Let's Talk Problems #1:

Lack of time, space and equipment

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The purpose of this series is to look at some common problems found in today's strength and conditioning programs and give some ideas and possible solutions to solve these problems. Even the best programs are not problem-free, therefore, do not feel singled out if something "hits home." The important thing is for the coach to recognize the problem and try to solve it. This might be a never-ending task as you try to bring your program closer and closer to perfection. There is always room for improvement. Be innovative and make the best of what you have.

For Easier Reading
Throughout the article I will use the terms "main exercises" and "auxiliary exercises." By main exercises I am referring to multi-joint lifts like the power clean, bench press, squat, etc., where many muscle groups are worked. If the sport is a contact sport, neck strengthening exercises are part of this group. Auxiliary exercises are the single joint lifts like arm curls, leg curls, tricep extensions, etc.

Finding Time to Strength Train
One of the biggest problems coaches have is finding the time for the athlete to get stronger. The facility is there, but the school schedule makes it difficult to get to it. This problem is accentuated at the high school level because of bus schedules. The coach has to find and enforce a time for the athlete to "pump some iron."

Before classes start. In some situations the bus arrives at the school early, giving the athlete the time to do some strength training before classes start.

Lunch. Half of the lunch period can be used to train. After the workout the athlete can use the remaining time to eat lunch.

Free period. In some curriculums the student has a couple of "free" periods a week. They must spend the time doing a school activity of their choice. This time could be spent in the weight room.

Study hall. In most cases this time should not be used for training. However, depending on the athlete's academic level and the possibility the work could be done at home, some of these periods could be used for training.

P.E. classes. Most athletes use these periods to lift weights. I do not think this should be a year-long situation, as this will rob the athlete from enjoying other sports.

Before practice. Usually there is a good time lapse between the last class and the start of practice. If the athlete uses his time effectively he would have time to lift weights before practice. Monitor the athlete to insure that he or she will not be too fatigued from working out before practice. An overtired athlete is more prone to injury, and fine neuromuscular skill may be affected during the start of practice. The body needs time to adjust to the training load. Activities such as free throw shooting should be moved to the end of practice.

During practice. If the time spent in the weight room is insufficient, the athlete can do some strength training on the field. Lifting apparatus can be put close to the practice field, or partner-assisted strengthening exercises can be done if equipment is not available. The athlete can also do push ups, sit ups, pull ups, dips and stadium steps to strengthen the body.

After practice. The coach should make strength training part of practice. Time should be allowed before bus departures.

After school. If the athlete can afford to miss the bus or lives within walking distance, he can do his strength work after school. This is almost impossible in rural areas.

Weekends. Many states do not allow school activities on weekends. If it is allowed, some kind of organized strength training can be implemented.

Commercial facilities. If everything else fails, something might be arranged at the local gym or spa.

These suggestions are far from being ideal, but they are definitely better than not lifting at all.
Lack of Time

Weight room available each day, but for short periods. In this situation the athlete should do a little lifting each day. The workouts should be broken down into upper body one day and lower body the next (split routine). The team should be divided into two groups, one group doing upper and the other group doing lower to make the best use of the little time available. Main lifts should be performed. If there is time left, some auxiliary exercises can be performed. Workout should be kept as specific as possible.

Weight room available only a few days, and for short periods only. This might be the worst situation a program can face. The athlete would have to train the whole body each workout. To accomplish this, you will have half the team start with their upper body exercises while the other half starts with their lower body exercises. The purpose for this is to have players training, not waiting in line. The lack of time will permit only main exercises to be done. The athlete might only have the time to do two main exercises like the squat and bench. This will have better results than doing several auxiliary exercises. There is no time for “beach” exercises. Circuit training might have to be used.

Weight room available only a few days with ample time. Since the athlete can only lift two to three times per week, the total body should be trained with each workout. Due to the ample time, the athlete will have time to do a variety of main and auxiliary exercises. Circuit training should not be used if maximum strength gains are desired. The team should be divided into groups and the groups should come in at different times so the coach can have more time to help everyone.

Weight room available every day with ample time. Wouldn’t a coach love to be in this situation? Unfortunately, it is quite unrealistic for most programs. With so much time available the coach would have two main options. One is to train every day using a split routine. The other option is to train the whole body two to three days a week and use the remaining time for other activities. A variety of main and auxiliary exercises should be performed. Circuit training should not be used unless the sport requires muscular endurance.

In-season strength training. During the in-season, some programs do not strength train because of lack of time. Some still believe that the players do not need to strength train during the season. I hope there are very few programs that fall under these two categories. Strength training must be continued during the season. Because of the lack of time, the athlete will not be able to do as much as he did in the pre-season. Two short workouts a week are enough to maintain strength. Time must be found during the week to accommodate these two workouts.

Limited Space and Equipment

Limited space and equipment but ample time. With this situation athletes should come in groups at different times. The fewer athletes you can have in the weight room the better. They should do main and auxiliary exercises. What particular exercises they do will depend on the available equipment. Since the equipment is limited, some should work upper body while others work the lower body. This way everyone can have access to some kind of apparatus with little waiting.

Limited space, equipment and time. This is a very difficult situation to reach optimal performance. The only thing possible would be to use circuit training made up of the little equipment you have. The athlete should start at different stations and rotate so to use what you have to the fullest in the minimum amount of time. Perform as many main exercises as possible. Do not use up your valuable time doing auxiliary exercises. The number of sets and reps might have to be reduced to accommodate everyone.

Minimum equipment requirements. By far the best option for any program is to buy barbells and dumbbells. They are inexpensive when compared to machines and they are very versatile. This kind of equipment can train all body parts as effectively as anything else, and, in some situations, better. When funds are limited, the coach should buy equipment that has multiple uses (e.g. bench press that can be changed to an incline press, a leg machine that can perform both leg extensions and leg curls, etc.) You will find that some of your existing equipment can be used for more than one exercise (e.g. the bench press apparatus can be used to do bench presses, incline presses, seated presses over the head, bent-over rows, pull overs, dumbbell flies, hyperextensions and abdominal work). If the funds permit, the coach should buy other types of equipment of his choice.

Conclusion

Try to get better, do the best with what you have and do not give up. You will find that you do not need a lot of complex equipment to get great results.

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