The Competitive Period in the Multiyear and Yearly Training Programs

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In the last two issues of the NSCA Journal, "The Role of All-Round, General Physical Preparation in the Multyear and Yearly Training Programs" and "The Role of Specialized Training in the Multyear and Yearly Training Programs" were presented. The first article showed how the athlete first develops all the physical qualities and basic skills needed in sports. In the second article it was brought out how the development of the physical qualities and basic skills served as a base for specialized training. In other words, the athlete uses exercises which are very selective and which have a high correlation to his specific sport. This article demonstrates how this specialized training, which is the key to success in sports, serves as the base or foundation for training in the competitive period.

Multyear Training

In long-range, multyear planning, the early years are devoted to all-round preparation. A prime objective is to develop the "versatile" athlete and after 3–6 years of such training, the athlete begins to specialize in his sport(s). This period of specialization may last anywhere from 2–10 years, depending upon the level of development of the physical qualities and technique needed in the sport. After this period, the athlete enters the period of competition, which can last anywhere from 1–20 years. The trend seems to indicate more years of competition rather than fewer. Competition at this stage is organized; the athlete participates in regularly scheduled events as an official team member. Competition, however, still exists in the early years of training and during the period of specialization. However, it is not considered major competition.

The athlete of today usually competes for a longer period of time because of higher levels of physical preparation and technique execution, better training methods, improved equipment and facilities and medical care. Two outstanding examples of long-competing athletes are V. Saneev of the USSR and A. Oetter of the U.S., who have successfully competed in four Olympic Games. What is most striking about these men is the fact that not only were they able to compete for many years, but they were able to compete on the highest levels. To win a medal in four Olympics is no easy feat! Such success can be greatly attributed to training and, more specifically, what took place during the competitive period in the year-round training program.

The Yearly Program

As in the multyear training, the competitive period follows all-round general preparation and specialized training. It is the real test of how successful all prior training was. But the competitive period is not merely a period during which competition takes place. It is another major period of training in the yearly cycle.

According to Ozolin and Khomekiov, the major aim in this period is to achieve the highest sports results in major competition, which have been planned for (2). In other words, a goal is set for the year's training which culminates with achievement during major competition. The goal should be realistic and should fit into the total long-range training plan for the athlete.

When viewed as another period of training, the basic aims of competitive period training (according to Ozolin and Khomekiov (2) are to:

1. Further the development of physical and volitional qualities which correspond to the specific sport;
2. Consolidate (strengthen) sports technique skills and, if necessary, improve them;
3. Master the planned tactics and acquire competition experience;
4. Maintain general physical preparation and the specialized preparation "foundation" at the achieved level. (There is continued improvement in those who are insufficiently prepared.);
5. Increase the level of theoretical knowledge; and 6. Increase the level of problem solving.

In this period of training it is necessary to increase the level of trainedness which is needed in order to achieve high sports results and to maintain sports form. In other words, the athlete must be at the physical and mental level which is necessary to produce high results and which is needed to keep him there.

Determination of these levels is usually done through scientific research of many top-level athletes (sometimes known as modeling). Norms are established and the athletes strive to fulfill the norms to produce a particular result. The model serves as the goal to be attained.

The competitive period is usually divided into two stages: the early competitive (usually around one–two months) and the main competitive (usually around four months). In the first stage there is a great deal of training and the athlete participates in many competitions. The basic aim, however, is still training and the competition merely becomes a part of it. There is no striving for maximum performances in this early stage of competition.

Participation in competition at this time accustoms the athlete to new conditions. The competition is used to check the athlete's capabilities and to evaluate the effectiveness of his training. Usually after the first few competitions the coach can make some definite conclusions about various aspects of the athlete's readiness. He can then make the necessary corrections in the athlete's training to better prepare him for further competition.

In the first stage of competition, there is no decrease in training load volume and no increase in the number of rest days prior to competition. In other words, there is no major change in the athlete's training to prepare for upcoming competition.

The number of training sessions decreases at this time but the density of the workouts increases. Also, the training methods are not as varied as in the general preparatory period. Specialized exercises are used most often. Varied exercises would not solidify the gains made!

The key to training at this time is to ''settle'' the athlete on a high level of sports form. In this state the athlete should show maximum and stable results. He should be able to perform almost identically every time. There should not be any "highs" or "lows" in his performances.

Further development and improvement at this time is strictly individualistic. In general, the athlete merely maintains his general physical preparation, flexibility and his specialized "foundation" on the achieved level. If work is

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needed on any of the physical qualities or on technique, then it continues. In addition, the amount of competition depends on the athlete. Some, because of their psychological state, need much competition while others need very little.

Training at this time is based on weekly cycles set up to insure fulfillment of the objectives. The weekly cycles take into consideration participation in competition, control tests and weekly check-ups. The control tests are used to determine stability and reliability of repeat actions as, for example, block starts in sprinting. The condition is once again only a means of preparation, although the most important.

In the main stage of competition, it is possible to decrease the load volume used in the specialized exercises but only with athletes who are physically well prepared. The key here is maintenance, not growth in physical qualities (with exceptions in some sports). Very important is consolidating technique skills on this new high level of preparedness. The technique work is done with multiple repeats of the event with intensities of 80–90 percent of maximum. Maximum intensities are used during competition and this is one reason why competitions are so important at this time.

If the technique is not completely mastered and has some deficiencies, then it should not be consolidated. In such cases, it is necessary to continue improving technique, trying to bring it to a new level. An upcoming meet should not interfere with technique work.

The importance of technique ranks very high with the Soviets. They firmly believe that it is better to achieve prominent sports successes after 1–2 years of technique work than to have mediocre results for many years because of technique deficiencies. Once technique is mastered, competitions are used as a means of perfecting technical skills.

During the main competitive period, training load volume decreases and intensity increases. The increase in intensity is very gradual and takes place simultaneously with less volume and variability in training. These factors, together with the optimum number of competitions, are the key elements for achieving great sports success.

On the whole, volume and intensity of training and competitive loads during the competitive period is wave-like in character. There is no straight line (continuous) increase or decrease in the loads. They are modulated according to the activity planned in the weekly cycle. As the major meet approaches, however, total load volume decreases. The intensity of the workouts changes differently and is determined by the sport.

According to Matveyev (1), in peaking for the competitions, there should be a culmination of the athlete’s physical and mental abilities. Of critical importance in the athlete’s specialized psychic training is development of a correct attitude to possible failure and maintenance of a positive emotional state. Competition becomes the main means of instilling such psychological stability and is the method used for further development.

Because of the great physical and psychological intensity during this period, recovery intervals after competition are longer. The recovery periods are usually characterized by active rest. The athlete usually executes varied exercises with changes in the methods of execution and the place of workout. This is done to more quickly recuperate the athlete physically and to relieve psychological stress.

In conclusion, training in the competitive period is directed to one major goal: the achievement of the highest results. All aspects of the athlete’s training merge at this time. The athlete finds himself on a new high level of sports form and strives to retain and maintain this level throughout the main period of competition. All training is devoted to this maintenance (and, in some cases, improvement) so that the athlete can show stable and reliable results. Any and all changes made in this period are small so that the athlete can remain on a steady level.

All training is individualized since all the pertinent characteristics of each athlete are taken into consideration when planning the training. The results planned and achieved are in accordance with each athlete’s capabilities. In other words, each athlete accomplishes his personal goals even though some may be subordinated to team goals.

For examples of competitive training programs in weightlifting in various track and field events and in other sports see the Soviet Sports Review.

For information about the Soviet Sports Review, contact Dr. Michael Yessis, P. O. Box 2878, Escondido, CA 92025.

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