

# **"Periodization: The Cornerstone of Sound Coaching"**

## **by Dan Freigang Ph.D., Sports Psychology**

### **Lessons from Sydney**

The interviews of athletes winning Olympic medals are astounding. Kathy Freeman the great Australian runner spoke of three quadrennial training plans, equaling 12 years to prepare for the Sydney games. Dennis Johnson, the American sprinter spoke about peaking for the 400 meters in Sydney that was very different from his 200 meter race in Atlanta. What are these great athletes referring to when talking about peaking and planning? This is called periodization and it's the cornerstone of sound coaching. Soccer demands technical speed, speed of thought and tactical speed. Coaches only have a finite amount of training time so we need to be precise in how we plan improvements. This month I will present the concept of periodization and how to implement sound physical and psychological training for your players.

### **What is Periodization?**

The concept of periodization involves the variation of training for weekly, monthly and sometimes yearly periods. These variations include intensity, amount of work and recovery periods in the workload. The training principle is to stress a specific human system while allowing others systems to recover. As a coach you probably have a sense of how hard your players work and then recover. This adaptation rate differs in individuals by training age, health, injury, and patterns of individual response. The idea is fairly straightforward for swimmers and runners. However, when we add reading, reacting and the tactics of soccer the training process becomes more complicated.

### **How Players get Stronger**

Humans need stress to improve. Players respond to demands placed upon them with a biological response called adaptation. If players run 2 mile intervals they respond by improving endurance. If players train 2 second agility skills they adapt

by becoming quicker. What are you trying to stress in training? Look at your seasonal plan. Perhaps you have identified periods of skills, fitness and tactics. That's great because you are on the right track. We need to stress those training components and also allow for recovery. This is part of a balanced equation that the great coaches are using. Stress shocks the players adaptive process into a state of compensation and the player improves. The more severe the stress, the more time you need to recover. If you don't stress enough the player goes through the motions of training and rarely improves, in fact they get bored.

## **The Adaptive Response of Players**

This sounds simple but each player is different and responds to training individually. Some players work hard and adapt well coming to the next session rested and eager. Other players seem to take a week off after a tough session. This is where coaches use their experience to identify the right amount of stress for each player. This can be difficult because each person has different abilities and limits. For example if you train very hard on a Monday session the players will probably be fatigued on Tuesday in a state of recovery. If you run another session stressing the same system some players will go deeper into fatigue and play worse. If you are training with enough stress you should plan for variation.

After a stressful session players usually become fatigued. This is the target of training. The recovery process is natural given the right conditions. Adaptation begins when players eat, rest and sleep. Players should play games and compete when they are rested and recovered. Competing in phase two is painful slow and will result in poor play. Some players have difficulty recovering from tough sessions, an experienced coach can recognize fatigue and plan for recovery sessions. An inexperienced coach will see poor play and conclude the team is not training hard enough pushing players harder. Players then learn to dislike training by suffering through sessions and not enjoying the game.

## **The Coaches Role in Recovery**

Intelligent coaches recognize that it is better to under train and have the players willing to push limits than to have players over-trained and going into games weak and anxious. The coaches responsibility is to plan for tough training while monitoring recovery. I am spending a lot of time on the training process because we spend most of our time in this activity. Training time is when we test and stress ourselves with recovery as the goal. Now that sounds bizarre, do you really have to teach players to recover? The answer is absolutely yes. Doubt, fear, criticism and confusion will all inhibit recovery. Poor nutrition, sleep and difficult social relationships will all degrade the adaptation process. The player's mental skills, of goal setting, self-esteem, mapmaking and recovery become critical on the pathway to excellence. Citius, Altius, Fortius.

Soccer is both tough and beautiful. Fatigue, soreness and challenge are part of the experience. Players need to be taught both training and recovery components. Soreness should decrease after two days. Injuries begin to heal and the desire to train should return after one session. We do have individual limits to training and too much stress can cause players to become stale. Too little stress and we don't improve. Training is very difficult and requires willpower, motivation and skills. The coach's role is one of setting higher standards than the players currently are working at. This will always be a battle and also a joyful challenge. The teams mission should be clear and coaches philosophy should be posted and ready to be improved. The coach acts as a source of expertise and a master teacher. With clear goals and a safe environment players will break down old barriers with joy and passion. Periodization, allows for tough training followed by great performances. We have all experienced the joy and success of a confident and well prepared team. The periodization process is a skill coaches can utilize for players to excel and enjoy the game. Play on.

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Now its game time. Lets see what you have learned by taking this true or false quiz.

1. No pain, No gain is the best training advice.  
True      False
2. Players will always battle through fatigue.  
True      False
3. Players respond uniquely and individually to training.  
True      False
4. Some players are tough, you can't teach toughness.  
True      False
5. The coach is responsible to create the training demands.  
True      False

Answers 1=False 2=False 3=True 4=False 5=True

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