



PLANNING FOR PERFORMANCE



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IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING

“Everyone has the will to win, it’s only those with the discipline to prepare that actually win”
Bobby Knight
NCAA Basketball Coach

Behind any successful athlete or team is a well-prepared coach or management team, who, with their athletes, have carefully plotted their campaign towards success. The quest for sporting excellence requires an understanding of the planning process.

This fact sheet guides you through some of the stages you need to address while you are planning for sporting success, regardless of what level of team or athletes you are coaching.

Key Components of Performance

Athletic performance is made up of a complex blend of a number of factors. The relative importance of each will depend on the demands of the sport and needs of the individual. One pre-determined factor is genetics. An internationally renowned scientist famously once said “if you want to be an Olympic Champion, choose your parents carefully!” Whilst it is true to say that your genes are established at birth they are, however, also greatly influenced by an athlete’s surrounding environment. Physiological gifts are easily squandered without the right balance of training, nutrition, and mental desire. As a consequence, it is generally accepted that success in any sporting endeavour is determined by the interaction of a combination of factors including genetics, physical, mental, technical and tactical training and preparation as well as good lifestyle and personal attributes.

To effectively train and prepare for competition, attention needs to be paid to each of these areas:

- **Physical** (strength, speed, power, aerobic fitness, anaerobic fitness, etc)
- **Tactical** (game or race planning, strategies, etc)
- **Technical** (general and sports specific skills required at each phase of development)
- **Mental** (psychological preparation, ability to cope

under pressure)

- **Lifestyle** (nutrition, sleep, recovery, education, time management, etc)
- **Personal** (beliefs, philosophy, values, approach, attitude, etc)

Depending on the needs of the athlete, the performance pathway they are on, the specific demands of their sport and the phase of the training cycle they are in, the relative importance of each of these components may vary.

Planning Principles

- **Set Goals** – These help set targets for the season, prioritise actions and set deadlines.
- **Needs Analysis** – Performance profiling provides a method to assess strengths and areas requiring attention.
- **Plan in Reverse** – In terms of annual planning, once the performance goal(s) for the season is/are identified work backwards from that date.
- **Flexibility** – Once the annual plan is mapped-out, allow some flexibility for unforeseen events such as illness or injury or changes in the competition structure.
- **Monitoring** – Effective training programmes should involve constant monitoring. Athletes should be encouraged to ‘self monitor’ by use of a training diary. Annual medical screening and regular fitness testing may also be incorporated into the annual plan.
- **Review** – The training and competition plan should be regularly reviewed by the coach and athlete, with changes incorporated when required.
- **‘Kaisen’** – This is the Japanese term for ‘continuous improvement’. Performance does not happen by chance. Leave no stone unturned in the quest for excellence.

Each of these critical elements, which form the basis of any effective training and competition plan, will now be outlined in greater detail.

Goal Setting

*“A goal without a plan is just a wish”
Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

Successful people set goals in their lives. Goals are important, as they provide direction and a target to focus your efforts and measure your success. Setting goals will help you to:

- Create a focus for your training
- Prioritise and get more out of your time
- Get better results
- Evaluate performance improvements
- Make the most of your talents

‘SMARTER’ Goal-Setting Principles

*“The person who makes a successful living is the one who sees their goal steadily and aims for it unswervingly. That’s dedication”
Cecil B. Demille*

Successful people from any walk of life, be it sport, business or the arts, commit themselves to reaching their goals or targets. Setting long, medium and short term goals is a big step on the road to action. Effective goals should always be based on the “SMARTER” principle:

S Specific

If the goal is too vague (e.g. “I want to get faster, I want to lose weight”), it will not help performers to focus their attention and plan their route to achieve the goal. Vague signposts or directions are of little use. Goals should be as specific as possible (e.g. “I want to improve my PB time by 5 seconds”).

M Measurable

Unless performers can measure their progress, they will be unable to assess whether or not they are improving or have been successful (how much faster, e.g. target times). Consider the variety of ways in which you can measure performance (e.g. number of sessions completed, number of

successful passes or tackles made in a game etc). Where possible, the majority of the goals set should be under the control of the performer rather than being dependent on other people, such as an opponent’s performance (e.g. to win a race).

A Agreed

The performer (or individuals within a team) must personally agree and accept responsibility for the goal(s) set. This usually means that they must have some say in setting the goal or target. Unless the performer agrees that this is what they want and can see how it contributes to their overall plan, they are not likely to strive hard to achieve it.

R Realistic

If a goal is too difficult, the performer will either fail or become disillusioned by the lack of success. In the same token the goal should be challenging and not something that is easily achieved. Evidence suggests that the highest achievers set the most challenging goals. The real challenge is self-belief.

T Time-Phased

The achievement of long term ‘performance’ goals needs careful planning to identify a series of staged short and medium term ‘process’ goals. Progress must be planned in smaller steps or short term goals – each identifying an achievable goal in a specified time span. Without setting deadlines, there is a danger that all your good intentions will be delayed and/or not achieved.

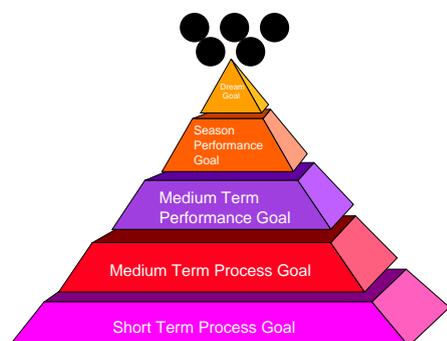
E Exciting

If a goal is too easy, it offers no challenge, little motivation and consequently no satisfaction on accomplishment. Goals need to be exciting.

R Recorded

It is essential to write down your goals. Not only does this increase commitment, it also serves as a form of contract. It also helps in monitoring progress. Many athletes pin up their goals in a prominent place such as on the fridge or above their desk as a reminder and constant source of motivation.

Figure 1:



Performance Profiling

In order to gauge an athlete's or team's strengths and weaknesses, an exercise called performance profiling should be carried out. A useful starting point is to identify the critical performance capacities for your chosen sport and then rate how important the following components are for achieving success. These should be broken down into the performance components:

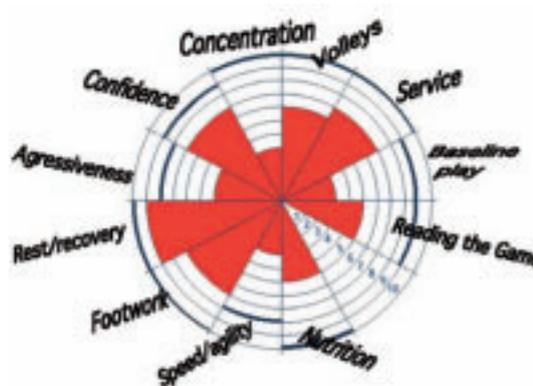
- Physical (strength, speed, power, aerobic, need to be consistent throughout, either aerobic fitness or cardiovascular fitness, changing from one to the other will cause confusion, anaerobic fitness)
- Tactical (game or race planning, strategies, etc)
- Technical (skills required at each level)
- Mental (psychological preparation, ability to cope under pressure)
- Lifestyle (diet, sleep, education, nutrition, time management)

Performance profiling is a simple tool to assist you with your planning and help prioritise your training by rating your current capacity against the level you need to be at to achieve a personal goal. Alternatively you can compare yourself against your team-mates or competitors. The ranking scale for performance profiling is usually 1 to 10, where 1=low and 10=extremely high. An example of a physical fitness performance profile is included (see Figure 2). Performance profiles may also be presented in a simplified performance wheel format (see Figure 3) where all performance determinants have been evaluated. This will help you to determine what aspects of fitness to prioritise and target in your training. Where areas requiring attention are identified, these can be remedied through setting specific personal improvement goals and appropriate planning and interventions.

Figure 2: Physical Fitness Performance Profile example

Capacity	Specific Details	Importance (1-10)	Current Status (1-10)
Speed	Reaction speed over 10m	10	7
Aerobic endurance	Ability to maintain short high intensity workouts	10	6
Agility	High intensity sports specific movements	8	6
Strength	Upper body	9	7
Flexibility	Good range of movement in specific joints/muscle groups	8	2
Recovery	Factor in appropriate active recovery strategies	10	4

Figure 3: Performance Wheel example



Reverse Planning

When using a one page year planner, work backwards from your major performance goal. Decide on what events your team or athletes can and should attempt to compete in, from all the events noted. If there are too many, rationalise so that the athletes will not be over-tired or fatigued by the end of the season. In order to peak at the right time it is important to establish which events you are going to compete in over the season and how your training will have to be adjusted. Getting the right balance between training and recovery is critical to performance. Don't lose sight of your major goal for the year. Other lesser events may have to be sacrificed in order to peak for the major goal. Alternatively, use them as training sessions with a specific focus on competition practice.

Monitoring Your Progress

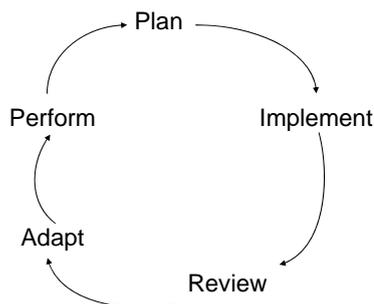
i) Recording Training

An accurate record of training should be kept. A record of the previous season's training is a good place to start your plan for the coming year. Carry out a brief evaluation at the end of each training session and a more thorough review at the end of

each week or phase of training. Each phase allows you to record how well the plan worked in practice and any other observations which improve future sessions. Things to record include:

- What actually occurred?
- Why you changed your original plan?
- How well your athletes coped with the plan?
- To what extent were the short term goals and training targets achieved?
- Recommendations or modifications for next phase of the programme or for next season

Figure 4: Monitoring Your Progress



ii) Self-Monitoring

Athletes should also take responsibility for recording details of their training sessions, evaluating them, and monitoring their own health. An example of a training diary and self monitoring tool is included below. The information you should consider recording includes daily resting heart rate, quality and quantity of sleep, quality of the training sessions, energy levels, muscle soreness, self-confidence and esteem, motivation and enthusiasm, attitude to work/study, attitude to team, communication with team, health/menstrual cycle, body weight, and food and fluid intake.

Monitoring factors such as resting heart rate, body weight and length and quality of sleep can alert the athlete or coach to impending illness or to signs of undue fatigue which, if not addressed, may lead to over-training. The record is also very useful when a review of the year's training is done between the athlete and the coach.

Figure 5: Athlete Diary - The Importance of Self Monitoring

iii) Screening

The more serious athlete should also have a yearly medical and physiotherapy screen similar to that offered to all athletes on the International Carding Scheme coordinated by the Irish Institute of Sport. The screenings should cover all aspects of the athlete's medical history and monitor the athlete's immune status. Regular blood tests may be recommended for athletes to monitor such things as iron status. The physiotherapy screening should look at all the joints and ranges of movement associated with the sport in question as well as looking at potential musculoskeletal imbalances, and should

alert the athlete to any injuries that have not been adequately dealt with during the previous season. The physiotherapist can also alert the athlete to any biomechanical deficiencies or any weaknesses in strength or flexibility that may pre-dispose them to injury. The athlete and the coach should also keep a record of injuries, how they occurred, whether they occurred during competition or at training, and the athlete's response to any treatment.

iv) Fitness Testing

In order to establish whether your training has had the desired effect, some form of consistent monitoring and/or testing must occur. The type of monitoring you choose will depend on your sport, what time of the season it is, and the resources available. Tests range from simple field tests (e.g. 40m sprint time to measure speed) to more complex and expensive ones (e.g. VO₂Max assessment in a human performance laboratory to measure endurance capacity). The tests should:

- Include variables that are relevant to your sport
- Be valid and reliable (valid: when a test measures what it claims to measure; reliable: when the results are consistent and reproducible)
- Use a protocol that is as sports-specific as possible (e.g. test runners on a treadmill, cyclists on a bike, etc)
- Be rigidly controlled (e.g. the same conditions must exist from test to test, including the venue, the time of day, the warm-up, the pre-test diet and training the day before testing)
- Be repeated at regular intervals over the annual training cycle
- Results should be appropriately integrated into the training programme
- (McDougall et al, 1991).

Physiological monitoring can be performed in a human performance laboratory using state of the art testing equipment or more simply using field-based tests. A testing programme indicates the athlete's strengths and weaknesses in relation to his or her sport and provides baseline data for individual training programme prescription. It also provides feedback and can be used as a basis for assessing the effectiveness of the training programme (McDougall et al, 1991).

A common field-based test battery for a team sport such as football, basketball or rugby may include the following tests:

1. Body composition (height, weight, and body fat measurement)
2. Speed and power (sprint test and vertical jump)
3. Agility test (sports-specific)
4. Anaerobic test (such as a decrement test, e.g. 5 x 40m on 30 seconds)
5. Aerobic fitness (20m multi-stage shuttle run)
6. Strength testing (sports and training-specific)

Tests 1-5 can normally be conducted in a single training session as long as the athletes have sufficient recovery time for lactate levels to decrease after the decrement test (at least 30 mins).

The strength tests are better performed on a separate day and should include lifts that have been used in training over the last phase. Ideally, fitness testing should occur at the beginning of the season and after each training phase.

Review and Feedback

"It's a bad plan that admits of no modification"
Publius Syrus (~100 BC)

Reviews of athlete, player and team performances at training and following competitions should occur at regular intervals. It is recommended that the coach and the athlete or team schedule a formal review of progress at least every 6 months or ideally at the end of each training phase. A major performance review should occur at least once a year and following the major competition of the season. Detailed information should be recorded on the factors that influenced the performance from a positive and negative perspective. This information should be used in planning for the following year and in seeking continuous improvement. The more the coach understands the responses of his/her athletes to training, the more successful the partnership will be. The more success and trust that is built up between the two parties the higher the likelihood of each achieving their goals and the desired performance.