

When working with multi-sport athletes, it's first important to identify the type of multi-sporter you're dealing with. Bruno Pauletto, former strength and conditioning coach for the University of Tennessee, identifies two types of multi-sporters: "Type A is very careful how he trains during one sport because he is also interested in doing well in the next sport. This athlete will not overdo one sport at the expense of the other." This athlete is probably good enough to start and perhaps stand out in multiple sports. "The Type B athlete may also compete in [multiple] sports, but he is partial to a particular sport and sees the other(s) as a way of improving his performance in his choice sport." This athlete could also be good enough to start in multiple sports, but his/her own choice is to use the second or third sport as a training ground for the first choice sport, possibly sacrificing performance and team goals for personal goals. Is there a "type C" multi-sport athlete? A talented athlete who just goes from sport to sport without any thought about training? Most definitely! We need to know how to work with all of these athletes.

Once you've determined what type of athlete you're dealing with, and this could (should?) be at the mutual consideration of coaching staff and athlete (and parents?), the next consideration should be how to manage the stress a multi-sport athlete is going to endure in his/her year round training and competition cycle. How can we help our multi-sport athletes manage stress?

Let's deal with training stress first. Training stress is the result of many factors: loading, intensity, volume, frequency and recovery allowed; all factors that a coach can control. Pauletto states, "Coaches need to be aware of a multi-sport athlete's special situation and help to maintain his overall strength program as well as the sport specific strength program. A coach should not let his personal philosophy interfere with the athlete's training and, consequently, undermine his performance in the upcoming sport." With that said, coaches from different programs should be pro-active in communicating with one another their concerns and any information that may help the multi-sporter stay healthy.

The other stressors we all deal with in life may not be so easily managed as sets and reps in a workout for a multi-sport athlete: school, family and personal factors are all external stressors that are mostly out of a coach's control. Coaches, like educators, must be mentor, counselor and sometimes friend to the athlete; a good coach will have a finger on the pulse of his team, especially the multi-sporters on the team. Flexibility and understanding go a long way in helping the stressed out athletes on your team, and I don't mean "making exceptions for exceptional athletes", a practice that too often fosters resentment among teammates and coaches. Rather, a coach can counsel and advise the athlete as he/she struggles with their stress. Again, coaches from the various sports can join forces in these efforts to help the athlete, reinforcing the message of a team effort for the athletic department.

Finally, as one sport season concludes and another gears up, we all need to recognize the fact that the multi-sport athlete may need some mental and physical r&r time. Modified practices during the first week may be warranted. Any injuries, bumps, bruises, strains or pulls should be fully rehabbed before an athlete is expected to fully take part in the next

season's practices. Pattern and overuse injuries such as tendonitis or shin splits should be addressed so they don't become chronic conditions. New patterns should be re-programmed into the athlete's system before the athletes are expected to perform them at top speed, especially for sports of different modalities (e.g. football-basketball, volleyball or field hockey-basketball). You wouldn't take your sports car off road, and your 4 wheel drive wouldn't handle well on the race track; so what makes you think your football or volleyball player will be ready for hoops, or your hoops players will be ready for baseball or lacrosse?

I hope you have found these reflections helpful as you prepare for the upcoming Spring sport season and the long off season for Fall sports.

Go 'Cats!