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# Strive For Quality

In this column, learn strategies to help you consistently make training a physical, technical and mental endeavor and prepare yourself for competition. We have touched on this subject before in this column but it bears repeating—over and over again, if necessary. This fact struck me as I was talking with an athlete this past week. He’s an elite level athlete with a realistic opportunity to represent his country in the Olympics, which would be the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. With this goal within his reach, you would think he would have every reason to be motivated, focused and purposeful about his daily training. Yet, he admittedly struggles with these things, almost on a daily basis. This got me thinking about athletes in general—what keeps you going and how can you stay focused and motivated given that this is even a challenge for some of the best athletes in the world.

In this column, we are going to take a look at why the notion of purposeful, quality training is so important and identify specific things you can do to enhance your daily training. We’ll discuss strategies to help you consistently make training a physical, technical and mental endeavor by bringing intensity, effort, purposefulness and quality into the practice arena—qualities that are needed to prepare yourself optimally for when it comes time to compete. And, for the next issue of the PTJ, I’m going to call on you to provide further strategies that you have found effective.

You may be asking yourself, “Why all the fuss, I’m training every day. Isn’t that enough?” A simple answer to this question is “No.” So much more can be achieved when you train with purpose and intensity (when you integrate the mental with the physical) versus just training (when it is strictly a physical and technical endeavor).

For one, intensity and purposefulness in your training today is going to enhance your training today. Quality training will lead to quality performances. To illustrate this, compare two tennis players who both take a hopper of balls out to the court to work on serves. One player pounds out her serves one after the other and gets through the basket of balls as quickly as possible. The second player takes a different approach to the same task. She performs her pre-serve routine prior to

every serve and really works on getting full extension as she drives up to the ball, something she has been struggling with recently. Pretty easy to identify the player who is achieving more, isn’t it? While they hit the same number of serves, the quality and focus of the practice is drastically different.

Additionally, intensity and purposefulness in your training will help develop the mental skills important for competition and, thus, enhance your competitive performance. To perform well in competition, one needs to be mentally prepared such as being focused, composed and confident. Just as you train the physical and technical skills that are necessary for performance, you need to train and develop mental skills—effective concentration doesn’t just happen, it needs to be learned and developed. Mental skills needs to be trained in training to “have them” for competition.

Let’s look at ways to bring intensity and purposefulness to training. We’ll start a list of strategies then continue this in the next Mind Games column.

- **Set a Training Goal.** Before each training session, identify one thing that you want to accomplish to bring purpose to your training session.
- **Use Cues** to emphasize important points during practice. “Rotate,” “torpedo off the wall,” “explode,” “run like a gazelle.” Performance cues can help you focus on the process without getting overwhelmed with “every little thing” you need to do. It is these same performance cues that you bring to competition.
- **Integrate Imagery.** Prior to a drill or a repeat, visualize correct execution. This offers you an additional form of practice and “imprints” success.
- **Be an Athlete.** Prior to a training session, make a conscious effort to place stress, worries, thoughts unrelated to your sport aside and commit to being an athlete for the next 1 – 2 hours. These distracters have a way of creeping into training sessions and taking mental energy away from the task at hand.
- **Strive for Perfection.** In talking with a coach, he noted that athletes sometimes fall in the trap of accepting “sloppy” technique in training yet turning around and demanding perfection in competition.

Don't allow this to happen to you. Every day, remind yourself that how you train is how you will compete.

you can allow yourself to rest mentally (i.e., slow, easy days, cross training days). This will keep you mentally fresh.

is more than just “going through the motions or putting in the time?” You have undoubtedly figured out some effective strategies to integrate the mental piece into your training and to bring quality and purposefulness to what you do. I ask you to share these with me so I can share them with others in our next column. Please email me your practical ideas at [suzriewald@aol.com](mailto:suzriewald@aol.com). I look forward to hearing from you. ■

- **Remind Yourself** of your competition goals. Sometimes a reminder about “why” you are training hard every day can enhance daily motivation. Tell yourself that your effort today will pay off at the end of the season.
- **Take a Mental Break.** Just as you need rest and recovery days built into a training program, you need a mental break as well. Identify days in your training program where

### Call to Action

The suggested strategies for enhancing training (and, thus, competition performances) offer a great start. But, now, it is your turn. Many of you have been training and competing for years and years, even decades. What do you do to bring focus, intensity and quality to your training? How do you structure your training so it

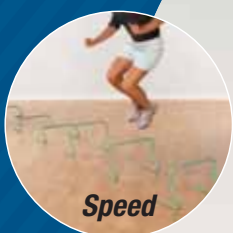


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