



IFAC 2011 PLANNING: YOUNG ATHLETE INTO SENIOR

Sandy Robertson, BAAB Master Coach.



Having tutored in coach education since the late 60s, I've seen the full cycle of recommendations for the young athlete, from 'work them hard' to 'take it easy- they're only young', and back, full circle. It's always difficult to obtain guidance on this, but as an experienced coach and teacher of Higher and Advanced Higher P.E. I always put across the definition of training as '*a physiological adaptation to stress*' i.e. no stress=no training. In an earlier version of the IFAC, The Scottish Athletics Coaches Coaching Convention, we had a keynote speech from Dr Istvan Smodiz of Czechoslovakia, who suggested that the stress levels of children had a higher base level than we imagined; whilst still recommending aerobic work up until puberty, he was keen for us to extend our 2km runs to 10km. He also reminded us that, under stress, bones increase their density, ligaments bind those bones more firmly together, tendons take a firmer grip of both bone and muscle, and hearts and lungs increase in size. What's not to like about this – and what on earth do we think we are supposed to be doing in training and coaching?

It would be interesting for me as an educator to begin with the unit of coaching; what does your normal training session look like?

Do you have games warm ups for your 14-16 year-olds? General drills where you insist on good form and quick action? Specific drills where you make similar demands e.g. of hurdlers, jumpers or throwers? A further skills section? A running session which was taken from a well-planned, progressive system and is specific to age and stage, and in context with the coaching year? A conditioning session involving weights or circuits or medicine balls or mobility exercises or some other specific material? A cool down involving stretches to return tired muscles to their normal habit length?

As someone who assessed and marked the UK's exam papers, I was aware that the issue of scheduling was a thorny one – very few people passed this aspect of the written exam, and during one spell the median mark was 2/30, which led to a re- emphasis in the education system. From what we know and hear and see, it may well be time to re-examine how we plan our year, our season, month, week and day.

Of course, if coaches simply go down to the track and coach off the top of their heads every week, this will be a barrier to athletes' progress. And in a large group it may be impractical to write individual schedules; it should be possible, though, to write a general plan which is cogent and coherent, modifying the sets for individuals.

Recently Scottish coaches reviewed the IAAF Levels 3 & 4; time is spent on scheduling, but tutors don't expect coaches to be expert at once, coming rather to a gradual dawning of what is required through guided discovery. Let's take a look at the possibilities for a group containing 15-17 year-olds as well as some seniors, which is the situation I find myself in weekly.

We learn from the literature that the monthly [or six-weekly] schedule is considered a microcycle, that it's not a stand-alone, but part of a bi- or tri-monthly mesocycle, which in itself is part, usually, of a double-periodised year, or two macrocycles.

Each microcycle is thematic i.e. it has an emphasis and a goal. Generally, after a late September active rest, October/November involves schooling of the technical models, general preparation, usually aerobic training, strength-endurance and mobility.

December/January involves the second phase of this preparation, usually specific fitness and development of an advanced technical model.

February is often the competitive phase for indoor track championships, or the pre-competitive phase for schools' cross-country. It is characterised by progressive intensity, greater recovery, and evaluation of performance under competitive fire.

At any rate, coaches will work backwards from the season's key fixtures for individuals or groups, and set the phases and the work to be covered in advance, setting goals and assessments in each phase and keeping things in context. Youngsters have to study, so time for this has to be factored in. Some coaches prepare short, intensive circuit sessions which can be done at home between studying bouts, but are very effective.

Let's take a look at this month's schedule for a 16 year-old Scots girl, a national champion at 300m, Triple Jump, Pentathlon, 300m Hurdles and Football; to preserve her anonymity we'll call her 'Gloria Mundi.'

SCHEDULE, GLORIA MUNDI, OCTOBER 2011.

- MON** Drills & skills; 150m x 10 in 23-24 seconds, 2 minutes rest; Weights I.
TUE **Rest: or** 200m x 10 in 32-33 seconds, 2 minutes rest; Circuits I.
WED Drills & skills; 120-200m clock, 2 minutes rest [1st run in 19-20 seconds]; Weights II.
THU **Rest: or** 300m x 6 in 52-53 seconds, 3 minutes rest: Circuits II.
FRI Drills & skills; 250m x 6 in 42 -43 seconds, 3 minutes rest.
SAT **Rest: or** Football.
SUN **Rest.**

WEIGHTS I.

| Reps | Hang Clean & Press | Hang Clean | Front Squat |
|-------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| 3 x 8 @ 75% | 20.0kg | 25.0kg | 25.0kg |

WEIGHTS II.

| Reps | Hang Snatch | Hang Clean & Press | Front Squat |
|-------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
| 3 X 8 @ 75% | 15.0kg | 25.0kg | 25.0kg |

Circuits I.

30 seconds exercise x 3/ 60 seconds rest between sets of this Arm/Trunk/Leg circuit:-

Hand-clap push up, Back extensor, Full squat:

Backwards push up, Bent-leg sit up, Half squat:

Push up, Twisting sit up, Twisting back extensor.

Circuits II.

20 reps x 3 of this core superset:-

Bent-leg sit up/ Back extensor: Straight-leg sit up/ Back extensor: High sit up/ Back extensor:

Twisting sit up/ Twisting back extensor.

Rationale.

- Aerobic work, moderate pace/ steady –state, during this preparation phase.
- Considerable volume, since coming off a successful UK School Games 300m Hurdles and two weeks’ rest.
- ‘Training to train’ for a summer of 400m Hurdles, but with one eye on the SIAB Pentathlon on December 3.
- Strength-endurance is a big factor, hence the long weights and circuits.
- Homework, study or tiredness may preclude club training on Tuesday/Thursday; tackle it sensibly as usual.
- If the club session isn’t on the cards, it’s possible to do a circuit at home – it won’t take too long.

Key dates.

- 03 December SIAB Pentathlon, Glasgow [tapered programme is on its way for last two weeks of November].
 07 January England Athletics Combined Events, Sheffield.
 February National Indoor 300/400m, Glasgow, Schools’/U18/Senior.

All the Best, Sandy.

NB. Many middle-distance coaches would recommend ‘LSD’, long, slow distance during this phase, and many more examples of long steady runs, fartlek, and fast and slow running, to exercise the cardio-vascular system; often even the sprinter will take the opportunity to run and jog during the late September break, along with cycling and swimming; however, the conference also queried whether we should ever get our sprinters to run slowly off a fast season’s end - questions like this keep our coaches thinking and our sport dynamic: thank you to everyone who contributed to the seminar.
