

The dangers of sports specific training!

Many personal trainers advertise "sports specific training" as a service that they offer. While the intention is honest unfortunately many have been misled by slick marketing of products supposedly beneficial for enhanced sports performance. Further to that the emphasis on replicating sporting movements in the gym can actually have adverse effects.

The time to develop movement skills related to the sport is during technical training sessions. Training in the gym should focus on preventing injury, getting stronger and faster FULLSTOP.

Here is a list of so-called sports specific training methods that are not exactly as they seem- and you wont be finding at Cre8 Health and Fitness.

TRAINING ON UNSTABLE SURFACES (BOSU, SWISSBALL, POWERPLATE)

The rationale behind this training is that training in an unstable environment will make your core stronger so that you are stronger in your sport.

Problems

1. Strength gains are primarily because of changes in the nervous system- by training in an unstable environment you impair the bodies ability to learn that skill and get an inefficient training response
2. Replicating a sports skill is even worse for the same reasons above- you confuse the nervous system and can mess up your movement
3. If you are in an unstable environment you can't handle as much load- if you want to get strong and fast you need to train to handle a lot of load!
4. It just doesn't work- the first study of unstable surface training on healthy individuals (i.e. not rehab) in 2007 and shows that this sort of training decreases the effectiveness of the training program compared to performing exercise on a stable surface! *
5. The core muscles are generally very unresponsive to training anyway so unless you are a beginner then it is not a good use of time in the gym!

* *Cressey et al.* Journal of strength and conditioning research 21(2) May 2007

Is there a use for unstable training?

Despite this at Cre8 you will see us use unstable training. However it is only useful in rehabilitation phases or in the very early phases of training when there are weak links that need improving. For example using wobble boards or air discs during certain

exercises can be used to improve ankle stability or hip mobility. Someone that works or plays in an unstable environment such as a fisherman or surfer may benefit from moderate use of this training, but all other athletes should only use it sparingly and generally early in the training calendar.

SAQ (Speed, agility, quickness) training

SAQ utilises hurdles and ladder drills to encourage the body to move and be able to change direction quicker. It supposedly does this through enhancing the nervous system to allow the body to move better.

Problems

1. Although there is a window of opportunity to train somebody to move faster it is generally finished by age 8. After this point the only method of getting faster is by getting stronger
2. Improving technique will help someone such as a sprinter to move quicker- however anyone that plays a contact sport or plays with an object such as a racket or bat will not benefit. As soon as they are put into the sporting environment with opponents and objects to manoeuvre the technique goes out of the window. If you are a rugby player for example you simply cannot apply a sprinters technique because you need to adapt to the game moving around you.

Is there a use for SAQ training?

In young athletes there is a benefit for SAQ training. It may also be useful as a tool for variation in an exercise program for someone with more general goals as it will still burn calories. However for an adult looking to improve their speed it is not an effective use of training time.

Ps- I have a diploma from SAQ international so I understand the concepts and techniques fully! It is a useful tool but not for most people looking to improve performance!

Sports Specific Movement Training/Functional Training

Another fad in the industry with regards to sports specific training is the concept of functional training. An example of this is using cables to replicate the sporting movements. For example a golfer or tennis player applying weight to a cable and replicating the golf or tennis swing. This may be one of the most detrimental things to performance possible.

Problems

1. All movements are controlled by the nervous system at lightning speed. It has a very specific sequence of muscle firing to replicate a movement with a specific timing. This is called a motor program! If you attempt to perform a motor program with added weight you will need to produce more force. When you go back to using the lighter sporting implement you have disrupted the timing of the movement because you have trained to use more force. The result is a slight technical flaw that leads to more hours practicing to correct! To simplify most sports require propelling a light object at high speed. If you train to propel a heavier object with less speed (because the weight slows you down!) how can this improve performance?
2. An athlete may hit, throw or kick an object thousands of times every week (or hundreds as an amateur) Do they really need to repeat these movements in the gym? By doing so they are more susceptible to overuse injuries due to constant stress on the same muscle over and over again. In fact during the season when in the gym they should focus on training the opposing muscles that don't get used so much in order to maintain muscle balance and prevent injury!

How Should We Train for Sports?

At Cre8 Health and Fitness we believe there are no bad exercises if they are used at the right time and for the right reason! Everyone that comes to train with us is assessed fully to understand which exercises they need at which times to ensure maximum progression.

Here are the factors that need to be considered when training for sports

1. Which injuries is the athlete likely to get based upon their current posture, muscle balance and biomechanics?
2. Which injuries are most prevalent in that particular sport?
3. Does the athlete have any weak links that will impair performance or increase risk of injury? For example a weak low back is often a barrier to improving speed!
4. What are the most effective exercises for improving performance in that sport? Olympic strength coach Charles Poliquin has compiled this information from thousands of athlete assessments and teaches his students exactly which exercises will give the biggest improvement in various events!
5. What is the athlete's age and training history?
6. How many weeks does the athlete have to train before competition?
7. If in the competitive season how frequently does the athlete play or compete?
8. What is the athlete's lifestyle like and therefore how well do they recover from injuries?

Anyone interested in training for sports should consider all of these factors when training and avoid training methods that look impressive but yield little results!