

OVER TRAINING

As we understand as coaches and leaders, to make our athletes improve we need to add progressive stress in a managed way as they improve, however adding more and more stress may not always bring increased benefits and as coaches we need to look for the signs of diminishing return and consequent overtraining.

There are several classic signs of overtraining in an athlete such as fatigue, lack of interest in training irritableness etc however possibly the major sign from a coaching point of view is that the athlete suffers from poor form despite training regularly and without outside influence (illness, injury).

Diminishing returns

Despite your best efforts as a coach to promote your progressive and managed programme of training which includes adequate rest periods, many athletes when edging towards over training head into the ever decreasing cycle of diminishing return. It is often the case in an athlete who is over training that as their performances decline they undertake more training, probably outside of your scheduled work, this then leads to more overtraining and loss of performance so the cycle continues until the athlete breaks down completely health wise or acquires an injury.

As a coach we must endeavour to prevent this from happening, but how? The obvious is to have a record of performances and how these correlate with training and vice versa, having regular feedback regards training from your athletes will help as you should be able to spot signs of a problem if of course your athlete is honest with you!

Let's take an example, the athlete has a carefully managed programme of training and is achieving everything that is expected by them and the coach, the athlete then decides that as they are doing well, more training will make them even better. So they may join a higher quality training group and do longer harder sessions, in such case they are now upping quality work as well as quantity suddenly without controlled progression or adequate recovery, after a couple of months performances have dipped so in the athletes mind they should do even more training and the cycle goes on until the athlete either breaks down with injury or illness. This is where the incidence of diminishing return has come into play as , as training increases too quickly the body is unable to properly adapt and if this is exaggerated by having less recovery or by increasing training intensity too quickly there inevitably will be a possible large increase in the percentage chance of injury and lack of form. If it is form that drops the athlete may then take on even more training and so the cycle continues.

Managing the situation

So, you have determined that your athlete is over training, how do you manage this? Many club athletes/runners have a regular schedule of competing and it is difficult to prevent them from doing so, also there will be inevitably be the tendency to want to train. The key is to bringing the athlete back to form is to change the type of training involved. If you really can't convince the athlete to reduce the training load, the ideal would be to bring in more recovery sessions or running at a steadier state. Often a balance is needed as our athlete is most likely wanting to train as "that is what they do" in such case a carefully managed programme of recovery and different focus needs to be instigated. The key message is that progression should be managed and as a coach the tell-tale signs of over training should be actively looked out for.

John Skevington UKA Level 3 Performance Coach