

Best training includes rest, active recovery

Whether the athlete I train is in high school or reaching the distinguished age of 50, I often hear the comment "Is that all I have to do?" in regard to a training program that is to be performed before the next session.

Most of the time, my response to this is "Less is more!"

Another conversation follows after sessions when I ask athletes if they were sore from the previous workout. I generally receive a "No, not really." My reply is "Perfect! I don't want you sore. If you're sore, then the body needs more time to recover, thus decreasing the performance allowed for the next training session and so forth."

You should be able to work out twice a day, six days a week and seldom be sore or fatigued, just like professional athletes do. The only difference between you and them is that they are getting paid to work out.

Many athletes excessively for that marathon in the middle of August, the last triathlon of the season, the hike up the Grand, or the 100-miler in early September. Sometimes the competitiveness and drive takes over or activities of daily living interfere with proper rest and recovery. It is counterproductive to follow the "no pain, no gain" attitude toward completing a series of workouts fatigued or thinking, "What's the harm in pushing through a little fatigue? It will increase mental strength as well as physical strength." This mentality blocks athletes from achieving their goals.

Research has shown that continually pushing tired muscles and fighting fatigue will induce a compromised state known as overreaching. Overreaching is the intermediate point between heavy training and overtraining. Acute overtraining is characterized by training fatigue, reduction or stagnation in performance, tight and tired muscles, disturbed sleep patterns, irritability, and often a persistent upper-respiratory-tract infection.

When we hike Snow King, tackle the Tuesday night bike rides or run for miles along the dike, our bodies release the stress hormone adrenaline (epinephrine). This hormone release initiates an increase in heart rate, causing more blood to go to the working muscles. This is normal during exercise, and the body is adapt-

ed to withstand this process. However, heavy training and two-a-day workouts without proper rest and recovery reduce the time the body has to heal itself.

Three ways to avoid overreaching and overtraining are a nutritional strategy, sleep and active recovery. Ian Jefferys of Wales, who is the strength and conditioning coach for the 16-and-under National Rugby Team, elaborates briefly on nutrition and sleep strategies:

A nutritional strategy must focus on a high standard of overall nutrition, not simply on nutrition before, during and after the game. This focus needs to be both quantitative and qualitative.

Athletes need to drink an adequate amount of water to maintain fluid balance in relation to weather and training conditions. Thirst is a poor indicator of hydration status.

Sleep is fundamental to optimal recovery, and both the quantity and the quality of sleep are vital. Indeed, athletes need a greater quantity and quality of sleep than sedentary individuals. However, many athletes, especially those in high school and college, are sleep-deprived. In general, athletes should aim for eight to nine and a half hours of sleep per night; those involved in heavy training should aim for the top end of this range. Of equal importance is the quality of sleep.

Active recovery is the most important strategy an athlete can learn. For example, if you put in 80 to 200 miles of road cycling per week, a good active rest could

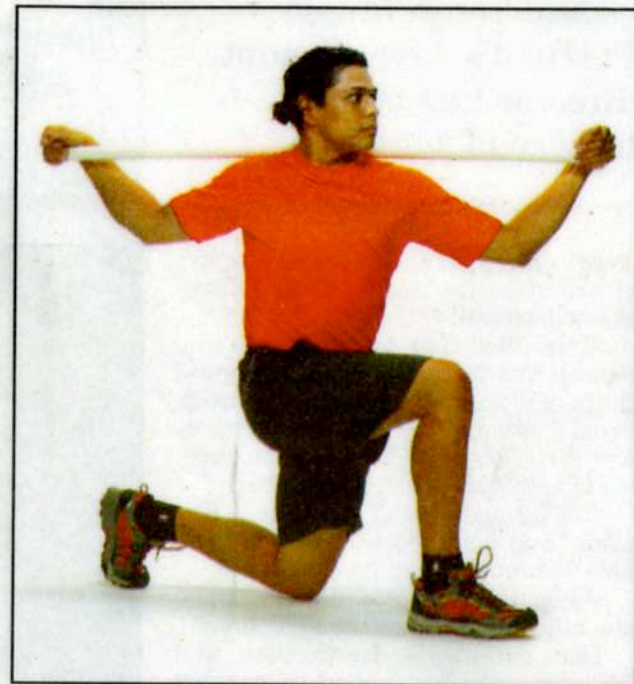
be swimming or a light game of soccer. If one keeps the pattern of movement different, the body has quicker recovery without using the same muscles again. Mountain biking up Snow King, hard hiking or trail running are less accommodating activities for active rest recovery. These activities travel in the same plane of movement as do biking, and although they are not the same action, they are the same muscle groups being used over again. The change in pattern makes all the difference in recovery.

Active rest also includes active stretching. The picture above is an example of an active rest stretch. It is called rotational lunge, and you begin by kneeling with knees at 90 degrees and placing a stick behind your neck. Activate the glute of the rear leg to move forward, and rotate your stick to the inside



Training to be balanced

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Rotational lunge: Start in a kneeling position, with knees at 90 degrees, with a stick behind your shoulders. Activate the gluteal muscle of rear leg to move forward. Rotate stick to the inside of the front bent-knee side. Hold two seconds and return to start.

of the front bent knee.

Athletes should follow this adage: "Train smart, train hard, recover well."

- Don't increase exercise intensity abruptly; Boost weekly training loads by 10 percent or less.
- Rest completely at least one day per week.
- Have variety in daily training schedule.
- Vary hard and light days.
- Avoid too many competitions.
- Eat a well-balanced diet. Include a large variety of food that contains adequate carbohydrate, protein and micronutrients.

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