

Managing Training Time

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Of all the factors influencing success in gymnastics possibly the most limiting factor, at least from a coach's perspective, may be the factor of Time. We are always working against it, there never seems to be enough of it, and other agencies (school, family) are always competing for it. Time affects every decision made by a coach. How much time is there until Nationals? How long will it take to learn this skill? How long to put it into the routine? How long until Suzie hits adolescence?

Fortunately, there is a very simple, logical method for making the most of the time available for training. This method will help to keep both you and your gymnasts appropriately on-task, and to avoid over-training a particular event, skill, or ability. To begin, it might be interesting to have an observer, such as a parent or other coach, keep track of the time course of your workouts for a week. You might be shocked to discover how long your "warmup" period really lasts, or how much time is spent in "transition" from one event to the next. Once the actual time schedule has been recorded, simply take the entire week of training minutes available (for example, training 5 days/week for 22 hours/week is 1320 total minutes available for training). Then divide the number of minutes spent in each activity per week and multiply by 100 to get the percentage of training time spent on that activity. For example if 170 minutes were spent "warming up" during the week, then 12.9% of your training time has already been consumed. Now, perhaps that number is exactly where you want it to be. However, we suspect that as you start to determine the percentages for all the other activities that take place during training, you will find that you will be surprised where your current plan places each activity in relation to the others.

The key to successful management of training time is to develop a training time schedule that is based on the current importance or emphasis on each activity that is undertaken during training. This scheduling can be done for many levels of training. For example, how much conditioning time should be spent on the kipping movement, versus casting, jumping, trunk extension, etc.? This would allow you to determine the number of exercises, sets and reps that will make appropriate use of your conditioning time based on the weaknesses of your athletes. For our purposes, let's just organize the total training schedule of a week's worth of training based on the competitive events and common activities.

We will continue working with the hypothetical situation of 5 training days, 1320 minutes per week. Next, we will list all of the regularly occurring activities that must be undertaken within a week's worth of training. Your list may be very detailed, or it may be composed simply of the 5 events (remember conditioning is the "fifth event!"). The following is an example of a list of activities that might comprise a typical training schedule.

Training Activities

- General Warmup
- Specific Warmup (tumbling basic skills)
- Uneven bars
- Balance beam
- Vault
- Tumbling

- Floor exercise dance
- Ballet
- Strength training
- Flexibility

Next, we will need to determine the % of importance for each activity. This is where it gets interesting. Perhaps you may decide that beam is the most important event, and requires at least 50% of your time. This means that you have 9 other tasks to undertake in the remaining 660 minutes available to you. If we go the simplest route of giving each of these 9 items equal time, then you have only 14.7 minutes per day for each of the remaining tasks! Below is an example of how training might be partitioned within a week for the above tasks.

% Importance of Training Tasks

- 5 General Warmup
- 8 Specific Warmup (tumbling basic skills)
- 20 Uneven bars
- 22 Balance beam
- 6 Vault
- 5 Tumbling
- 5 Floor exercise dance
- 7 Ballet
- 17 Strength training
- 5 Flexibility

Of course, these tasks are not going to be performed on each day of training. Consequently, the percentage of importance for vault, for example, may seem low, however it is a relevant percentage considering what is done within the total week. For vault, the total available minutes are 79.2 per week. If vault is trained each day, there would only be 15.8 minutes allowed per day, hardly enough time to rotate to the event. So, we choose to train vault only twice per week, allowing 40 minutes for vault training on two different days.

Once the percentage of allotted time for each task is determined, the training schedule for a week then can be created. Below is a hypothetical weekly schedule for training including all of the above tasks according to their appropriate % of training time. Actual training time in the week is 1324 minutes, slightly more than we budgeted. Remember too, that transition time from one event to the next has not been accounted for. By simply rounding down on all numbers above (for example beam = 55 min, bars = 50 min, flexibility = 20 min), adequate transition time can be built in to the schedule. A simple spreadsheet program such as Excel or QuattroPro will easily perform the calculations you need and keep track of your schedules as they change throughout the training year. This information, combined with team results on each event over a season, may help the coach adjust the training goals and daily training load for the next training cycle.

The final step for planning would be to determine the rotation schedule based on the clock, so that each coach is aware of the exact time that an event has to be completed and when rotation should occur.

What is the benefit of the above planning? It ensures that the coach remains on-task and does not over-emphasize one event or training task more than another. It ensures that the day-to-day training corresponds to the importance the coach has placed on achievement or improvement in each of the training tasks.

Hypothetical Training Schedule Based on Percentage of Importance of Tasks

MIN.	MONDAY	MIN.	TUESDAY	MIN.	THURSDAY	MIN.	FRIDAY	MIN.	SATURDAY
22	General WU	45	Ballet	22	General WU	22	General WU	45	Ballet
22	Specific WU	22	Specific WU	22	Specific WU	22	Specific WU	22	Specific WU
58	Beam	58	Beam	58	Beam	58	Beam	58	Beam
53	Bars	53	Bars	53	Bars	53	Bars	53	Bars
40	Vault	33	Tumble	40	Vault	33	Tumble		
		33	Floor dance			33	Floor dance		
45	Strength	45	Strength	45	Strength	45	Strength	45	Strength
22	Flexibility			22	Flexibility	22	Flexibility		
262	Total	289	Total	262	Total	288	Total	223	Total