



FUNCTION VS. PAIN.

WHEN TO STOP AND TAKE A LOOK.



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Training of the gymnast rightly occupies the majority of time involvement in the sport of gymnastics. The ‘father of athlete training’ S.E. Bilik, MD in his 1917 first edition of the Trainers Bible states that physical training is, “to put the body with extreme and exceptional care under the influence of all the agents which promote its health and strength, in order to enable it to meet extreme and exceptional demands.”

Physical training requires time to learn technique, create repetitions that are correct and allow for the development of a neuromuscular memory pattern that allows for fluid functional performance. The trained eye of the masterful coach can identify proper form, posture and movement. Critically it is also this same ‘eye’ that will identify the most telling and critical factor in determining the presence of a physical barrier that precipitates an injury or is the symptom of an injury.

Training consistency is critical to technique development as well as mental health and a feeling of progress and inclusion in the program. As such each athlete, parent and coach encourages the athlete to follow an intense training regimen. In the gyms across America our gymnasts push themselves and appropriately are encouraged by coaches to meet new standards of personal development. In the training process of obtaining new levels the body reacts with sensations of muscle soreness, muscle and structural fatigue and some level of ‘injury.’

Injury by definition is ‘damage, wound, trauma.’ By my definition injury is any intrusion into the normal function of the human body which precludes normal performance. It is my experience that every gymnast either has been injured, is injured or will become injured; therefore, having a process to delineate the actual status of an athlete is important.

THE ISSUE

The question being asked in every gym and home in America regarding training and competition is how to manage the gymnast who experiences injury. Knowing that pain is part of the injury process we have allowed ‘pain’ to be the telling guide of when to stop or alter the level of activity. Pain as a general indicator for all individuals is an unfair assessment. While it is perhaps safe to lump all decisions into this category, it should also be noted that pain is an emotion which varies greatly

from person to person.

Culture has also allowed pain to become a badge of honor. The adage of ‘no pain, no gain’ and stories of athletes overcoming pain to achieve a goal. Pain can also be ‘faked,’ exaggerated and down played by the athlete.

Pain, by definition is “an unpleasant sensory, an emotional experience associated with, or described in terms of, actual or potential tissue damage.”

THE GOLDEN RULE

In my 30 plus years in sports performance health management the golden rule on when to stop training and evaluate is the loss of normal function in movement.

- Function is the most accurate indicator of an issue that needs to be addressed. Any alteration to the normal function of an athlete indicates a root cause effect (injury) to the normal function of a joint or muscle group.

Training for professionals in healthcare, specifically certified athletic trainers, for the assessment of an injured athlete is to include the observation of functional movement. It is this element that is inherent to the neuromuscular system that an individual cannot ‘hide, alter or fake.’ When pain associated with a loss of normal function ranges from very low to very high the altered function of the athlete is very consistent. Therefore it is an excellent measure of when to address the athlete with questions and seek professional consultation.

The most telling outcome of allowing function to be the guide is that the professional health care provider and coaches can work together to identify the actual root cause of the malfunction.

THE OUTCOME

Establishing a protocol within your gym and a culture among your coaches and parents you can utilize ‘functional movement patterns’ as your guide to when to stop the gymnast and evaluate the cause.

Seek a healthcare provider in your area that has a functional movement appreciation and works with you to understand how to correct the barriers found in the root cause evaluation. Getting to the root cause of a malfunction will lead to better outcomes for your performers in injury prevention and performance elevation. ✘

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