

TRAINING LIKE AN OLYMPIAN

By Pia Jmioff

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Training to be an Olympic athlete is a full time job. Experts say it takes at least 4 - 8 years of well planned training to be ready to represent your country as one of the world's best. While genetics and physiology play an important role, training, commitment and the ability to stay injury-free are equally important factors.

Olympic caliber athletes work with the experts. American downhill skier Lindsay Vonn travels with a team of 14 medical and fitness professionals. Physiotherapists, trainers, sports psychologists and dietitians are only some of the team. By looking at the strategies used by these world class athletes we can apply some of these tactics to our own health and fitness plans.

The professionals ensure that the type and amount of training is appropriate. Over training or training beyond the body's ability to recover is detrimental and can actually decrease performance level. It is important to find the right balance between training and rest. No matter what your fitness level, over training can result in lack of energy and inability to keep up the training program, increased incidences of injury, decreased appetite, loss of enthusiasm for the sport, depression and insomnia.

For any level of training, whether it be for competition or for general health and wellness, it is good to change things up periodically. The body adapts to a training level fairly quickly. After 6-8 weeks additional stimulus is beneficial. Using this formula, anyone looking to increase their fitness level should look at reviewing their training plans about 6 times per year.

Cross training is often used to supplement the main sport. It gives the muscles a break from the repetitiveness of one sport and helps strengthen any muscles being neglected. For example, a runner may add low-impact swimming to the work out regime, to work on cardio vascular conditioning while giving the body a break from the high impact of running.

Another good reason for cross training is to avoid boredom and burn-out and get a nice mental break from the repetitiveness of a sport.

Any athlete, Olympian or recreational, can make use of different techniques to test and enhance performance. Fitness testing, especially testing for aerobic capacity (Vo2max) is a tool that is used to determine current fitness level and can be redone over time to see improvements. It is important, especially in endurance type sports, to know aerobic capacity. This can be used for competitive purposes or for personal goal setting and proper exercise prescription.

Lactic acid testing is another test method that can help an athlete to know his/her threshold before getting into anaerobic zone, meaning that the person is working at such a hard intensity that the body can no longer supply enough oxygen to meet the demands of the working muscles. The goal during the training period is to increase the lactic acid

threshold. For example, in a marathon, the person with the higher lactic acid threshold can stay in aerobic zone (with oxygen) at a higher intensity and will get to the finish line sooner.

For the recreational athlete, heart rate monitoring, aerobic fitness testing, and lactic acid testing can be great as motivational tools to improve one's own performance, and will also satisfy the curiosity of one's own fitness level compared to the rest of the population

To succeed at reaching your goals in sports and fitness, regardless of what level you are at, proper and safe training is essential. Olympic athletes are our best example of just how important this is.

Pia Jmioff is an exercise physiologist and personal trainer at City Centre Health and Fitness. 399 Main St, 3rd floor of the City Centre Building. Numerous medical and fitness programs are available including the new Quick Fit introductory program to promote weight loss and a healthier body. Call for a free consultation 250-487-1481