Speed Skating Training

Summer training

The most important off-season training is endurance training. Endurance training provides the foundation upon which all other types of training can be stacked. Cycling, running and rollerblading are all good examples of endurance building activities. The key to endurance training is to raise your heart rate to at least 75% of its max and keep it there for a prolonged period. This period could start at as little as 20 minutes and extend to as much as three hours, as in a long bike ride. For beginners, starting with 20-30 minutes three times per week and building to a maximum of 60 minutes will provide the start of a good endurance foundation. Athletic type sports such as soccer, track, cross-country running, and cycling can also provide this endurance base without the rigidity of a formal training program. The exact type and amount of endurance training should be determined between you and your coach, based on your age, training background and fitness level, and your goals.

Strength, speed and power are also important in speed skating. Intensive formal training for these components must wait until a solid endurance base has been established. However, there are several activities that you can do to build up strength, speed and power as part of your endurance base training. These include circuit training and fartlek training and the good thing about these types of training is that they re best done with a group. The idea is to include specific activities for strength, speed and power as part of a general endurance program. Callisthenics, imitations, partner exercises, sprints, and various dry training games can be incorporated into general endurance-type programs to put more specific emphasis on developing strength, power and speed. Again, the amount and type of these activities in your program is a matter to be determined between you and your coach, and the determination is based on your age, training and fitness level and goals.

Finally, a very important part of training at any level is flexibility. Specific flexibility exercises for the joints and muscles important to speed skating performance should be initiated at the start of your involvement in training and maintained year round. There is a significant overuse injury problem associated with the high volumes of training required at national and international levels of competition, and proper attention to thorough warm up and warm down programs including a comprehensive flexibility exercise set will help to protect you.

Winter training

It is very difficult to improve or even maintain general aerobic endurance simply by skating. Most skating programs are interval in nature and relatively anaerobic. It is difficult to perform ice programs similar to long continuous cycling or running programs. Therefore, any skater who has taken the time to train conscientiously during the summer to improve general endurance should ensure that some general endurance work is done during the skating season. This could be done by doing some endurance work before or after the skating session or adding additional running or cycling elements to the program or by limiting the ice training periodically for 7-10 days to concentrate on boosting the general endurance training. Since general endurance is important not only in the races but also to enhance the recovery process between training sessions, between intervals or between races it is important not to let this quality slide during the skating season.

Skating 4-5 times per week is usually enough to maintain strength that was developed in the summer dry training period. Combining a program of 2-3 full weight-training sessions per week with 4-5 serious ice-training sessions per week has usually resulted in incomplete recovery as determined by bio-chemical blood analysis. In order to continue to improve qualities in the weight

room, the National Team now limits the amount of ice work while focusing on the weight training and eliminates weight training while focusing on the skating. Weight training cycles of 8-10 days with 4 weight training sessions included, are inserted into the program in September, October and November. To maintain strength throughout the skating season it may not be necessary to enter the weight room at all. For a skater with limited strength entering the skating season, strength may actually improve while skating. To improve strength in the well-trained skater during season it may be necessary to compartmentalize this type of training with only enough ice work to maintain a good feel for the ice. It is difficult to work on everything at the same time.

Diet

Many athletes are faced with the nutrition challenges presented by double workouts, back-to-back events and tournaments that require top performance hours on end, sometimes days in a row. The athletes who pay careful attention to what they eat are able to conquer these events and win with good nutrition. But, as one athlete commented, "Most skaters don't even think about what they'll be eating between races. They just eat whatever's around -- a box of donuts, a bag of chips, or nothing." These athletes, and others who give no thought to their sports diet, cheat themselves of the ability to refuel and play hard again.

Tips to success with repeated bouts of exercise include:

1) Eat a high carb training diet every day. You can compete at your best only if you train at your best.
2) Be sure to enter into the event well fueled by a high carb pre-event dinner.
3) Eat breakfast the day of the event.
4) After the first event, eat carbs and drink juices ASAP while waiting for the second event.
5) When competing two days in a row, be sure to carbo-load at both dinners.

Although teaming up with good nutrition can give you the winning edge, to get a team to dedicate themselves to eating carbohydrates can be a challenge. Group spirit often culminates in high fat (sometimes high alcohol) parties that fill the stomach, but leave the muscles unfueled. Some coaches rise to meet the team nutrition challenge by educating their skaters about the importance of carbs and fluids; enforcing appropriate between-event eating; assigning someone the job of providing bagels, bananas, juices and other high carb sports snacks; dictating where the team will eat (i.e., at the Italian restaurant, not the steak house). Or, they make sure each skater packs his or her bag with appropriate foods (sports drinks, animal crackers, raisins, fig newtons).

If you are among the many athletes who gives no thought to your sports nutrition game plan, think again. The right sports diet can indeed enhance your performance. Even varsity athletes and winning teams who are doing well despite poor food choices can do better when they pay attention to their diet. Give food a chance!