

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES

Article by Guo Weidong

Translated by Yoke Yin

Modern training techniques for professionals incorporate aspects of education (pedagogy), psychology, nutrition, strength and conditioning, etc., making them highly sophisticated methods. All of the above are needed to fulfill their maximum potential.

For amateurs, training is carried out at times that do not interfere with education or careers. Only the training of professionals is seen to push the limits of the human body to achieve world-class standards and benefit the society. As for amateurs, the aim of training is only to build the physical abilities of the body, making it difficult to attain excellent sporting achievements of a grand scale. Bringing glory to the country is thus a problem. The differences between training programmes for professionals and amateurs are discussed below, with reference to China's professional athletes and Singapore's amateurs.

The differences are as follow:

The Length of Training Time

In China, it is ensured that professional athletes train everyday. At their peak, these athletes train three times a day, about 6-8 hours each day and approximately a total of 40 hours a week. In comparison, the National Triathlon Squad of Singapore does not put in as much training time as the China team does. Singapore triathletes train for 2 hours once a day, amounting to about 12 hours a week. During the examinations period in Singapore, athletes tend to cut down on training, and some may even stop training for this period of time to concentrate on their studies so as to attain good results. Hence, their regular training sessions only resume after the examinations, and athletes have to rebuild their level of fitness once again. Thus, the reasons for the difference in the level of achievement can be seen from the amount of time invested into training.

Team Management

Training programmes for professional athletes are optimal when the team of athletes is closely-knit, allowing coaches and other related personnel to actively participate and manage the team.

(i) The Monitoring Of Athletes' Health

Medical Officers can conveniently keep track of athletes' health indices, such as proteins in urine, heart rate, haemoglobin count and many other health aspects. Coaches can use the above information to plan suitable programmes or make alterations according to the health conditions of the athletes, so as to allow the programmes to be more scientific and practical. Thus under the close monitoring through medical methods, fatigue, over-exhaustion and injuries can be prevented. As for amateur athletes, such monitoring is difficult to carry out. Thus during sessions,

coaches are unable to target specific needs of the athletes according to their physical abilities.

(ii) Nutrition

The needs of every athlete after completing their various training programmes differ, thus methods to effectively recover and replenish the nutrients their bodies require will also be different. The close monitoring of their needs, massage and other rehabilitative means can be made easily available to professional athletes who live and train together as a team. However for amateur athletes, they go home after training, thus the coaches are unable to keep track of their diets. Moreover most parents of these athletes are also unaware of the different nutritional needs of their children, so they cannot ensure the replenishment of the vital nutrients lost during training. This in turn affects the rate recovery. With slower recovery, the requirements of the training programme will not be achieved, thus improvements in results cannot be attained.

(iii) Providing psychological guidance

The gathering of professional athletes usually allows them to easily communicate with one another, and thus understand each other's psychological behaviour. Psychological counseling is thus easily carried out within the group. As for amateur athletes, the coaches do not have opportunities to spend such quality time with them, and will therefore be unable to understand the mental behaviours of the athletes. This hinders the proper guidance of the team members.

Academic Expectations

In China, athletes are not bound by expectations of academic achievements. Training takes priority over education, and the time spent on studies is only 20 hours a week. This is not exactly beneficial to the development of youths. As such improvements to such a system would benefit these young athletes' future. On the other hand, it allows systematic training programmes to be carried out. In China, athletes receive pay if they train as professionals. Given China's overriding aim to produce world class athletes, the lack of academic emphasis is accepted. For elite Chinese athletes, there is no need for excellent academic achievements as they do not have to worry about their future because of government support. Another advantage for those Chinese athletes who attain world-class standards is that all the top universities in the country will lower their entry standards, so as to allow them to represent the various schools and seek glory for these institutions. Such can also be seen in developed countries e.g. Japan and the United States. In Singapore, academic excellence greatly affects the lives of amateur athletes. They cannot neglect their studies, because a university degree is the only thing that can ensure a good career in the future.

Wastage Of Talents

Talented Singaporean athletes are very rarely recruited by coaches after they finish their National Service. Majority of these seek other careers and occupations. There are many underlying reasons, the most significant of which is that the government does not place great importance in the benefits that coaches should reap. Coaches in general, face more

challenges than teachers. This is because they have to impart the proper techniques and ideologies towards the sport. Singapore, which already lacks human resources, needs to ensure the recognition of talents; otherwise the goal of becoming a sporting nation will not be achieved.