

## **Chapter 2: Key Concepts in Peaking**

Now that a foundational understanding of dynamic movement has been established, we can begin our discussion on peaking the qualities that are necessary for athletic success. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to delve deeper into our peaking methods, exercise selection, and concepts associated with this method. It is important to keep in mind that while these concepts are applicable to all athletes who have built a proper foundation of training, athletes are individuals; and in that, they respond to stimuli individually. The concepts presented in this chapter are qualities that all athletes should possess and train; however, due to the individuality of the human organism, elite athletes may have unique peaking strategies. This realization may keep you from pounding your head against a wall, but it is the art of coaching and building relationships and consistency with athletes that will allow you to individualize the peaking strategies.

### **2.1 The Art of Peaking**

As mentioned in the preface, one of the most misunderstood aspects of training athletes is how to peak when it counts. There are far more variables to account for other than time of year, such as training age, sport and position, strength, and acute:chronic workload. For instance, if an athlete trains too hard before a competition, they won't be able to use their athletic abilities to their fullest capacity. If athletes don't train hard enough before a competition, they won't be prepared for the demands of their sport and their performance will suffer. This is where a well-planned off-season becomes increasingly important as this is where the foundation of in-season training is built. For instance, athletes who compete frequently, especially those with long seasons, it's important to maintain muscle mass during the season, as a loss of muscle mass precipitates strength loss. As such, having a foundation of strength training will allow for athletes participating in such a sport to train with higher volumes without a detriment to their performance in sport.

One major factor to consider when working with athletes is whether the athlete competes in just one sport or in multiple sports. At the professional and college level, the level of competition is so high that athletes must focus on one sport. However, these athletes often have extremely long off-seasons and can build a base of strength and conditioning such that missing a few workouts in-season will not be that big a deal. There are exceptions, of course, such as professional hockey players, who have an off-season that only lasts a few months – less if a team goes deep into the playoffs; for these players the off-season may not even last the summer.

Building strength and resiliency is not only important for protecting the athlete from injury, it allows the athlete to train speed qualities in movements. You can't solely rely on training speed-strength and expect it to yield great results if you don't first address more absolute strength qualities. Regardless of how quickly the muscles activate, if they haven't been given the ability to contract harder and with more force, the bar speed is going to plateau. Without increasing the force development capabilities of the athlete, you can work speed all you want but it won't yield great results. Remember, you must have a good foundation before you can add the bells and whistles, and that foundation is strength. Once that's been achieved, the emphasis can then be focused on the speed of these contractions.

The focus shifts from slow contractions developing a large amount of force to maximizing the speed at which these forces are achieved. Transitioning this focus is the first step to peaking the athlete as now they're utilizing faster muscle contractions to produce a large amount of force. This speed of contraction begins to engrain a sport-specific movement pattern, because now they're performing it at a speed similar to what they will see in a competition.

The next section will describe how to select exercises that are appropriate for peaking athletes. The correct combination of exercise selection and movement velocity is a powerful tool and can yield tremendous benefits for the coaches who know how to wield it.