ATHLETE PREPARATION

Plan | Train | Evaluate

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!” - Benjamin Franklin

Prepare to be Successful

Practically every sport in existence has its own skill-specific training, conditioning and drills that are recommended to prepare the body and mind for the sport and Cheer is no different. In this TCI Module we will explore the ways in which a responsible coach can prepare athletes for a healthy cheer experience that can last a lifetime.

GENERAL SAFETY

The foremost goal before beginning any training whatsoever should be the safety of the athlete. Therefore it is essential that a coach does a risk-assessment of the following key areas:

Training location
- first aid kit location
- ceiling height/obstructions
- performance area: matting and any equipment available
- waiting area(s) safety and security
- emergency exits
- lighting
- temperature (summer/winter)
- toilet access
- changing rooms
- communication availability (phone service, 3G, 4G and/or internet access)
- access to drinking water

Considerations must be made about the safety and security of anyone onsite during a training session. Taking part in outside events like fairs, performances, camps, etc. may involve the preparation of a formal Risk Assessment. Risk Assessment documents can be confusing and difficult to accurately prepare. Many people have specialty training in Risk Assessment and it is important to get advice before preparing one yourself.

Club Matters - Sport England

Club Matters provides free, convenient and practical resources for clubs including Risk Assessment information. Visit the Club Matters Website and click on CLUB MANAGEMENT to see all of the advice and resources available.

www.sportenglandclubmatters.com
Emergency Action Plan (EAP)

An Emergency Action Plan is a plan coaches design to help them respond in a responsible and clear-headed way if an emergency occurs. It is important to ensure that the people nominated to complete tasks within the plan are able and happy to assist.

Keep a copy of your EAP in your coaching folder and a copy in your First Aid Kit. Ensure that all coaches know the basic protocols of the plan. Who is the caller, who stays with the casualty, who removes other athletes from the area and keeps them safe and calm.

EAP basics include:

- Who is in charge in an emergency
- Emergency telephone numbers: ambulance, fire, police, facility management, athlete parent/carers and emergency contacts for adult athletes
- Medical Profile for each athlete: allergies, pre-existing conditions, medications and treatments
- Address and specific directions to training area (some locations have tricky addresses or you may be in a gym at the back of a site)
- Complete first aid kit and First Aider
- Designated Caller

How to Handle an Emergency Situation

Remain Calm: Take a deep breath. Remember that to be calm in a stressful situation you must deliberately adjust your behaviour. Reassure yourself that you can handle the situation until help arrives. Assess the situation to see what needs to be done before acting.

Seek Additional Help: Call 999 or Emergency services. Be prepared to answer questions about the victim or the situation. This will not slow an ambulance or police down.

Determine the Nature of the Emergency: Help others leave a hazardous area. Offering verbal reassurance to an injured person if he is conscious will help, even if you can’t move them. Let that person know who you are and what is happening to them. Ask them questions to keep them conscious. If the emergency is stable, stay with the victim.
Coaching a successful cheer team does not require a 9-panel Sprung floor and tons of specialist equipment. Those things can all be very useful, but are not essential. When choosing which equipment to invest in, always consider the following the “Who, What, When, Where, Why, How” of it’s functionality.

- **WHO can use and benefit from the equipment?**
  - Consider size/height/weight of average athletes in your programme
- **WHAT does it train?**
  - Investing in multi-functional equipment is efficient and ensures a solid investment
- **WHEN the equipment will be used?**
  - Is the equipment a year-round tool or only useful at certain stages
- **WHERE will the equipment be stored?**
  - Consider the wear and tear on equipment that is moved frequently and the set-up take-down time needed for equipment
- **WHY is this equipment necessary?**
  - Is this essential to better training and safety or is it a fun thing to have?
  - Some equipment can be a recruiting tool for new athletes or athlete retention
- **HOW can we ensure safe use of equipment and retain its value?**
  - Train staff to use equipment properly and care for it
  - Instruct athletes on safe practices while using equipment
  - Follow equipment instructions
  - Ensure that equipment is allowed in venue and is appropriately insured

**Recommended Cheer Equipment:**

**Training Surface Mat**
- All mats should be secured to one another and should not be able to move independently of those around it
- Gaps in between mats should be no more than the thickness of a £1 coin to prevent trips and falls into gaps
- Matting is to decrease impact on hard ground on an athlete’s body in the event of a trip, fall, incompletion of a skill, and repetitive high-impact training with a qualified coach
- Mat thickness should be considered in conjunction with height of skills performed and impact of tumbling skills performed
Crash Mat(s)
- Crash Mat thickness should be 20cm or more and 240cm x 120cm in width and length.

Other Equipment Recommendations
- Folding Wedge (photo credit www.norberts.net)
- Booster Block or Folding Panel Mat (photo credit www.tracks2000.co.uk)
- Barrel, Octogan or Top Tumbler (photo credit www.tumbltrak.co.uk)
- Stretch Bands (woven) or High Resistance Latex Bands
- Thick rubber bands

What other equipment can you think of that is important for cheer training?
- Shoes: soft sole, flexible, supportive
- Training Gear: flexible sports clothing
- Music Player
- Music Tracks
ATHLETE CONDITIONING

5 BENEFITS OF STRENGTH & CONDITIONING
- Dylan Mudlo

- Preparation for the future
- Reduced injury risk
- Increases in strength
- Smaller incidence of burnout or overspecialisation
- More enjoyment in movement and physical activity for a lifetime

In order to provide a well-rounded athletic experience it is essential to ensure athletes are properly conditioned for the skills they are expected to perform.

An athlete who cannot support their own weight through their arms will not safely be able to tumble.

An athlete who struggles with hand-eye coordination will struggle to react when a stunt goes wrong.

In this section we will explore the reasoning behind athlete conditioning and the basic principles that should help you choose and monitor the conditioning programmes used in your coaching.

Dylan Mudlo, MS, CSCS published a Blog post on the 5 Benefits of Strength and Conditioning Training for the Youth Athlete on June 25, 2015 on the website www.ironcityelite.com. You can Download the full article from the Module 2 website page.

When we address the fundamentals behind each of these benefits it becomes easier to appreciate how conditioning for the athleticism sits alongside teaching the skills and choreography of the sport.

1. Preparation for the future means how conditioning is setting an athlete up for progressions or more difficult skills in the future
2. Reducing injury risk is just that, stronger and more flexible athletes are less prone to injury, especially when involved in a year-round sport. A well rounded programme will prevent overdevelopment in specific areas which leaves athletes open to injury.
3. Increase in strength is important to develop control and coordination that will assist an athlete as they grow older.
4. Smaller incidence of burnout or overspecialisation means that at a young age athletes should be trained for “fundamental movement skills” before “sport specific skills.” (High Performance Training for Sports, Joyce 2014)
5. More enjoyment in movement and physical activity for a lifetime implies that when you move well and are not in pain you will continue to enjoy movement for a lifetime.
Before buying or subscribing or committing to a conditioning plan, make sure to learn as much as you can about it. Talk to others who use the same or similar plans. Reach out to experts, they want to talk to you about the benefits and shortfalls of different training modes.

Once you have chosen a programme, make it work for you. Ensure that it is held to, review and adjusted as needed.

Having some knowledge of the human body and how it develops is important. Check out the following resource from the BBC.

There are some great inexpensive but very useful books, websites and Apps that you can use as part of your coaching library.

**Books:**
- *Dynamic Stretching: The Revolutionary New Warm-up Method to Improve Power, Performance and Range of Motion.* Mark Kovacs, 2010

**Websites:**
- www.tumblingcoach.com
- www.fortheloveoftumbling.com
- www.getbodysmart.com

**Apps:**
- Cheerleading Conditioning by Fitivity and others including Pilates
- Seven - 7 Minute Workout
FLEXIBILITY

Lets’s explore the different types of stretches.

Passive Stretching
Passive stretching is similar to static stretching, except that an apparatus or partner provides the force to stretch the muscle. For example, you may stand with your back against a wall while your exercise partner lifts your leg to stretch the hamstring. Passive stretching relieves muscle spasms and helps reduce muscle fatigue and soreness after a workout.

Dynamic Stretching
Dynamic stretching involves controlled swinging of the arms and legs that gently takes them to the limits of their range of motion. Here, parts of the body are moved with gradually increasing speed, reach or both.

Ballistic Stretching
Ballistic stretching forces a body part to go beyond its normal range of motion by making it bounce to a stretched position. It increases range of motion and triggers the muscle’s stretch reflex. Performing ballistic stretching can make you more susceptible to injury. Only highly conditioned and competent athletes preparing for strenuous activity should employ it.

Active Isolated Stretching
Active isolated stretching is most commonly used by professionals: athletes, trainers, massage therapists and others. To complete at active isolated stretch, you reach a certain position and hold it steady without any assistance other than the strength of your own muscles. Kick a leg up high, for example, and hold it up in that extended posture. Active isolated stretching works with natural physiological processes to increase muscle and fascia elasticity and improve circulation.

Isometric Stretching
In isometric stretching, as a muscle is stretched into position, you resist the stretch. For example, have a partner hold your leg up high while you attempt to force back your leg in the opposite direction. Isometric stretching is the safest and most effective method for increasing the joints’ range of motion, and it strengthens tendons and ligaments while retaining their flexibility.

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF)
Proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation combines isometric, static and passive stretching to foster a high level of flexibility. Perform it by passively stretching a muscle; isometrically contracting it against resistance in the stretched position; and passively stretching it through the resulting increased range of motion. It is an advanced form of flexibility training that also helps improve strength.

When we train our athletes it is important to see the roles that FLEXIBILITY plays in our training:

- Flexibility is an important part of preventing injury
- Achieving flexibility is different for every athlete
- Flexibility is needed for a large quantity of cheer-specific moves
Flyer Body Positions

- abdominals
- rectus femoris
- quadriceps
- sartorius
- vastus

- erector spinae (muscles of the spinal column)
- latissimus dorsi
- gluteals
- hamstring

Jumping & Tumbling

- pectoralis major
- abdominals
- rectus femoris
- quadriceps
- sartorius
- vastus

- erector spinae
- deltoid
- latissimus dorsi
- gluteals
- hamstring
- gastrocnemius
- soleus
- achilles tendon
**What is Flexibility?**

When you stretch a muscle, you lengthen the tendons or muscle fibres that attach to the bone. The longer these fibres are the more you can increase the muscle size through strength training. So, a more flexible muscle can become a stronger muscle.

To IMPROVE flexibility, stretches need to be done 5-7 times per week, 2-4 repetitions of the stretch and held for 15 - 30 seconds each time.

To MAINTAIN flexibility, stretches need to be done 2-3 times per week, 2-4 repetitions of the stretch and held for 15 - 30 seconds each time.

Train flexibility with a WARM body after activity or workout to prevent muscle damage.

**Team Flexibility Reminders:**

- Some people are more flexible to others

- Listen to athletes and never force a stretch with your own body weight when a person says “No” or “Stop”

- There are sometimes underlying physiological reasons why some athletes can perform flexible moves and others cannot

- Always work towards a balanced body- stretch both sides and always counter-stretch

- Discomfort is to be expected when beginning a stretch routine, pain is not acceptable

- Make corrections of technique and use tools such as yoga blocks, bands, and mats to make stretching easier

- Be aware of athlete’s age and development stage. It is not recommended that children under the age of 5 perform bridge positions. Athletes who are going through puberty may encounter joint and muscle weakness.
THE LANGUAGE OF CHEER

“When the trust account is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective.” - Stephen R. Covey

Visit www.iasfworlds.com

• Click on Rules and Divisions
• Click on CHEER Glossary
• Complete request for Glossary and Rules access
• Download Glossary and Rules for this season

Many things can influence the language we use in our everyday communications from where we grew up, where we live now to who we are speaking with. The language of Cheer is very much the same!

Using the terminology of the IASF can be a very useful tool when teaching your athletes, coaches and parents about our amazing sport. It can also be very useful when you are speaking with judges at a competition about scoring so there is no misunderstanding of routine elements.

Not all skills are covered in the glossary but the most important are. If you are ever unsure of a skill, reach out to the cheer community to assist you.

PROGRESSIONS

In Modules 4, 5, 6, & 7 we will discuss the importance of teaching skills using progressions. Just like we approach conditioning and flexibility, building a foundation brick by brick leads to athletes who succeed.
Congratulations!

You have now completed

Module 2 Athlete Preparation

See you again soon!