

The Need For Athletes Rankings

When trying to evaluate the validity of many research studies it is not uncommon to find articles dealing with exercises for athletes in specific sports. If they are training articles, they typically deal with exercises or training routines that are used with athletes in a certain sport. Usually ignored is the effectiveness of these exercises and exercise programs in relation to the athlete's level of ability.

This gets pretty frustrating at times especially when it is recommended that the exercises or training programs are good for all athletes in all sports. In other words, no distinction is made between the athletes in general or in specific sports or levels of competition. Nor are distinctions made between the training of a professional supposedly elite athlete or a collegiate and sometimes high school athlete.

For example, the Russians have found that strength training programs for beginning athletes do not have the same effects as with elite or high-level athletes. Thus, it is important to know which level of athlete is addressed in order to make the training practices most effective.

In the former Soviet Union and in present-day Russia, the athletes are ranked by ability. They are recognized for each level of accomplishment by their new title which tells everyone what they are capable of. There is no guessing as to how good the athlete is.

The highest ranking possible is Honored Master of Sport, International Class. Next in order is Honored Master of Sport and Master of Sport, followed by Class I, Class II, and Class III level athletes. There is also a junior classification system which consists of first, second and third class athletes. This classification is used only up to the age of 19.

These rankings are not used to merely honor the athlete. They play an important role in training and in research since each level of athlete is different; they are differentiated mentally, technically, physically and physiologically. Because of this, you must differentiate the type of training and the effects of particular exercise regimes for each level. This allows for greater precision in training.

For example, circuit training is a very effective method of developing strength and other physical qualities. However, it is only effective for second and third-class athletes. Thus, Master of Sport athletes do not use this training because it would not bring about positive results.

It should be noted that a ranked athlete is already an accomplished athlete. He is not a beginner just starting or learning the game. He or she is an athlete who is in serious training, working out up to six days a week and, in some cases, more than once a day (the only exception is with juniors). However, outstanding youngsters can go past the junior ranking and be ranked together with adult athletes, especially when putting together national teams.

The ranking system is very effective and allows coaches to know immediately the level of performance for each athlete. Also important to note is that these levels are nationally based. Therefore, an athlete from one part of the country or from a particular school can still be rated the same as an athlete in a school from another part of the country and different level of school, as for example, between Division I and Division III.

The rankings are based on objective data. For example, an Honored International Class sprinter would have to have a time under ten seconds in the 100m. A class three sprinter may have a time of 11:5-12:00. The other rankings would fall in between this range. In the throwing events, ratings are based on distances thrown while team sport athletes are usually rated on the ranking of the team, how many points they scored, how many points they got on defense, etc. Thus, there is very little room for incorrect diagnoses of an athlete.

It should also be brought out that the precision of the rating is another reason why the results of Russian research are so effective. The research is always done with particular levels of athletes and the results apply only to this level, not to all athletes as typically occurs in U.S. research. Understand that many sports studies done in the U.S. involve physical education majors or "fit" recreational players who are presumed to be athletes. Today, however, this is very far from the truth.

For accurate results, I strongly recommend establishing a system similar to the Russians so that we too can be very objective when talking about the training of athletes as well as levels of athletes. It will help stop all the confusion as to the effectiveness of various exercises and/or training programs.