

SMARTER COACHING:

WHAT DO YOU REALLY KNOW ABOUT YOUR ATHLETES?

by Patrick A. Ward, CSCS

We see it all the time, especially at the high school level. Want your kids to get stronger? Get them in the gym, load them up and get them lifting!

The biggest problem with this is that most coaches (and even trainers) aren't gathering enough information about the athlete before they "load them up" under the bar. As the famous quote goes, "If you aren't assessing, your only guessing". Testing and re-testing an athlete is of utmost importance. Initial tests identify postural, strength, and flexibility imbalances, while follow up tests show improvement and can identify other areas that require attention. It makes sense, how can you know where someone is going if you don't know where they are and how can you tell if they have improved if you don't re-test? Tests should include quantity based tests such as 5RM squat, vertical jump, 40yd dash, etc., and quality based tests.

The two most important things in an athlete's development

are preventing injury and emphasizing good technique. Good technique alone can take care of certain gaps in the athlete's "quantity based" tests. Tests allow you to find underlying physiological issues that contribute to improper form. If your athlete can jump with better technique, they will jump higher. If their squat form is more sound, they will get more out of the exercise. Good technique and coaching can also help to decrease the risk of injuries on the field.

Know what your athlete needs. If they are overly tight in the hips, then a good flexibility program can prevent things like pulled groins or hamstring strains. No two athletes are alike, but everyone needs to start at a "base" level. Some may have a lower base level than others but the most important thing is that athletes focus on creating a strong base of stabilization, strength and balance. The most important thing you can do as a coach is know your athletes and know what it is that is holding

them back from getting to the next level. Do they need more flexibility? Do they need more power? Do they need more strength? Do they need greater stability? Do they need greater agility?

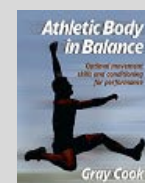
There are a number of testing procedures for analyzing your athlete's movement such as The Functional Movement Screen by Gray Cook or the Overhead Squat that is used by the National Academy of Sports Medicine. Both procedures will help you gather information about the athlete's movement that you need to come up with a comprehensive program and achieve success on the field.

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THE OSP PHILOSOPHY

Every athlete who trains with us is Optimum Sports Performance. The moment an athlete commits to becoming a better, stronger athlete with us, he or she becomes part of our family. Every athlete who completes one of our programs, whether training with us for a summer, or for years, represents what we believe in and why we do what we do. We expect our athletes to give us everything they've got, and in return, we demand the same from ourselves.

RECOMMENDED READING



Athletic Body in Balance
by Gray Cook
2003, Human Kinetics