

Why an obsession with new drills could be hindering performance.

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Preps and drills ... why are we so magnetised to them, like a moth to a lightbulb?

You'd think that the paparazzi has arrived in the gym when introducing a new drill; phones and cameras everywhere making sure every moment is captured.

Who doesn't like new shiny objects eh?

I'm not being judgemental as I understand the appeal; I love a good drill too, and would also film it to add to my archive of options BUT I do recognise that a drill is just an ingredient within an extremely important recipe, which never seems to get half as much attention or thought.

A significant amount of the things we do with our athletes probably don't matter, and I'm always looking for ways to reduce the number of steps or processes to teach something.

Like a good caddy advising a golfer, there's usually only a few good options when it comes to the best choice of club to use next, and there's not many to choose from in total.

For the context of this blog, let's use a back flick (AKA 'back handspring' for my USA readers) as an example.

There are literally thousands of drills and exercises which can be used to teach a flick, and some fantastic ones too.

But how many do you need?

I would say most skills can be taught in just a handful of stages, say 4-5 steps, assuming the pre-requisite skills are refined already.

4-5 drills, all with specific performance and learning benefits is ample for teaching a skill and too many more could actually hinder learning rate and retention.

It's possible to teach an exceptionally good 'flick' with just this number, leaving out the 'impressive' or 'glamorous' drills we scour to find on YouTube, and instead focusing on teaching high quality, basic movement.

Whilst the internet is FANTASTIC for sharing content and getting ideas, it has poor quality control, and before implementing a new idea into my program I would first stop to think of the following:

1. Is it what the athlete needs?
2. Is it simple enough to implement?
3. Can my athlete already perform the pre-requisites?
4. Is the video from a credible source, with someone of experience?
5. Do I know what the learning outcomes are of the drill?

There's a difference between what your athlete needs, and what we like the look of as coaches ...

I like the look of the new 'Range Rover Sport', but it won't actually improve performance against my Nissan X-Trail of getting from A-B in the UK. It's a nice new shiny object which i'm attracted towards BUT there are far better things to spend my money on.

There are often far better ways that YOU can improve performance than some of the preps and drills that you may be spending your time doing with your athletes.

I've failed to see significant improvements in the athletes of many coaches who spend hours online every week looking for more drills and exercises to use. The internet hasn't really helped them at all. Again, it's not better ingredients they should be searching for it's the best recipe instead.

Technique hasn't changed that much over time, although innovation has. 30 years ago saw gymnasts performing many of the highest complexity acrobatic elements of today without the modern day equipment luxuries.

How?

Attention to detail on technique, using simple methods and exercises. Nothing fancy. Much of innovation wasn't there yet and the virality of sharing ideas certainly wasn't.

Let's use a chef baking a dessert as an analogy here.

If an experienced chef was given the basic yet quality ingredients of sugar, eggs, flour, butter and chocolate how many recipes do you think they could make?

The list is endless and with the right love and attention they could create a masterpiece too.

The message here is that you don't need many ingredients, you just need the right recipe and attention to detail.

More important areas to be obsessive over would be in the top three areas I see high performing coaches excelling in:

1. Being PRODUCTIVE.
2. Being ACCOUNTABLE.
3. Having exceptionally HIGH STANDARDS.

Without those qualities you're not going places in the high performance world, irrespective of how awesome your drills are.

Take a moment to reflect on your program, and before looking for more drills to use consider these questions:

1. Are my athletes able to perform the current drills with great execution (if not then a new drill won't suddenly help them to perform it better either.)
2. Are the drills the problem, or is it the ratio of drills to practice?
3. Do I have clarity on exactly what the finished skill should look like?
4. Are the athletes physically prepared for the elements?

As always, I welcome your comments and feedback on this blog post.

Right got to go, off to YouTube ...

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