

Know your sport: Planning, training and competitions (with Dave Rogers)



At this time of the year, orienteers usually reflect on the past competitive season and start to make plans for the upcoming season.

In terms of making plans on which races you will compete in, how far ahead do you look? A year, 6 months, a week, a day? This year, the JK, and various British Championships are in April and May 2015. Wouldn't it be great if we were better prepared for them?

Most successful orienteers, tend to plan ahead and select the key competitions that they want to do well. Having selected these key competitions, they design their training and other races around them. In coaching terms, this is known as 'periodisation' of training.

Periodisation training is a systematic training plan used by athletes to adjust their training throughout the year in order to be in the best condition at the most important races.

Periodisation training plans can be complex and individually designed, but the basic annual periodisation phases outlined here can be used by most orienteers with some minor tweaking.

PHASE ONE – PREPARATION (August – September)

The goal of the first phase of training is to gradually return a rested athlete to training in a slow, controlled way. This phase builds fitness slowly, by performing low-intensity, moderate-duration activities. Easy, moderate sessions that are comfortable and steady are a good way for most athletes to prepare for the harder training ahead. Cycling and swimming are popular during this phase. It is also a good idea to decide what races you are going to target so that you aim to peak at the right time.

PHASE TWO - BUILD BASE FITNESS (October – December)

The real training begins after about a month of easy preparation. You now focus on improving all the major areas of fitness, specifically cardiovascular endurance and strength. During this phase, you'll increase your overall fitness, build strength and power, add interval training and do a variety of all-body exercise. This is the phase where you work on your weaknesses, your flexibility, your balance and develop a solid nutrition plan.

PHASE THREE– ORIENTEERING SPECIFIC TRAINING (January to March)

The next few months are the time to focus on orienteering specific fitness. This is the Principle of Specificity, which implies that to become better at a particular exercise or skill, you must perform that exercise or skill. During this phase, you simulate race-like conditions and practice skills needed during your event. Your body is strong and fit and you can focus on race technique, strategy and technical training. You'll practice skills again and again so they become second-nature and combine them in one coordinated, flowing movement. You may also start competing in "lead-up" events to get used to actual competition and race-day conditions. Wherever possible, find events on similar terrain and orienteering discipline to your selected key competitions.

PHASE FOUR– TAPERING (late March – early April)

Tapering refers to a decrease in training volume in the week or two prior to major competitions. According to research, the ideal tapering strategies include a drastic decrease in training volume, but adding short, high intensity interval training sessions leading up to the competition. The guidelines include: decreasing your training volume (mileage) by 80 to 90%; decrease your frequency of training (number of workout sessions) by 20%; for events lasting an hour or less, use a one-week taper; for events lasting more than an hour, use a two-week taper.

PHASE FIVE– RACING/ PEAKING (April – May)

"Peaking" refers to an athlete being in the absolute best condition (physical, emotional and mental) at a specific time for an event or race. The peaking phase of periodisation training can last one to two weeks and is the ultimate payoff for the periodisation training programme. After the Taper phase, most athletes will find that their fitness is at maximum for a period of one to four weeks, depending upon how they spend that time. If you have a long season you will need to create smaller rest/work phases during the active season. For example, if you compete each Saturday, Sunday will be a recovery day, building back up by Wednesday and Thursday and tapering again on Friday.

(Acknowledgement: The bulk of this article is reproduced from the Northern Ireland Orienteering Association's Coaching Focus, October 2012.)

Here is an example of how the year might be planned. In 2015, the British Championships are on the 18th April so phases may need to be adjusted a bit if that competition is when you want to reach your peak.



For more on the science of periodisation, please see Paul Murgatroyd's articles in CompassSport magazine and his 'Physical Conditioning' presentation at the 2012 British Orienteering Coaching Conference:
http://www.britishorienteering.org.uk/page/coach_support