

SPORTS CONDITIONING NEWS

YOU CAN USE[©]

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Back to School

By LaRue E. Cook

Parents, coaches and athletes at the middle school, high school and College levels all across the DC metropolitan area are preparing to return to school and to their school sports. Many of the athletes will be returning from a summer of playing sports, while others have had a summer off. Either way, all of our athletes will require a certain amount of preparation before starting their season. For all of the athletes, a prerequisite will be a pre-season physical – this requirement is essential and makes sense on many levels. However, what is equally important for getting our athletes ready for their season is a well-planned and effective strength and conditioning program. A well-planned program will take into account the essential elements of strength, strength endurance, cardiovascular conditioning, flexibility, as well as the development of speed, agility, quickness, power and balance. So as you begin to prepare for the upcoming school season, whether

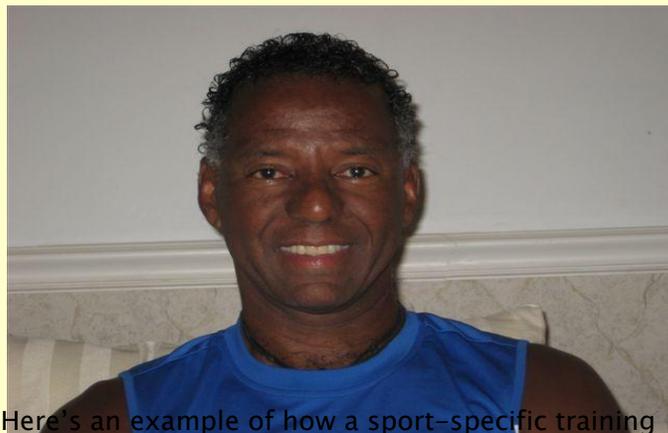
What is Sports Conditioning?

Sports conditioning or sport-specific training is a method of training that focuses on improving the athlete's 'functional fitness and conditioning' for their particular sport. This type of training is not a one-size fits all type of training! To the contrary, an effective sport conditioning program is one that takes into account the individual strengths and weaknesses of the athlete, the particular skill-set needed in the specific sport involved, the type of strength that the athlete needs for their sport (e.g. raw or maximum strength versus sub-maximal strength endurance), and the cardiovascular demands of the sport.

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you're a coach, parent or athlete, make sure that a well-planned strength and conditioning training program is an integral part of that preparation.



Here's an example of how a sport-specific training analysis works. Let's take a look at training for speed. To establish a baseline measure of the athlete's speed, many coaches use the 40-yard dash. But because not all sports involve sprints of that distance, is this always a good measure? I would say "no!" Here's what I mean. In the case of a high school basketball player the court is 84-feet long – much shorter than 40-yards! So, why do I really care how fast my basketball athletes can run a 40? The truth is that I shouldn't. A fast athlete at 40-yards may not be my fastest athlete at 84-feet. Acceleration and quickness come into play here. Therefore working on acceleration and sprint speed at this shorter distance may be much more effective.

Plyometrics for Power

Traditional weight training entails exerting force on a stationary weight or object to set it in motion – think of a bench press or dumbbell curl. But with this, the athlete actually slows the momentum of the weight down as they complete the lift or exercise. This type of training is great for building strength, but is this type of training necessarily helpful for our athletes who need power? Think about throwing a football or hitting a tennis serve. **Power** can be simply defined as combining strength and speed. The analogy I like to use is a rubber band. A rubber band has the strength to bind things together, but used in that way, it does not represent power. Pick-up that same rubber band, stretch it and then release it, and you now have something that represents POWER! You've

now combined the strength of the rubber band with the stored energy caused by stretching the rubber band and releasing it, thereby creating power from the release of the rubber band. Our muscles operate in much the same way, and since most sports skills require power, training in a way to develop and use this power is a smart way to train for most athletes. **Plyometric** exercise is one of the primary training methods used to develop power. This type of training uses our muscle's elastic and contraction properties to create power. Because this is a specialized type of training, a full description is beyond the scope of this newsletter. Please feel free to contact us for help in designing a plyometric program for your athletes.

LEC Fitness in the Movies

After almost one year in the making, we finished the production of a short documentary on the benefits of strength and conditioning for female athletes. The film is entitled 'We R Athletes,' and it has been submitted to several film festivals throughout the U.S. Our owner, LaRue Cook who was the screenwriter says that his idea in producing the film was to celebrate female athletes. Here is the film's short synopsis:

Are female athletes real athletes? This may seem like a silly question, but to our mothers and their mothers, it's one that

they often faced. Take a look at today's female athletes, there should be little doubt, these are true athletes! Yet, for many years, girls and women who played sports were considered "girls and women playing!"

Female athletes are strong, dedicated and inspiring. This film takes a brief look at just how far our female athletes have come in improving their participation in sports through proper strength and conditioning, and takes a generational look at how female athletes have evolved over the years and are finally becoming recognized as the true athletes that they are, that they always have been.

You can see a short trailer of this film on

YouTube here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LIFM5oj6uw>

*"Female athletes are strong,
dedicated and inspiring."*



One of our athletes performing a shoulder stabilization and strength exercise.

Ask the Trainer

With LaRue E. Cook

Here you will have the opportunity to ask LaRue questions about strength and conditioning, and sports performance. Got a question that you'd like to ask? Send your question to us at:

lecfitness@yahoo.com Add in the Subject Line: Ask the Trainer and we will try our best to include your question and our answer in an issue of *Sports Conditioning News You Can Use*.

Q: What do you consider the most important aspect of speed training?

A: That's a great question, thanks for asking. Most people assume that improving speed technique, improving acceleration, or developing quickness are the most important aspects of speed training. However, in my opinion, teaching the athlete to safely and effectively slow-down or stop is the most



I use the ball-drop drill, as seen here, to teach deceleration as well as to work on acceleration.

important skill in speed training. As a matter of fact, it's the first thing that I "teach" athletes! Most injuries related to non-contact knee problems are caused by improper deceleration. Think of how many girls and young women injure their knees when landing from a jump, or cutting. These are all deceleration movements. As I remind the athletes, coaches and parents that I work with, you don't want to start driving a car fast until you know that you've got good brakes! Also remember, a fast out-of-control athlete is NOT very effective!

We're Here To Help You!

We understand that most middle schools, high schools and even some colleges do not have the budget to hire a full-time strength and conditioning coach to work with their athletic teams. We can offer you several budget-friendly options! The following are just some of the ways that we can help:

- Specialized assessments (for example: Sportsmetrics™ digital drop-landing testing for female athletes)
- One day training clinics
- Coaches' "Train-the Trainer sessions"
- Special 1-day, 1-week, 1-month or full season strength and conditioning training with your athletes
- The 6-week award-winning Sportsmetrics™ training for your athletes to help reduce the risk of non-contact knee injuries
- Seminars and presentations on topics related to sport-specific training and conditioning
- Work with your Coaches to develop a training program for their sport team
- A review of your existing program

About LaRue

LaRue E. Cook is the President of LEC Fitness, LLC. He has been working with athletes of all ages for 18 years, and during that time has trained junior athletes just starting in sports, several nationally-ranked junior athletes, high school athletes, and those those pursuing College sports. LaRue has also served as the consulting Strength and Conditioning Coach to a Division II athletic program.

LaRue is a Certified Sports Performance Trainer through the USA Weightlifting Association, a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist through the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), a Certified Sports Conditioning and Injury Prevention Trainer for the Cincinnati Sportsmedicine Research and Education Foundation's award-winning Sportsmetrics™ Program, a Certified Youth Conditioning Specialist, and a Certified Speed and Agility Coach (USA Track and Field, and ISSA). LaRue is a nationally-recognized strength and conditioning expert who has served as Sports Conditioning contributing author for a variety of publications including ESPN.com, Women's Basketball Magazine, Tennis View Magazine, LiveStrong.com, Tennis Life Magazine, and iHoops.com. Additionally, LaRue has authored a Continuing Education course for the International Sports Sciences Association on Deceleration Training for Female Athletes, and an eBook on Shoulder and Core Strengthening for Throwing, Racquet and Overhead Athletes.

LaRue has served as an Adjunct professor of Strength and Conditioning for Female Athletes, and Youth Conditioning.

We work with individual athletes and parents, coaches, sports teams, or entire athletic programs.

Working with your athletes is our privilege, and one that we will never take for granted.

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