

Planning & Development

MARCH ALREADY? – WHAT NOW?

Training & Season Planning Helps Curlers gain an “edge”

By Elaine Dagg-Jackson

So the season has come to an end just when you were starting to get serious about this training-for-curling thing!

So, don't stop now! Why not begin preparation to reach next season's goals? With more at stake each year for competitive curlers including lots of cash, “hearts”, and now opportunities for Olympic qualifying berths, curling teams are increasingly examining the benefits of a year-round training program. Not only do the stakes get bigger, but the opposition gets better, and therefore tougher to beat. Curling teams are looking for ways to establish an “edge”, and so are looking beyond the boundaries of the curling sheet to add depth to their training programs.

While it is only possible to focus practice and preparation on the ice during curling season, there are many other things you can do in the “off season” to prepare yourself both mentally and physically for an improved performance next season.

Planning Maximizes Efforts

How do you know where to start? By Evaluating levels of performance at the end of the season, you will be able to determine where you should focus efforts to maximize gains. Goal setting is the single most important thing you can do in a training program.

Imagine you were going to go on a trip to a city 100 km from your home. Once you had decided on your destination, you would plan your mode of transportation as well as the route you would take to reach your destination. On the other hand, if you did no advance planning and did not know the way, you would be leaving a lot up to chance as whether or not you arrived at your destination efficiently or even at all! Achieving sport goals is very similar to planning a road trip – you know where you want to be – a zone winner for example, but often teams leave too much up to chance in determining whether they will ever reach their destination.

Planning and implementing a training program will not guarantee you will reach your goal, but it will certainly ensure effective preparation as well as increase confidence in your ability to reach it.

Where to begin – Process for Planning a Training Program

1. **Assessment** – Evaluate where you are now.
2. **Goal Setting** – Decide where you feel you need to be in each area that affects curling performance.
3. **Action Plan** – Devise an action plan to plot your path to achieving your goals. ie. strength training program.
4. **Implement** – *Just do it!* As they say.
5. **Evaluate** – Check your progress against your goal. Did you reach your goal in that area? Is there further improvement to be made?
6. **Repeat** – Goal, Action Plan, Implement, Evaluate

Factors Affecting Curling Performance

1. **Skill Technical/Experience**
2. **Physical Components**
Energy Systems:
Aerobic
Anerobic
Strength
Muscular strength
Muscular endurance
Flexibility
Nutrition
3. **Tactical**
Strategy
Game plan
Ice Reading
4. **Psychological**
Mental skills/
Mental toughness

5. Planning

- Goals
- Competitions
- Practice
- Peaking

6. Other

- Teamwork/team building
- Communication

The following grid demonstrates a simple tool that can be used to create a skill development plan.

GOAL/DATE
SUB-GOAL
PRESENT LEVEL
HOW ASSESSED
DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Example:

Physical Condition: Improve physical condition. Improve stamina during competition.

- Played 3 games/day during provincial – felt tired during 3rd game, felt that we could have been more effective in sweeping and mental sharpness. Skip had difficulty concentrating for all 10 games.
- Can jog 20 minutes before tiring.
- Jogging 20 minutes – 3 x/week.
- Increase by 1 minute each week for 8 weeks.
- Maintain aerobic level by jogging 2 x/week for 28 minutes.

Example:

Tactical: Increase confidence in choice of shots. Develop team and individual comfort and confidence in game plan – specifically in first 3 shots of the end (FGZ strategy).

- Changed game plan several times during the season.
- Team was unsure of where the first rock should end up.
- Test a game plan during weekly game in March.
- Conduct discussions at team social function during off season.
- Watch curling on TV – Season of Champions.

PHYSICAL FITNESS FOR CURLING

Many teams are focusing on physical training plans to add to their off season preparation. Physical fitness levels determine

not only the strength and stamina curlers bring to the physical part of their game, but also in their ability to remain mentally strong and focussed during demanding competitions and situations.

Aerobic:

Aerobic training determines an individual's ability to perform an activity at sub-maximal intensity for extended periods of time. By developing a good aerobic fitness base, curlers can resist fatigue during demanding bonspiels and playdowns. Feeling fit and full of energy also helps curlers remain confident in their ability to meet demanding situations. If a curler is fatigued at any time during a game, energy will be spent on dealing with fatigue rather than on concentrating on the demands of the game.

Aerobic training must be done a minimum of three times per week, and preferably four times, to realize improvements. A workout day should be followed by a rest day to allow the body sufficient time to recover from each training session. Once the desired level of aerobic fitness has been reached, levels can be maintained with one to two workouts per week.

Many activities are excellent in their ability to increase aerobic fitness. Jogging, cycling, swimming, "aerobics, skiing, skipping, racquet sports, fast walking, volleyball, soccer, rowing (boat or machine) are all excellent choices. It is crucial to maintain an intense level of activity for a minimum of 20 minutes to achieve training gains.

Anaerobic:

The sport of curling utilizes the anaerobic energy system in its requirement for sweeping at high intensities for periods of 10 to 25 seconds. The anaerobic system demands an ability to perform an activity at maximal or near maximal intensity for short periods of time with short periods of rest between repetitions. Anaerobic training should be performed two to three times per week. During the curling season it can be accomplished in sport specific "sweeping drills", and in the off season with short interval activities such as sprints.

Strength:

Strength training is achieved by using body muscles to move body parts through their full range of motion against some type of resistance. Resistance may be acquired through the use of weight machines, free weights, rubber tubing or similar items.

Strength training for curling is relevant to:

1. The relative power and speed a brusher is able to apply to sweeping for periods of up to 25 seconds repeated for approximately 2.5 hours; and
2. Supporting the body weight and controlling the body position to drive out of the hack and to slowly lower the body into the delivery position while remaining in complete control of the direction of the stone.

Therefore considerations for strength training for curling are:

1. To develop muscle mass by increasing overall relative strength to increase the power applied to the brush, and controlling manipulation of body weight;
2. To develop the speed strength (the rate of ability to muster strength to go from inactivity to near maximum effort quickly);

3. Endurance of sustaining power level and maximum number of brush strokes for the duration of a game/competition.

4. Speed strength is more important for upper body, while maximum strength/power is more important for lower body.

Significant improvements in strength can be realized by training three times a week for 6 to 8 weeks. Maintenance requires only 1 to 2 workouts per week. Strength training programs are available through many sources such as recreation centres and gyms.

Flexibility

Flexibility enables a curler to execute movements required to perform the curling delivery comfortably and smoothly.

Performing movements comfortably and easily is critical in determining the outcome of the shot and in ensuring excess stress is not placed on joints and tissues. Training flexibility is important to increase the range of motion required to improve performance and to reduce the risk of injury. A training program to improve flexibility involves a series of stretching exercises which can produce improvements in 12 weeks.