As you sit down to read the January issue of Bowling This Month, it is the perfect time to reflect on and articulate your New Year bowling resolutions for the upcoming calendar year. Certainly, one of your goals for 2008 will be to become an improved player. But, how can you do this? How can you organize your training to become a more skilled bowler who peaks for specific competitions throughout the year? Building a “periodization” plan is one solution.

Periodization is a process of breaking down your training and practice program into progressively smaller increments of time and more manageable parts. If you want to take your performance to the highest level, developing a periodization plan can help you achieve more through the creation of a very structured training program which includes adjustments in volume, intensity and frequency of training.

For our purposes, this can take the form of thinking about and planning for your training in three distinct phases: pre-season, season and post-season. Then, with each of these seasonal phases in mind, you will develop a specific plan (annually, monthly, weekly and daily) in which you consider three additional factors: (1) the volume or amount of training often in hours or number of games; (2) the intensity or level of training; and (3) the frequency or how many times you train. Finally, when planning to peak for a specific tournament you can conceptualize your training into three phases: preparation phase, competition phase and transition/recovery. When you conceptualize your training with these three things in mind, it will help you to develop a far more effective training program.

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Developing your periodization plan: pre-season

The program you organize during the preparatory phase, the development of the motor abilities in your sport...to the highest level possible, is a fundamental requirement to improvement of the athlete's working potential, their physical abilities, and as a result, their improvement of performance from year to year. (Bonoma, T 2004).

In the beginning of your training program, or pre-season, you want to concentrate on the development of new skill acquisition. During this period, there is no attention paid to competition allowing one to maximize a focus on new skill development. This should also include your base fitness training to establish a fitness level needed and maintained throughout the competitive season. So, both the volume of on-lane work and the volume of fitness training should be the highest of the season, during pre-season. A bowler is refreshed during this period and this level of freshness is needed for the long hours on the lanes and in the gym.

During the pre-season, you want to have a holistic approach to skill development with a focus on bowling, mental skills, and fitness. Fitness should include a mix of aerobic, anaerobic and strength training. To maximize the effectiveness of this phase, you should set very specific goals for yourself in each of these areas. As always, goals should be both realistic and measurable. After accomplishing goals, these should be revised to a higher level.

During this phase, you should focus great attention on improving your skills in areas of weakness. For reference, this should include increasing your release options. In other words, you should improve your ability to manipulate axis rotation, axis tilt, rev rate and ball speed. This is the time of the training year to experiment with new release and lane play techniques to improve your diversity as a bowler. My new book can help with learning releases (available on my web site.) During the pre-season phase, you can improve your mental skills through reading and experimenting with sports psychology skills as well.

In addition, frequency would be higher during this phase, but with lower intensity. Frequency of training might consist of two training sessions per day for a team or two sessions each weekend day as an individual.

In the pre-season, overloading will help you set the stage for improvement. Overload is when an athlete completes high volume of training with medium to low intensity. With overload, you surpass the volume you would complete in a tournament situation. Through your perusal of bowling magazines or discussions with others, you might have learned of professional bowlers who prepared for the PBA Tour by bowling 20 games each day. In a nutshell, this is the concept of overload. When training to peak, for a specific tournament, you will likely train through minor tournaments and league sessions as well. To prepare for a future competition, volume should be higher.

Developing a periodization plan: Preparing to peak during the competition season

As the pre-season comes to a close and the competition season begins, you want to focus on skill refinement. This includes sustaining the new skills developed during the pre-season as well as those skills needed for a specific lane condition you will be preparing.

I recommend that during your regular training program, you practice your various releases and lane play strategies on different lane conditions. This will allow you to maintain your skills throughout the season.

When you attempt to peak for key events, you are working toward maximizing performance at specific times of the year. Begin by rating your competition schedule with a 1 to 5 rubric. During the season, in preparation for specific events, a bowler needs to focus on the three phases of competition: preparation, competition, transition. See the Periodization template in the resource section of the BTM web site to help with planning (www.bowlingthismonth.com/resources).

For a competition which doesn’t have any real meaning, rate it a one. A one-level event requires no reduction in training. This might be a local weekend tournament in which you might actually train on the competition day. These tournaments are frequent throughout the year and will not influence your training program.

For your most important events, rate each a five. These would be one to three of your most important events of the season in which you want to achieve your optimum performance. This could be the state championships, a RTBF Major or the U.S. Open. For planning purposes, peaking will require two to three weeks of taper to ensure you are fully rested for maximum performance. After the event, you would likely need one to two months of recovery (off-season).

During the tapering phase, leading up to the most important event, you would reduce your daily practice time and number of games with a focus on maintaining training intensity although the frequency could be multiple times each day. For example, maintaining the intensity would include training by using the pre-shot routine
100 percent of your shots, practicing the specific releases, spare shooting, choosing equipment as well as working on angles of attack needed for the tournament, practicing on the specific lane condition, etc.

Most importantly, immediately following a high-level tournament in which you have attempted to peak for, you should decrease your training frequency, volume and intensity. You must give yourself an adequate time to recover physically, emotionally and psychologically.

For the remainder of your tournaments, you will rate them from 1 to 4. As the rating increases, you should incorporate increasing levels of both tapering and recovery.

**General training recommendations for pre-season and season**

**Pre-season**

During the pre-season phase, you want to bowl between 10 to 20 games per practice session based on your competition demands. If you want to peak for a city or state tournament later in the year, then 10 games will be adequate. If you are attempting to peak for a major international event, then the pre-season should be more extensive with close to 20 games of practice daily. Also, see the step load process below to avoid bowling burnout in the pre-season. Focus on both aerobic/anaerobic training and strength training during the pre-season. But, before beginning any fitness routines, consult your doctor.

**Season**

During the season, you are refining and maintaining skill. As a guideline to help you improve your training during the season, here is a 90 minute on-lane general practice process. As a guideline, this should be considered as a medium volume, medium intensity and low frequency training session.

**Warmup (10 Minutes)**

Elite bowlers are athletes. Accordingly, you need to take care of your body. Begin each practice by completing a stretching routine focusing on motion movements targeting the shoulder, wrists, ankles, biceps, triceps, calves, hamstrings, etc. Focus on slow movements in both directions. The idea is to get the blood flowing and loosen-up rather than resistance stretching. This will help to prevent injury.

**Release Variation Practice (45 minutes)**

Work on altering your axis rotation, axis tilt, ball speed and rev rate. Spend 10 to 15 minutes on each release you developed during the pre-season. Each of these will help you change the ball reaction by changing how much skid and back end strength you will be able to achieve. This will have you playing multiple parts of the lane. Most importantly, you empowered yourself in the pre-season by learning how to manipulate ball reaction by changing your release. If you are preparing for a tournament, focus on those release elements and target lanes you are likely to utilize, based on the lane conditions.

**Spare-shooting (15 minutes)**

One of the best spare shooting practice methods is to throw the first ball straight down the middle of the lane. Specifically, you will line up to throw straight down 20 or the 4th arrow. On your first shot, throw straight across the 4th arrow. If you are able to throw straight, in this drill, then you will likely leave corner-pins on both the left and right. This will allow you to practice the most frequent leaves. For this practice process to be the most effective, you must learn to throw a zero degree axis rotation or straight end-over-end release.

**Psychology (15 minutes)**

At the end of each practice session, spend 15 minutes on mental skills-building activities. These should include visualization, positive self-talk building, pre-shot routine, deep breathing activities for relaxation, etc. Invest in books such as *Focused For Bowling* and the more recent *Bowling: The Handbook of Bowling Psychology*. These books provide readers with specific mental skill building activities to help improve your game. The small financial investment and the dedication to sport psychology improvement will pay big dividends in your game.

**Cool-down stretch (5 minutes)**

After practice is completed, go through the stretching process again. This will increase your flexibility as well as reducing your chances of injury.

I am not forgetting fitness. You should continue with a fitness routine to sustain your fitness achieved during the pre-season.
Avoiding overtraining and staleness

Tiger Woods is often criticized for his reduced competition schedule on the PGA Tour. Yet, he is likely to be regarded as the greatest golfer who every lived with a winning percentage higher than 25 percent of tournaments entered. He is a role model for training proficiency. He might participate less, but he wins more. A reduced competition schedule allows him to recover adequately while preparing for majors, tournaments he wants to peak for as a champion golfer. He understands what most professionals do not. You must engage in a Periodization plan to maximize performance at specific events.

When considering your training program, the step-loading method can be helpful in avoiding overtraining and staleness. Specifically, in a one month training process, you would alter both the volume and frequency of training.

Week 1 – Low
Week 2 – Medium
Week 3 – High
Week 4 – Medium-Low

You can download a periodization template from the resource section of the Bowling This Month website at http://www.bowlingthismonth.com/resources/. With this template, you can edit the document placing the correct months in the order in which you have a pre-season, season and post season. In Asia, this is likely a calendar year while in North America, this would run from approximately August to July.

Proven process to manage training

The beginning of the year is the best time to reflect on what goals you want to accomplish for this year. Periodization planning offers the serious competitor a proven process to manage their training to meet these goals. With purposeful planning, an elite bowler can manage the volume, intensity and frequency of training to ensure they peak for the most important competitions while organizing the improvement of new skills in the pre-season and the needed rest and recovery in the off-season. Without a purposeful plan, a bowler can’t be sure they are ready for the most critical tournaments of the season. Finally, a holistic training program should include on-lane, mental skills, lane play planning, goal-setting, evaluation, fitness and strength training.

References