

THE RULES HAVE CHANGED... **Have You?** SPORTS SPECIFIC TRAINING

by Dennis Angelina, Masters of Science, CSCS



No matter what your age, do you strive to have a body that looks more like an athlete's rather than a bodybuilder? In today's fitness world the athletic look, or what I like to refer to as the capable look, is in and the bodybuilder look is out.

Looking like you are physically capable of doing anything from lifting your body weight on the bench press multiple times, performing multiple pull-ups, running three or more miles at any given time, performing multiple clap push-ups, and being flexible enough to touch your toes all while taking care of your family in the pain-free shell you call your body. That is what athletes have, and it is what you can obtain.

Sports specific training (SST) can be defined as a variety of training techniques used to simulate specific sports movements to prepare the body for competitive movement. SST allows for less time in the gym with greater results, which focuses on the entire body as a functional working unit rather than long slow isolated movements of any single muscle group. SST can be broken down into four key areas of training:

Sport specific weight training: Explosive full body lifts which include balancing and an increase in caloric burn over traditional methods.

Speed: Proper full body mechanics during a straight sprint, approximately 40 yards.

Agility: Explosive movement and change of directions between points of interest which are marked by short bursts of energy



Plyometrics: Explosive movements, which focus on vertical jumping and proper landing techniques. Possibly the most fatiguing of all the movements, plyometrics play an important part in the success of all other movements

SST techniques revolve around balancing, unilateral and bilateral movements of any given appendage. Most importantly, SST focuses on core stability. The stronger your core the more successful you will be in any area of fitness and activity.

SST has worked wonders in the realm of athletics, giving us stronger, faster and quicker athletes on all levels; however, SST has also established a place of dominance for recreational athletes, weekend warriors and gym rats alike. If you play golf, tennis, racquetball, run or play any other sport at any age and you do not practice SST, you are doing yourself a disservice. SST is a great way to strengthen and prepares your body to take on the chronic strains of every day life above all other training methods.

In the next section I will elaborate on each of the four key areas and explain how to implement them into your training routine. The philosophies will be extracted from training techniques designed for athletes, and will be applied to your average person who plays recreational/competitive recreational sports or the person who enjoys a variety of different activities.

SPORTS SPECIFIC WEIGHT TRAINING:

Sports specific weight training (SSWT) does not necessarily always rely on how much weight an individual can lift for a specified amount of repetitions, but focuses more on the velocity at which an individual can move weight through a controlled movement. But most importantly, the movement should require the assistance of two or more main muscle groups to complete a repetition; this will create the feel of a full body exertion. This type of movement will increase heart rate, power, explosiveness and overall strength. Not all movements are to be done with this type of technique; however, movements such as clean, squat, bench press, standing push press among others may be performed with this kind of explosiveness.

SSWT includes unilateral movements such as doing a bench press with weights in each hand, but rather than lifting them bilaterally, lift them unilaterally while alternating with each weight. Other methods of training can and should range from balancing with or without lifting weights, twisting from the core through a sport specific movement among other lifts and movements which are thought of as outside the box or none traditional lifts.

SPEED:

Speed is simply the ability to achieve high velocity. This branches off of explosive forces applied to a specific task. The concept of speed is not independent from strength training, and should be properly applied with it.



INING, INAGILITY:

Agility is the ability to brake from an explosive movement, change direction and accelerate again. Often times to work out we go onto a treadmill and maintain a constant velocity over a specific timeframe. What I am proposing to you is, find a small area, which can be as small as 20' by 20' or larger. Place two or more cones of equal distance and create a five to ten second pattern which you will sprint to each spot, braking and changing direction in order to continue to the next spot. Time yourself and attempt to beat that time over any given amount of attempts.

Agility ladders are also a great workout for agility and speed. You can purchase cones

and ladders for under forty dollars, refer to an instructional book for drill ideas (which most likely will come packaged with the kit), and begin your workouts in your gym, backyard or local park.

PLYOMETRICS:

Plyo's can really be defined as work. Work is "the product of force exerted on an object and the distance the object moves the direction in which the force is exerted," (Essentials of Strength and Conditioning, 2000.) Essentially, jumping explosively is what plyometrics amounts to. These types of exercises consist of jumping and landing in a vertical, horizontal, and/or lateral plan. Jumps and landing can be performed bilaterally or unilaterally. Repetitions can range from one single jump to multiple jumps in a row, covering a specified distance or clearing set barriers.

Now that the four key areas have been defined, implementing them properly and safely becomes the next concern. I will touch on a few recommendations. However, what I strongly suggest is to find a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) at your local gym and use him/her for guidance.

Please be aware that persons with the title CSCS, who have been certified by the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), are the ONLY people qualified to guide you on any of your training needs. If your local gym does not hold their employees to this degree of education (a four year B.S. degree in the sports medicine field from an accredited college program), you must seek this knowledge from another location.

There are many ways to incorporate this type of training into your program, and I will give some examples, which can be followed. Take half of your lifts for each major body part (chest, back, shoulders, legs) and now make one-half of those lifts SSWT movements. To each one SSWT movement you now have for each major body part, insert one movement which includes

balancing/balancing and lifting pending on your skill level. That will take care of the weight training.

Speed, agility, and plyometrics can be performed on your off days. For instance, if you weight train Monday, Wednesday and Friday, insert one day of agility and short-sprint work for speed on your off days. On the other off day add plyometrics. These workouts can be finished within one-half hour or less, and this still leaves you with one or two days of rest within the week.

If you are strained for time, than I suggest you add the speed work on Monday's workout. Add agility to Wednesday's workout and plyometrics to Friday's workout or any combination of the three days and package your workout so you still meet your time constraints. The speed, agility and plyometric workouts do not have to be long, and can be incorporated along with your weight training. One to three drills for each of the speed, agility and plyometrics is all that needs to be done to feel benefits from the exercises.

I hope you enjoy the article and I hope it puts a different perspective on how to train effectively and safely.



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