

The Periodic Approach

Competing week after week can provide valuable match practice, but also raises the complex question of how a player can maintain peak performance. Often it's through **periodisation** – that is, planning a training program to ensure a player reaches top form at the optimal moment. By **Dieter Wilhelmi** and **Dr. Sarah Morante**

May through to July is a tennis enthusiast's heaven – we have weeks of great matches to watch at the French Open and Wimbledon, in addition to their lead-up events. But having these two Grand Slam tournaments in such quick succession presents a considerable challenge for a coach in ensuring his or her player peaks at the correct time. With approximately four weeks between the respective French Open and Wimbledon finals, it is very difficult for a player to maintain peak form for this period or to achieve a second peak in performance. This is clearly demonstrated by the record books, which reveal only five occasions over the past 20 years in which the same player has won the singles title at both the French Open and Wimbledon – four of these five wins were achieved by Steffi Graf!

A History of Planned Training

The concept of designing a training program to achieve peak performance is nothing new, with ancient Egyptians and Greeks having systematically trained people for military endeavours. Furthermore, several manuals dating back to 170 – 245 AD were written that outlined the planning and training of Greek Olympians. Then in 1963, Tudor Bompa revolutionised western training methods when he introduced his ground-breaking theory of periodisation. Since then training has become a science of its own as it deals with many physiological, technical, tactical and psychological variables. Coaching has become more sophisticated and with the assistance of sport specialists, a much broader knowledge base is being created that is directly reflected in the methodology of training.

So what is periodisation? Periodisation is the planning of the various training principles and variables over a period of time in order to peak for a particular competition. It schedules training into phases that provide the framework from which a coach can implement an individual training system.

Competition Calendar

The first consideration for any coach is the player's competition

calendar. Players should develop a training program around the major tournaments of the year. However, this can be difficult for some coaches as they may have players that are busy defending points and rankings. Higher ranked players have a distinct advantage in that they can be more selective in regards to the tournaments that they wish to enter. In addition, coaches must consider how many tournaments a player can enter without encountering either burnout or some form of injury which may prevent them from competing at a major championship. For example, consider some of the early withdrawals from the 2008 Rome Masters, which included Radek Stepanek, Nicolas Pietrangeli, Andy Roddick and Fernando Gonzalez.

Physical Preparation

Appropriate physical conditioning is the foundation on which all sports performance is built. For a player to move successfully from the slow French clay (longer point duration) to the faster grass they must experience the physical stresses that each of these environments can bring. In addition, physical preparation is critical to a tennis player as physical fatigue will affect technique and in turn performance. Great champions like Roger Federer spend significant amount of time trying to acclimatise themselves to the upcoming environmental conditions and often train in a fatigued state so that they are able to meet any challenges that lay ahead.

Technical Preparation

Technique must be adjusted in time to manage the different court surfaces – the faster grass, for example, would demand generally shorter backswings than that required on clay. Coaches must plan the periodised program so that the players have sufficient time to make any required technical changes. For example, some coaches choose that their players fine tune their game by playing lead up tournaments on similar surfaces whilst other coaches ensure that a player experiences sufficient practise and matches away from the competitive environment.

