# How to Build The Perfect Athlete For Any Sport

## The 6 Secrets of Successful Sport-Specific Conditioning

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Let me ask you a few questions.

How does Tiger Woods consistently play his last hole as strong as his first?

How is it that Michael Jordan could consider a comeback in the NBA, and play successfully, at an age when most professional athletes are stuck in their armchair counting their pension checks?

How did Northwestern University, known for its scholastic achievements, win game after game in the 4th quarter, win the Big Ten Championship, AND go to the Rose Bowl game?

Three words.

**Superior physical conditioning.**

Compare two athletes in any sport. Given equal talent and skill, the player with superior physical conditioning will win…every single time.

If you are serious about your sport, you must know and live the principles I call the **6 Secrets of Successful Sports-Specific Conditioning**.

**Identify the abilities of the ideal athlete in your sport.** The easiest way to initiate this part of the process is to picture the top athlete in your chosen sport. Ask yourself what abilities they possess that make them the best at what they do. Abilities are qualities like flexibility, strength, endurance, power, balance, reaction time, coordination, speed, and agility. Don't confuse abilities with skills that are specific to the chosen sport. For instance, a basketball player must be able to dribble while running up the court. That's a sport-specific skill, not an ability. The abilities are what underlie each skill.

Now, examine each ability more closely. Think of the extreme of each ability and rate that level of ability a 10 on a zero to 10 scale. For instance, if you are examining flexibility, who are the most flexible athletes in the world? Gymnasts! So gymnasts require a number 10 level of flexibility for successful performance. Olympic weightlifters would be a 10 for power. Power lifters would be a 10 for strength and so on, for each ability.

Next, take your chosen sport and compare it to the extreme. Let's use golf as an example. Does golf require the same level of flexibility as gymnastics? Of course not. When was the last time you saw Phil Mickelson do the splits? Golf does require some pretty significant flexibility in the spine, shoulders, and hips. So while it may not require a level of 10 in flexibility we can estimate the ideal level of flexibility as a 7 or an 8 out of 10. At this point don't worry about trying to be exact when establishing the ideal abilities of a golfer (or any other athlete for that matter) as your best estimation will not vary much from the ideal unless you really have no understanding of a golfers needs.

Repeat this process for each ability, to create your ideal athlete, in this case a golfer. When you finish you should have a chart that looks something like this. Keep in mind that the scores will be different for different sports.

**Optimal Abilities for Golf**

| Ability | Optimal Score |
|---|---|
| Strength | 5 |
| Power | 8 |
| Speed | 8 |
| Coordination | 8 |
| Endurance | 3 |
| Reaction time | 1 |
| Flexibility | 7 |
| Agility | 3 |
| **Total Score** | **48** |

**Assess your current abilities.** Here's the hard part. Now you have to be honest with yourself. It's time to compare your current abilities with those of each extreme. You may or may not be a strong as a power lifter. It doesn't matter. BE HONEST! You gain nothing by overestimating or intentionally underestimating your own abilities. In fact, overestimation or underestimation of your abilities will promote absolute failure of your sports conditioning program. If you need to, get a second opinion from a trusted coach or mentor (friends tend to rate you favorably even if you lack a certain amount of ability – they're your friends after all). They quite often can provide you with the objective eye you'll need for proper self-assessment.

When you've rated your own abilities, you should end up with a chart that looks something like this.

**Your Current Abilities**

| Ability | Your Score |
|---|---|
| Strength | 6 |
| Power | 6 |
| Speed | 5 |
| Coordination | 8 |
| Endurance | 3 |
| Reaction time | 5 |
| Flexibility | 5 |
| Agility | 5 |

| Total Score | 43 |
|---|---|

Identify your weak points compared to the ideal. This part is easy. Simply put your abilities up against what you determined to be the ideal for your sport. Then just highlight those abilities that fall below your estimation of the ideal level for your sport. For the example we'll just continue to use our golf example.

**Optimal Abilities for Golf**

| Ability | Optimal Score | Your Score |
|---|---|---|
| Strength | 5 | 6 |
| Power | 8 | **6** |
| Speed | 8 | **5** |
| Coordination | 8 | 8 |
| Endurance | 3 | 3 |
| Reaction time | 1 | 5 |
| Flexibility | 7 | **5** |
| Agility | 3 | 5 |
| **Total Score** | **48** | **43** |

**Design an individualized training program to focus on your weak points.** I think this is one of the most common areas where athletes make mistakes in their sport-specific conditioning program design. It is a waste of valuable time to focus your conditioning program on your abilities that are already at optimal levels or higher.

Look at the example. "Your score" for strength was 6 out of 10 but the optimal score only requires that you possess a strength ability of 5 for successful performance. So how much time and effort should you be spending on strength, enough to maintain your current levels. Any more than that will not improve your performance, in this case, as a golfer. However, "your" power, speed, and flexibility ratings fall below the ideal for golf. Therefore, the majority of your sports-specific golf conditioning program should revolve around improving those ability scores to achieve optimal levels.

**Identify and train in the energy system used in your sport.** I have a pet peeve with this one. Most trainers, even some of those who are considered experts in the field of sports-specific conditioning, screw up this part of their program design on a regular basis. To do this correctly, you must understand the physiology of the main energy systems and how they are used in your chosen sport.

Let me use two examples. A marathon runner and an Olympic weightlifter. A marathon runner relies very heavily on the aerobic energy system to provide energy over 26.2 miles of running in about two and a half hours. A weightlifter uses primarily the ATP/CP system to provide energy to lift very heavy weights in just a couple of seconds. So how much distance running and endurance training should a weightlifter do? **NONE.** Assuming our weightlifter can walk from the warm-up area to the weightlifting platform, he has plenty of endurance. Get it?

Now these examples are extremes at opposite ends of the energy spectrum, so it's kind of easy to identify appropriate energy system training. What about sports with mixed energy needs? Take basketball for example. It sure looks like a lot of running, but it's not marathon-style running now is it. It's actually a whole lot of repetitive sprints followed by a lot of standing around and occasionally some light jogging. Research shows that basketball actually relies most heavily on short-term energy sources (85% ATP/CP and anaerobic glycolysis) and a little from intermediate energy systems (15% aerobic glycolysis). In other words, if your coach is having you run laps for conditioning you are not wisely using your conditioning time.

**Identify and train the type strength used in your sport.** Most athletes equate strength or being strong to maximal strength. In other words, how much weight can you lift. However, there are many different types of strength such as maximal strength, starting strength, explosive strength, speed-strength, functional strength and strength endurance. Focus on the wrong type of strength training may improve performance in the weight room, but it does very little toward improved sports performance.

For instance, it doesn't take a 300-pound bench press (high levels of maximal strength) to drive a golf ball 300 yards, but it does take higher levels of speed-strength and explosive strength than the norm. Most of a golfer's strength training should, therefore, be designed around increasing levels of speed-strength if the goal is to increase driving distance. A sprinter may need to improve his strength endurance to prevent slowing down at the end of a 200-meter dash. A baseball pitcher may need to increase explosive strength to increase throwing speed.

**Hire a professional sports performance coach to design your individualized program.** If you haven't realized by now, proper design and implementation of a sport-specific conditioning program is not as simple as it seems. Each individual athlete brings a unique set of abilities to the table, so "cookie-cutter" programming doesn't work. Each sport has very specific needs for optimal performance. Only those who are trained to identify these abilities and needs can truly provide you with an optimal training program. Without proper guidance, your conditioning program becomes a "crap shoot". You may get lucky and actually improve your athletic performance, OR more likely, do nothing to improve performance. By the way, a poorly designed sport-specific conditioning program can actually reduce your ability to perform at your best on game day.

If you have learned anything from this special report, consult with a professional sports performance coach or strength and conditioning coach to make every play your best.

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