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USRPT AND THE NON-TAPER

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The question often arises about tapering and where it fits into USRPT. Tapering is usually required in fatiguing and debilitating traditional training. One should be wary of not polluting the principles and practices of USRPT with traditional training artifacts that often lead to irrelevant requirements. If USRPT is strictly followed there is no need for traditional tapering. Why? The format of USRPT practices is such that training stimuli are both relevant and maximized, and excessive stress from traditional training that leads to long-term fatigue (Selye's *Stage of Exhaustion*) and very often glycogen depletion that interferes with recovery and learning, does not occur.

Below are a series of email exchanges concerning tapering and USRPT. They took place on Cameron Yick's discussion group on USRPT.

The Exchange

This week's Bulletin pertains to the topic of TAPERING. [Response by Camreon Yick.]

This is the second most frequently asked question submitted to the panel.

Taper is a term associated with traditional periodization/training. Traditional periodization concepts do not apply to USRPT as its models assume that non-race-pace work is useful training content and structure highly fatiguing/recovery blocks of non-race-pace work. In short, tapering is not really something that happens in USRPT. Its expectation is that swimmers should be always within a few days of swimming a personal best. This is very possible if the athlete is purely performing race-relevant content in practice (namely USRPT).

USRPT is special because not only is it specific and race-relevant, but it is also autoregulating in terms of swimmer response. An athlete performs as much race-relevant content as possible every day. That is determined by how much of each USRPT set is completed before failure. If a set is completed, future sets will need to be adjusted in difficulty (in terms of speed and/or rest-interval length). [If you are not familiar with how to do this, re-read the latter portion of Swimming Science Bulletin #39, and possibly parts of the "Overlooked Components of Sprint Training" Bulletin in the Swimming Science Journal's Bulletin (<http://coachsci.sdsu.edu/swim/bullets/table.htm>)].

From Dr. Rushall as a response to Cameron Yick's statements above:

If USRPT is followed and training items are terminated when performance criteria no longer can be maintained, excessive debilitating training is avoided. USRPT swimmers should never be "thrashed" as is the want of many traditional coaches. It even accommodates other life stresses, such as when exams or study periods occur.

In one sense, competition preparation is probably at most one day away with a sleep-in morning and a workout of abbreviated sets which the swimmers should be able to complete totally (no failures)... The competition state should not be that much different to how a USRPT swimmer feels after a Saturday afternoon and Sunday off.

There is no need to "taper" because there is no debilitating fatigued state from which to "recover". The USRPT athlete recovers between sessions, ready to get faster and sustain their existing speed for longer every practice session.

For this to be possible, irrelevant activities have to be dispensed with in order to maximize energy available for race-relevant activities. Hence, "hybrid" training (a mix of traditional and USRPT activities) is discouraged because USRPT adaptability and capacity will be compromised by irrelevant training activities.

From Coach SwimDog (April 11, 2013)

I may have mentioned this in one of my prior e-mails, but I am a firm disbeliever in the taper if you follow the USRPT format.

Track and field seems to have figured this out, and I feel it is due to the significant amount of money available to the athletes in that sport. Track stars at any distance are paid handsomely to be fast in Berlin on Tuesday, Stockholm on Saturday, and Brussels on Wednesday. Many of them make \$100K for a victory and added bonuses for World, European, and even meet records. There is a monetary incentive to be fast all the time and they are. They're not just fast once a season or once every four years.

I am not sure if the financial incentives at the Grand Prix swim meets are enough to change peoples' thinking, but if I were an athlete at that level, I would sure be interested in finding a way to be fast ALL THE TIME.

Dr. Rushall commented:

Excellent. Coach SwimDog makes a very good analogy. I was made aware of Alex Popov doing this frequently when he trained in Australia and prepared for many World Cups.

The following was a communication with Coach Peter Andrew, coach of Michael Andrew.

A point that you should consider and all be proud of is that Michael Andrew is breaking records throughout the year. Most others only do it when they are tapered. Their best times appear and are then unchanged for another six months if at all (they could change age-groups). As is being reported from around the world, USRPT trained swimmers break records at any time. The psychological and physical taper of usually two weeks after traditional training is not required. A couple of days of reduced volume of race-specific work and an easy day before the competition starts (in Michael Andrew's case a long car trip) is all that is needed. USRPT swimmers are not given the overuse overload of irrelevant training that is characteristic of traditional training. Of course, Michael is the shining light of this point but other lesser swimmers training with USRPT continue to improve virtually at every meet.