1.2 Sports Assessment. Characteristics and Particularities

We enter the third basic ongoing task of athletic training with an activity that should be performed continuously and that has a direct influence on training. We will dive into the evaluation of athletic training.

The measurement of athletic capacities, evaluation of the efficacy of the system of training and the specific evaluation of the translation of the developed capacities to competitive situations are probably some of the actions related to athletic training that have experienced the greatest advances and adaptation in the sports world in recent decades.

Nearly all technical teams have some *software* for measuring performance, with a statistical system that provides specific data for each athlete in training situations. Technological advancements in the service of sports assessment are increasingly relevant, and a concrete example of this is the famous Google Glass, which, at the moment, remains a precocious attempt to provide the coach with information in real time.

Figure 9: Google Glass

Source: Cazón, April 13, 2014. Recovered from http://goo.gl/R80Zmb

But we will save a deeper examination of new technologies, new generations and sports practice for later topics in this Certificate program.

Now we will attempt to conceptualize, delineate and determine principal components that make up the evaluation of athletic training.

We will begin with a philosophical definition that links with evaluation in the athletic context. In decades not long ago, evaluation in any context was a truly stressful event, not so much for the measurement itself but for the consequences associated with it. For this reason, many generations developed a certain fear of evaluations and, as a consequence, there is still today a certain dislike for evaluations.

Fortunately, new generations are growing and see evaluations as an everyday thing and, therefore, figure as active agents of evaluation. They are trained in *I like* or *I don't like*.

Evaluation is nothing more than a measurement to determine the level of development or the level of transfer of certain capacities. Without measuring evaluations, it is impossible to adapt the training plan and it is impossible to manage adherence; and without continuous measurements, you cannot pass from one phase of training to another. Evaluation is necessary, it is positive and it brings many associated benefits; evaluation permits us to reorient, correct or pass to later stages.

The fears associated with evaluations are due, fundamentally, to the consequences derived from the measurements and to the poor management of the results obtained by the coaches.

When we stated before the necessity of working with the whole team around team culture, we mentioned establishing common behaviors necessary for the development of the team and their capabilities. This is the moment to present evaluations as an analysis and a continuous and necessary action for the team, without an subsequent catastrophic or dramatic consequences for any athlete. The evaluations provide data that serve to validate or correct the direction of the behavioral shaping process that makes up athletic training. Welcome to the evaluation of athletic training.

Figure 10: Aspects of athletic training to assess

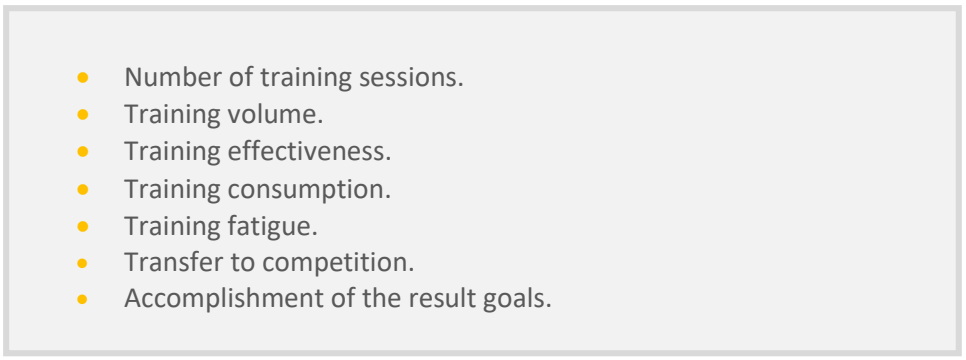
- The content of training.
- The volume and intensity of training.
- Athletes' performance in training tasks.
- The effects of training on athletes' progress.
- The effects of training on performance and on the results of the competition.
- The psychological aspects of athletic training.

Source: Prepared by the author based on Buceta, 1998, p. 387-388.

1.2.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Assessments of Athletic Performance

The marriage of quantitative measurement systems with qualitative measurement systems allows the coach to enjoy more exhaustive data when making decisions.

Figure 11: Quantitative methods in athletic training



Source: Prepared by the author.

The *quantitative methods* were the first to have a role in sports evaluations. These allow us to determine with exactness quantities, volumes, minutes, distances traveled, effectiveness in execution, metabolic consumption and different indicators that provide feedback for the coach and allow her to make decisions that are increasingly accurate.

If the real average playing time of a competition, like soccer, is 55 minutes, and the real average training time is 30 minutes, then there is surely a deficiency in performance deriving from this gap of minutes between training and competition. Today, quantitative methods provide ever more valuable data, like, for example, the real training time free from interruptions, which allows us to make more precise plans and training sessions that are better adapted to the reality of the demands of competition.

Today, it is inconceivable that coaches would lack quantitative methods of evaluation to gather quality data that allows them greater effectiveness in decision-making.

But the need to obtain richer information led to the incorporation of *qualitative methods of evaluation* to record subjective information, undetectable with instruments, which generates impacts on the quality of athletic training and its translation to competition situations.

Qualitative methods include personal interviews, group meetings, performance records, self-reports and other complementary methods

that facilitate access to increasingly accurate and reliable information about the performance of the athletes and the team as a whole.

The coach's challenge today has less to do with the methods of assessment than with the style and strategy of synthesizing this volume of quantitative and qualitative data about her team to make more effective decisions.

Figure 12: Qualitative methods in athletic training

- Adherence to training.
- Perceived mastery of abilities.
- Perception of tiredness and fatigue.
- Level of self-efficacy.
- Level of enjoyment.
- Stress load from training.
- Post-competition stress load.
- Level of team cohesion.

Source: Prepared by the author.

The core ideas for evaluating qualitative and quantitative methods suggested in the charts above are only collections of experiences from different coaching staff. Each coach and each team of coaching staff select what variables to measure and the best way to do so. What is certain is that today, whether quantitatively or qualitatively, everything is measured.

1.2.2 Self-Assessment and External Assessment. Comparative Measurements

Not only have the consequences associated with sports assessments, their frequency and the management of their results changed and evolved, but also the role of the athlete being evaluated in the evaluation itself has undergone fundamental changes.

Historically, the athlete had a passive role in the *feedback* from of their sports evaluations. They received a data point, one or more numbers and little more. Today, the athlete also has his own data, he also combines quantitative and qualitative information related to his performance and the performance of the team. The athlete has a much more active role, a bigger commitment to the assessment, that enriches both the training as well as the individual and collective competitive profile.

These self-assessments are not designed to avoid external assessments of the athlete; on the contrary they are carried out to understand the

athlete's perceptions about her efforts, her executions, her performance in training, her performance in competition, the role of play within the team, etc.

The self-assessments do not preclude external assessments; on the contrary, they enrich and complement them. It is very important that the coach and his assistants train themselves to carry out these feedback interviews, with the goal of taking advantage of the athlete's commitment and leading role, and not prevent them from taking an undue leading role.

This space and time for combining information related to the athlete's performance is vitally important, and the coach should take advantage of this moment to:

- Detect if the athlete overestimates their performance.
- Detect if the athlete underestimates their performance.
- Detect if the athlete overestimates their contribution to the team.
- Detect if the athlete underestimates their contribution to the team.
- Bring the perspectives and assessments of the athlete and coach into alignment.
- Set priorities jointly.
- Generate a new work program for this athlete.

These spaces of interaction between coach and athlete to engage in dialogue about performance, the training and other topics of interest with concrete data provided by both sides are an exercise that demands time and dedication and, in the short term, this investment of energy is costly, but it provides lots of direction coordination and sustainability to the training process. The athlete's active role and the position of the coach as facilitator favor the quality of these "comparative" encounters that are decisive for the future of the team's training and competition.

1.2.3 Behavioral Assessment of Athletes

Without getting lost in the complexities of what behavioral assessment means, still less behavioral analysis, we would like to suggest a model for recording an athlete's behaviors that is widely used in sports and that favors the design of training programs for each athlete; in turn it allows for greater recognition of progress in training.

Table 1: Record of the Athlete's Behavior

Behaviors that should be maintained	Behaviors that should be consolidated
Behaviors that should be eliminated	Behaviors that should be generated

Source: Prepared by the author.

In order to manage this behavioral record in a collaborative manner between the coach and athlete, the coach needs to have previously assigned the function or role that the athlete is to carry out. Starting from there, it is crucially important to set athletic behavior priorities for the athlete.

What do we do with the behaviors that the athlete masters even in stressful situations? These behaviors are included in the section to be *maintained*. They are completely consolidated behaviors that are not affected by the stress of competition and that benefit both the athlete and the team.

What do we do with the behaviors that the athlete masters, although in an intermittent manner during stressful situations? These behaviors are included in the section to be *consolidated*. These behaviors have been learned by the athlete, but his total control during stressful situations is still variable.

What do we do with the behaviors that the athlete has not yet learned or mastered? These behaviors are necessary for their effective performance, and are included in the section to be *generated*. Constant change and ongoing challenges always bring up new behaviors to incorporate. This space should always include a strategic view that includes the medium term.

What do we do with dysfunctional behaviors the athlete has that hinder the performance of his function? These behaviors should be included in the section to be *eliminated*. These dysfunctional behaviors are the most difficult to modify. It is crucial to set priorities and partial goals.

As we mentioned before, this is only a brief introduction to the behavioral assessment and recording of athletes. This record is also used at the team level, and the result is very positive as it makes the shared performance objectives more visible, it generates adherence among the athletes and promotes the exchange of exhaustive high-quality data between the coach and the team.

It is recommended that this record be developed collaboratively between the coach and the athlete to avoid the feeling of imposition, but fundamentally we recommend that this behavioral record be implemented. A single meeting to assess and set priorities is useless if there is not an established work program for the athlete and a subsequent schedule of interviews for feedback from both sides in order to assess advances and define or maintain development priorities.

The meetings or interviews with the athletes should be proactive, with the goal of managing their behavioral record, and should assess advances, consolidations and allow for the definition of new performance objectives. Today there are still coaches who continue to use both the interview and the meeting to punish the athlete for unachieved results, and they either forget or are unaware of the importance of using these tools for managing performance.

1.2.4 Frequency of Sports Assessments

We will finish this discussion of sports evaluation by clearing up at what times and with what frequency the athletes' performance and results should be measured.

Luckily there is no longer debate about whether we should evaluate before, during or after training or competition. The necessity and availability of methods of assessment before, during and after training and competition is clear.

The more data you can obtain about individual and collective performance, the better for making more effective decisions. So, do we have to meet all the time with the athletes to manage the results? Of course not. The data should be processed by the coach, and he should respect the set schedule of interviews and meetings, and not increase meetings or interviews based on the volume of data he receives. If this were the case, measurements would be the main interruption for training, and they would be an annoyance both for the coach and for the athletes.

Occasionally, the appearance of critical indicators could change the schedule of meetings and interviews, but only in special cases.

Focusing on the frequency not of assessments but rather the management of the results of the assessments, this frequency will be higher when the emerging data are related with behaviors to be generated and with behaviors to be eliminated, while meetings and interviews for managing performance will be less frequent when the

emerging data is related to behaviors to be maintained and behaviors to be consolidated.

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