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Time Management Mission: Possible

RIS - Winter 2004

by Kathy Toon

"Time management" - now there's an oxymoron. For a young athlete, the time-management challenge involves a balancing act between school, sports, homework, social time and family activities. There are literally thousands of books that claim to teach us how to juggle all of these tasks and effectively manage our time.

The truth is, you simply can't manage time. Time takes care of itself. Think about it. You can't control a clock - it just keeps ticking.

How you use your time determines whether or not you will fulfill your dreams, on and off the ice. You have the same amount of time as your competitors do. But winners and losers use their time differently. What separates the champion from the competitor is the use of time - winners do what losers don't want to do.

Accomplishing your dreams does not happen by accident. It is the result of planning. Planning your activities helps you stay on course. Thoughtful planning allows you to focus on the things that you decide are the most important. Effective planning is a skill, not a gift - a skill developed by practice.

Habits
Our habits are learned patterns of behavior, and we can always learn new ones. Successful athletes have effective daily habits. They organize and manage their time around what's important to them, based on their VALUES and BELIEFS. They put their time and attention on the things in their lives that produce results. Successful athletes don't just do things differently - they do different things!

According to Stephen Covey's Quadrant II Time Management Matrix, we spend our time in four basic ways. Covey found that successful people spend their time on things that are "important" but not necessarily "urgent." He defines the things we do in terms of what's "urgent" or "not urgent" and what's "important" or "not important."

Focusing on what's "important" yet "not urgent" will make a huge difference in your effectiveness as a student-athlete. Taking time to plan at the beginning of each week will help you take a proactive approach to your life.

Daily Planning
Take 25 -30 minutes at the beginning of each week to plan the week ahead. Sit down in a quiet place, take out your calendar and decide what you want to accomplish during the coming week. Reconnect with your dream. Review your goals and set objectives for the week.
Then spend 5-10 minutes each day reviewing and revising your plan. Each day ask yourself this question: "What can I do today that will move me closer to realizing my vision?" Base your day's actions on your answer.

Long-Term Planning: Creating Your Training Schedule
Periodization is a training plan that is designed to allow you to peak at specific times of the year. Researchers have found that athletes cannot perform at 100 percent of their best 100 percent of the time. With periodization you can determine when you peak by carefully planning your training, and also reduce the risk of injury and psychological burnout.

Periodization breaks training into four phases: preparation, pre-competition, competition and active rest. Each phase can vary in length, according to your needs and schedule, but in general: preparation should last from four to 12 weeks; pre-competition, one to four weeks; competition, two weeks at the most; and active rest, a few days to several weeks, depending upon your needs.

Preparation (off-season): During the off-season, your goal is to develop a strong aerobic base emphasizing both muscular and cardiovascular endurance. Training should focus on high volume and low intensity. For strength training, use light weights and frequent repetitions with a wide variety of exercises. Increase your aerobic base for endurance and recovery with rhythmic and continuous exercises, such as running or biking. Preparation is also the time to work on technical aspects of skating. Any competition during this phase should be done with the goal of development in mind.

Pre-competition: The goal here is to increasingly modify your training routines so they approximate the actual demands of skating. Strength training should intensify, then taper off as you get closer to the competition you are training for. You should transition from aerobic rhythmic training to more skating-specific speed and sprint work. Your goal is to be ready on competition day.

Competition: This phase begins two to five days before competition day. The goal is to bring performance to an optimum level during the most important time. The training focus should be to simply maintain your current level of fitness. By properly training, you've maximized your chances of performing well.

Active rest: Once your competition is finished, you should go into this last phase of periodization. Put your skates away for a little while and allow your body to recover. This is one of the most controversial, yet most important, areas of periodization. Without proper rest, you'll just wear yourself out mentally and physically. However, it's called "active rest" because you shouldn't just sit on your duff. Do some cross training, play other sports for fun and relaxation. You also should assess your past competitive performance and discuss with your coach those areas of your sport that will need attention when you return to training.

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