

Wynn Gmitroski: View from the top! Saturday September 26, 2009 University of Manitoba

Wynn's 28 years of coaching has taken him to four Olympic Games, twelve World Championships and five Commonwealth Games. He has coached most of Canada's top middle distance runners over the past 15 years, including Angela Chalmers (1992 Olympic 3000m Bronze Medalist), Diane Cummins (Canadian Record Holder and 2001 800m World Championships finalist) and Gary Reed (Canadian Record Holder and 2007 World Championship 800m Silver Medalist). In addition to his coaching he does sport/fitness consulting and is a physiotherapist in Victoria.

Wynn's clinic was based on his vast experience and the pursuit of Optimal Performance. He discussed all aspects of athletic development and answered questions on all facets of training. He provided an insight into his pursuit of coaching athletic excellence and some of the world class performers, especially 800m specialist Gary Reed, whom he has coached for the past 7 years. His clinic was not just a discussion on training but a philosophy on life in Athletics!

Wynn believes that Optimal Performance means beginning with the right attitude and developing athletically through fun, healthy activity which translates into training consistently. He highlighted the need for excellent support, including financial and the use of an integrated support team, including a goal for life after track. He stated that, Gary Reed was the first athlete who came to me ready to run. He had the athletic tools ready to develop into a world class 800m runner. Gary's background before turning to the 800m was as a national ranked decathlete.

Wynn believes that consistent development is the key to longevity in the sport, and that athletes should not rush through the developmental process. Athletes have to develop speed, proper running technique and core strength before moving to specific event development. He stated that there is a very poor conversion rate between world youth to open competition results. This may be attributed to physiological or psychological factors, but none the less, the facts remain that successful performances at a youth or junior level may not translate into successful senior performances, so don't rush overall athletic development for that immediate success.

With younger athletes Wynn stresses the importance of more, shorter training sessions, rather than fewer longer training sessions. He believes that postural stability and efficient movement are the building blocks of athletic development, so coaches should focus on those crucial areas. He encourages athletes to engage in multiple events and focus on year around development. He believes in strength work, including the use of free weights, stating that the incidence of injury in supervised conditions is 5%, whereas the incidence of injury is 95% in unsupervised conditions. Thus the key is proper supervision and in all cases proper technique and volumes. He stresses the importance of functional strength, total body strength and through a full range of motion. This will translate into improved performances on the track, where it counts! He encourages 72 hours between sessions of the same energy system (except aerobic) for recovery and quality before quantity. His strength training sessions include, overhead press including a squat, forward and side lunges, 1 legged squats, and abdominal exercises including planks, leg raises and crunches.

Wynn's success comes from his meticulous planning, his keen observation skills and his awareness of his athletes. He recommends yearly planning for developing athletes. He recommends setting priorities in training, and focus on achievable goals. If still coaching in Manitoba he would use the indoor season as a time of development, not competition and would use the winter to develop athleticism.

He states the primary factors in success are:

- 1.) accurate quality, consistent training
- 2.) enhanced recovery methods to support quicker adaptation
- 3.) Good nutrition
- 4.) Correct posture and range of motion.

Furthermore he adds that the successful athlete should:

- 1.) be focused (happy and healthy)
- 2.) have the ability to perform under the heat of battle
- 3.) be adaptable to stress
- 4.) have the ability to relax into a vegetative state
- 5.) have optimal health.

The keys for improved performance are; stress, rest and adapt. Wynn challenges all coaches to carefully listen to their athletes!

Wynn uses a 1-5 classification system for setting training intensities and advises the use of heart rate monitors for obtaining best results, including examining post workout recovery.

Level 1: Easy running - Calculated from formula using resting heart rate

$$\text{Max HR} - \text{Rest HR} \times .7 + \text{Rest HR} = \text{recovery ceiling}$$

Level 2: Marathon pace - Steady state running

$$\text{Max HR} - \text{Rest HR} \times .85 + \text{Rest HR} = \text{recovery ceiling}$$

Level 3: 10km pace - Threshold Pace (Anaerobic Threshold)

Level 4: Max VO2 Interval pace workouts: 2-5 min. intervals (3km race)

Level 5: Pace Specific Quality work.....1/1 work/rest ratio short speed/ speed endurance

He advises working up to training volumes up to race distance in sets, especially for race specific and middle distance athletes. 3km runner: 10 x 300m1 minute recovery

Wynn follows a 3 week cycle of intensity, volume and then recovery. He integrates strength, speed, and endurance training during the year, with different emphasis at different times. He focuses on technique all year and insists on not setting boundaries or barriers for developing athletes. He does use tests to determine training levels.

Wynn stressed the importance of injury prevention. He would like coaches to observe their athletes postural alignment, movement patterns as well as analyze their athletic background and goals. The foot strike as well as their stride rhythm will provide the coach with information on their efficiency of movement and potential problem areas. Above all, observe and listen to your athletes!

Sheldon Reynolds - Coaching Manitoba