

# Sport Training Periodization

*by Frederick Claro*

The periodization of sport training is basically the slicing of a training year (although it can also apply for multiple years such as training for the Olympics or a football / rugby world cup based on a four years plan) into different segments or phases whose will take care individually of the general and specific development of the athlete/player. Instead of training randomly, the work loads are planned to fit a specific schedule for each of the frames involved.

This concept is not new. It was developed in the 60's throughout the eastern bloc countries, and brought to its finest development from 1963 by Tudor Bompă a Romanian former Olympic rower, and now a retired Professor of the York University in Ontario Canada, founder of the Tudor Bompă Institute. Periodization of training had much to do with the superiority of eastern athletes over their western counterparts for more than two and half decades and in numerous sport activities. However, what is new is its apparent spreading in western countries.

An annual periodized training plan is composed of the following phases:

- Preparatory
- Competition
- Transition

The plan can also be bi-annual with phases such as:

- Preparatory
- Competition 1
- Transition
- Preparatory
- Competition 2
- Transition

Each phase of the training will include sub-phases where general and more sport specific abilities will be develop following the principles of training development known as:

- Overload: progressively increase the work load (volume and intensity)and allow for sufficient adaptation and recovery time
- Specificity: train from the general to the more sport specific (running takes various forms of adaptation according to the sport practiced...)
- Reversibility: basically what we don't train will detrain, hence the necessity of a specific maintenance of the athlete/player's bio-motor abilities during competition and transition phases

Figure 1 illustrates a sample periodized plan:

Phases of training	Preparatory					Competition					Transition				
Sub-phases	General Preparation			Specific Preparation		Pre-Competition			Competition		Transition				
Macro-cycles															
Micro-Cycles															

**Figure 1:** Phases and cycles of a hypothetical annual plan (Adapted T. Bompa, 1999)

Rugby, as a complex team sport involving a vast area of technical, tactical, psychological and physical conditioning development, is a perfect example of a sport where planning the step by step development of the players became an absolute necessity for a team’s success. The periodization of the annual plan together with the periodization of the players’ bio-motor abilities will ensure that nothing is left to chance when the league competition starts.

Many believe that this system is somehow meant to “be for the pros”. What we can actually say is that a plan can be developed for any team, no matter the level or division. We could even say that according to the recent development of professional rugby, amateur teams will have much more time to implement a periodized plan correctly, whereas the elite teams are still struggling to fit a minimum of preparation in their pre-season! Moreover a good periodized plan will certainly prevent numerous overuse non contact injuries unfortunately sustained too many times by ill prepared players.

If team’s players, coaching staff and management are all committed to improvement as a long term objective, then plan well your seasons ahead, be flexible, re-assess achievements regularly, adapt, and success will follow. But one thing for sure: nothing happen overnight, patience and consistency should also be prime qualities to develop.