



PERFORMANCE SOCCER CONDITIONING

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Conditioning Interview

Periodization: The European Approach to Fitness Planning and Making it Work for American Soccer

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David Tenney is currently the Fitness/GK coach for the Kansas City Wizards of MLS. Tenney joined the Wizards from George Mason where for the last two seasons he served as goalkeeper and fitness coach for both the men's and women's teams. Besides coaching at GMU, Tenney was also youth director and assistant coach for the Washington Freedom. Tenney received his B.I.S. in Coaching Science from Mason in 2005, and is currently pursuing his Master's in Exercise, Fitness, and Health Promotion. He is known as one of the best soccer-specific fitness experts in the United States.



David Tenney

Tenney played for the Baltimore Blast of the NPSL from 1998-2000 where he saw action in 21 games. During the 1998 season he started 23 of 25 games for the Baton Rouge Bombers (EISL) and was selected to the league's All-Star Second Team. Other professional experience for Tenney: Washington Warthogs (May 1994-Jan 1998) and in Germany for SV Linx (1992-1993) and FC Rastatt 04 (1993-1994). Collegiately, Tenney played for Virginia Tech from 1989-91 and was named Metro Conference Defensive MVP (1989)

BEG INT ADV **PC: What is your international experience in conditioning for soccer?**

DT: In 2000 I spent a week in Holland at the KNVB taking an international course. This was my first experience where there were discussions about integrating fitness in the daily soccer training session-this sparked my interest. Four years later I was lucky enough to earn the Czech version of the UEFA license, which encompassed about 30 hours of exercise physiology classroom sessions. Emphasis throughout the course was not just daily training but also how the daily training sessions were all in the context of total workload during the week and month and how one would train the different energy systems on different days. This was done on the field and all within the "normal" training sessions.

This was my first introduction into stricter periodization of soccer training so a lot of the talk in the Czech Republic was on micro cycles (weekly training). If you were to go to the Sparta Prague training complex on a Tuesday, you would see every older youth team doing hurdles, ladders and boxes during plyometrics. For this club Tuesday was an individual high intensity day; Wednesday was a one v. one or two v. two game action day; Thursday was a low intensity functional day; and,

Friday was training set plays with very little competition. You could see that the entire club had a very strict micro cycle that they adhered to. This opened my eyes as to what soccer coaches need to think about.

I came from a background of how to create training sessions and how to educate players. This experience provided the next step, which is how much, when and how often and how to mix in adequate rest for high levels of development. An overview of international soccer conditioning planning based on my observations is seen in Table One.

PC: Would you say that the Czech experience was the most advanced educational system in its approach to conditioning and soccer fitness?

DT: This is a definite yes. The course was at Charles University where a lot of the professional teams and national teams bring in their players to test for VO₂ max efficiency, power and speed/endurance. Some aspect of fitness was tested year-round at different points of the year. Every coach was interested in the results and used the information.

As an idea of what was covered in the course, one discussion was how to design a training session and improve VO₂ max; another was on improving speed and power. In our country we use an outside speed/agility coach a lot, but in the Czech Republic this coach would be an assistant coach. He would be a coach who would do speed/agility with a ball or one v. one with an attacker and defender working on biomechanics and improving running techniques. Ultimately, it's with a ball at the top of the eighteen beating a player square on goal. You can do all the speed/agility work you want but if you can't do it with a ball against a defender, it doesn't really translate.

PC: So it's safe to say there's not an outside conditioning coach but rather a coach on staff that is responsible for conditioning?

DT: Yes. Their educational system in terms of sport physiology was so advanced that their assistant coaches all had the tools to do work with things like medicine balls and plyo boxes. By incorporating the university system into their coaching courses this is how, in part, they educated their coaches.

PC: One of the most difficult aspects of training is applying individual periodization principles and activities to a team setting. As we know, response to training is an individual phenomenon. How can you gain individual response to exercise while applying training to an entire team?

DT: This is one reason it makes sense to do a lot of things on the field within game-like situations because when I think of individualization of soccer players, I think of position-specific. Your central defenders and strikers have some clear needs in terms of maintaining speed, strength

and power. The midfielders have a need to be able to recover from sprints and have good aerobic power ability. This is necessary to be able not only to recover within a game but also to recover between games. Another thing to consider is playing time and providing the opportunity to condition players who are non-starters. This is accomplished by doing extra work after the regular training session.

The next consideration is age-older players will not recover as fast as younger players. Consequently, these individuals do less work on the field and more in the weight room. In summary, training is individualized between positions, playing time and age.

PC: Based on your experience where should the conditioning educational emphasis be placed in the U.S.?

DT: Coaches should realize that they can get a lot of what they need to do in the context of a normal training session. One can create sessions to train energy systems, strength and power all on the field and in specific ways. I see a lot of coaches stopping play and talking a whole lot during the training sessions. They don't think about the fact that these interruptions change the entire training load of the session by allowing their players to have unscheduled recovery time. In their zeal to stop and coach they put themselves in situations where they feel they have to work the players by doing non-specific things at the end of training sessions. There is a time and place for this at the end of the week before a game.

It is my feeling that as this game is evolving it's becoming a faster game where recovery from sprints and ability to make a lot of quality sprints is probably the most important factor. Applying the micro-cycle concept, Tuesday and Wednesday should be devoted to letting the players do things fast and explosively, limiting the time they have to recover.

In this way they are getting the amount of work they need based on individualization they need and not ruining it by the coach stopping and talking on a regular basis.

PC: You hear the phrase more and more in soccer that younger players are overplayed and under developed. This is creating a situation that players are playing so much they are pacing themselves and not developing to their potential. How does this practice retard the development of soccer athletes?

DT: In the youth environment there are very few coaches who work in conjunction with a strength and conditioning coach. Coaches need to be aware of how much, if any, strength training is being done beyond practice time. There will be a decrease of strength and power when too many games are played with not enough recovery time and strength and power are not addressed on a periodic basis. Having said this, it's important for youth coaches to realize that if they play too many games during the week, strength training can't be done.

From a periodization standpoint you can only have two peaks in a week and the higher those peaks are, then the rest of the week must be lower intensity. It's hard for a youth coach to realize that if a player has had those two peaks of loading over the course of the week, then the rest of the week has to be low intensity. For example, I can add body weight strength activities because it's at a lower intensity and is enough strength work to maintain the athletic component. It's a matter of knowing when to back off and what to do.

More Information Please!

Contact Dave at dtenney@kcwizards.com

Table 1

Examples of other countries and how they plan (Scandinavia, Italy & Eastern Europe)

a. Fiorentina-Try to keep players at 90%-95% of maximal fitness levels over a longer period of time

b. Czech Republic-Efficient use of blocks of time to train aerobic power and strength/power

c. Norway-Data from Hoff & Helgerud suggest a link between VO₂max and on-field performance

d. Italy-Increased use of individualization in fitness loading during training week

