

Practical Tapering

Developmental Program, Xcel, NGA, USAIGC, AAU

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It is possible to address tapering and fatigue management not just by adjusting intensity and volume during training but by analyzing your annual competition schedule. Below are suggestions:

Annual Competition Schedule

1. **Number of Competitions**—Rethink the total number of competitions, in total, your athletes are required to attend.
2. **Rank the Competitions**—Rank competitions with a numbering system from least important (for qualifying purposes) to most important (for culminating success). Include the in-house “intra-squads” in this ranking system.

Example of intensity ranking:

Inter-squad pre-season ranked = 2
Early qualifying meet* to State = 4
Invitational (long-distance) = 5
Later qualifying meet to State = 5
State = 6
Regionals = 8
Nationals = 10

*Early qualifying meets—if successful, can give the athlete a much-needed mental intensity break allowing them to focus on increasing their routine/skill difficulty for the later competitions. The “first routine” should be lower in difficulty, but contain clean and “percentage successful” elements, giving a greater chance of success for a qualifying score.

3. **Back-to-Back Competitions**—If necessary to compete on back-to-back weekends, look for ways to place a local competition in front of a long-distance competition covering more than one day. Long-distance competitions usually lose training time the day before and the day after, created by travel, causing a disruption in the total plan. Avoid placing long-distance competitions back-to-back.
4. **Standard “No Monday Practice”** after a long weekend of competition (usually a long distance competition) at times allows the coach to use the remaining training days to execute a FULL week of training numbers—So much for the Monday rest day! If a rest day is given, remember modified training numbers are important for the remainder of the week (this should already be reflected in your annual periodization plan).
5. **Multiple Levels Competitions**—If multiple levels of athletes attend a long-distance competition, avoid requiring all athletes to remain and watch all athletes. After competing, athletes should return home to rest for the upcoming week of training. If a higher-level athlete competes on Friday but remains at the competition to support or “vacation,” they lose Saturday, Sunday, and

the “No Training Monday.” By arriving home after their competition, they are rested and ready for Tuesday and the remaining training bouts left in the week. By staying at the competition over the weekend and into Monday, they will struggle with the higher intensity or increased numbers Tuesday usually brings. Encourage higher-level athletes leaving after their competition to use their “No Practice Monday” for catching up on homework, medical appointments, etc., to avoid missing a day of training later.

6. **Once Qualified**—Once an athlete has qualified into the qualifying system (usually State), consider having the athlete skip the other qualifying competition(s) or use them to perform a higher level of routine development. Avoid using a competition to “sandbag” or enter to win...every competition should be used as a verification process.

All information on the number of competitions each athlete will attend, staying or not staying to watch other teammates, “No Practice Monday,” when to leave to attend long-distance competitions, and more should be discussed in full with parents. This information should be available to the parent PRIOR to their athlete moving into their new level (and must contend with added or changed requirements) AND in the annual “Family Meeting” before each season.

Be creative, but plan your competitions. Remember to keep science-based decisions first and foremost within your program.