# NSA Roundtable Combined Events

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The combined events are currently experiencing a golden age in the public eye and, in the men's events, the highest performance levels ever seen.

In 2012, heptathlete Jessica Ennis, Britain's poster girl for the Olympics in London, overcame media and public pressure to win her country's first athletics gold medal of the Games, the whole process attracting unprecedented attention to the event for both her performance and her star quality. Also in London, Ashton Eaton of the USA capped what was arguably the best year ever by a male combined events athlete by following up his earlier world records and world championships in both the decathlon and the indoor heptathon with a hard fought victory over countryman Trey Hardee.

Eaton won the decathlon again at the 2013 IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Moscow, strengthening his claim as the event's greatest of all-time, and if the Moscow heptathlon was missing Ennis due to injury and the performance level was slightly down, it still had a good competitive field and a wonderful story line as Brianne Theisen-Eaton (CAN), Ashton's wife of just a few weeks, took the silver medal behind Hanna Melnychenko (UKR).

To add some context to the attention currently focused on the combined events, NSA asked IAAF Coaches Commission member Frank Dick, himself the coach of two-time Olympic decathlon champion Daley Thompson (GBR), to speak with experts with special perspectives on the combined events to get their views on the developments and trends we are seeing.

First is Toni Minichello, who has worked with Ennis's from the age of 11; guiding her to European and world titles and personal best scores every year except one from 2004 to 2012.

Then we have Harry Marra, the American coach of both Ashton Eaton and Brianne Theisen-Eaton who previously worked with 1996 Olympic Champion and four-time World Champion (three outdoors, one indoors) Dan O'Brien (USA) and the 1992 Olympic bronze medallists Dave Johnson (USA).

Jitka Vinduskova, PaedDr, CSc, is a Vice Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport at Charles University in Prague and Chair of the Methodology Committee of the Czech athletics federation. She has supported that country's system for developing the combined events as both a coach and administrator, including work with Rudolf Chovanec, Zdenek Vana, Dalibor Kupka, coaches who in turn worked with Czech decathlon greats, Robert Zmelik, Thomas Dvorak and Roman Sebrle.

Last but not least, we get an athlete's perspective from the 2000 Olympic decathlon champion Erki Nool of Estonia, who during his career also won European indoor and outdoor titles in the combined events.

**NSA:** *What is your assessment of the combined events competitions at the IAAF World Championships in Moscow? Are there any*

*trends you see in the heptathlon and or decathlon in recent years?*

**Minichello**

The absence of the top five placed heptathletes from the previous year's Olympics was bound to affect the results, so it comes as no surprise first that the top score in Moscow was the lowest ever to win the world title. In fairness to the athletes, however, the results at world championships the year after an Olympics are always lower for a number of reasons (motivation, retirements, etc.). In comparison with previous editions of the championships, the scores for positions three to eight in Moscow were average and about what you would expect. In terms of possible trends in the heptathlon, I noted several points. First, a number of the athletes were faster in the hurdles. At the same time, however, they were not carrying over this speed into gains in the 200m. Second, the 800m was very quick and competitive. This was likely because of many competitors being in contention for medals going into the final discipline together with the strong pace set by Rath (GER), which forced the top competitors to respond and the others to just be dragged through to fast times. Third, we see that since the 2005 World Championships, more and more heptathletes are jumping higher in the high jump, which means a 1.80m+ performance is required to remain competitive. Finally, analysis of the throws shows that in Moscow these disciplines on average (using percentage) contributed less to the scores of the top eight placers. If we think that the top heptathletes are better in the hurdles, possibly their 800m running is better and there is a real and generalised improvement in the high jump, we have to ask if coaches are putting less emphasis on throws training.

**Marra**

Moscow was a very good and very well run competition. From a coach's point of view, access to all the event sites was easy. Looking at the performances, the decathlon pole vault was the very best in any combined events competition I have ever seen! The pole vault defines skill and what Moscow showed us is that today's decathletes are by and large much better athletes than their counterparts in the past. As for the heptathlon, we saw that six of the first seven placers in Moscow achieved total score personal bests. This was great for their development. Not having the top finishers from London in the field afforded these ladies the chance to step up without the pressure of going against the likes of Ennis, Chernova, etc. And they did in fact step up.

**Vinduskova**

The decathlon in Moscow was one of the highest quality competitions in world championships history. Seventeen athletes scored over 8000 points, there were ten personal bests in the top 20, a world leading score and two national and area records. The heptathlon results were also pretty good, with seventeen competitors over 6000 points, seven with new personal bests and two national records. Personally, I very much appreciate athletes that are able to come close to or score a personal best at the major competitions. We are not sure if it is a trend, but we believe that there will gradually be an overall increase in the number of 8000-point decathletes and 6000-point heptathletes competing at any given time, which means the competition just to be at a major event will be tougher. Another thing we are noticing is that fear of injuries and lingering health issues are making it so that the majority of athletes are choosing both their individual and combined event competitions more selectively.

*Jitka Vinduskova*

**Nool**

My impression from Moscow is that we are seeing a strong new generation in the decathlon. There might be a little stagnation in the top three or four but the second level, say fifth to tenth is getting stronger and will be pushing Eaton and anyone who wants to be on the podium. I have to say I am impressed with the increase in the standard of the German athletes. From a technical point of view, the results in the field disciplines of the combined events, especially the pole vault, are more stable but at the same time the average level in the 400m is not so high as it was 10 years ago. In the heptathlon, the scores were a little low at the very top, but this has a lot to do with the fact that the two best from the previous year were missing. The overall scores in the second level were okay, nothing that indicates a trend for me.

**NSA:** *There is much talk of optimal performance profiles in sport. These cover anthropometric, physiological and psychological factors. What do you consider to be the most relevant in a heptathlete/decathlete?*

**Minichello**

To be honest, as coach to a heptathlete who is considered by some to be too small to be a credible contender, I tend now to put little store by anthropometric guides. The things I look for are excellent running speed and a good high jump; if you have those two basic elements the rest can be taught. The downside is there are a lot of quick athletes drawn to the sprints when they should be in the combined events where they would have a real future. I think a lack of patience on the part of athlete and coach could be one of the reasons this happens and it shows an important psychological side of the athlete and the coach that is necessary for success. Patience and a systematic and progressive approach to developing the athlete are important, but we also have to deal with expectations. In Great Britain, few are able to work long enough to create a future, preferring to judge themselves or their personal coach on results or on funding.

**Marra**

There is no such thing as optimal performance profiles in athletics! It is such a cop-out that it is ridiculous, and those looking for such profiles are barking up the wrong tree. You must coach to the athlete's needs. There are, of course, fundamental movement patterns that must be understood by the coach and athlete, applied to the athlete's movements and (this is the critical part) adapted to the needs of each athlete. You must fully understand what each discipline is asking the athlete to do, learn the physics behind each skill and then put that knowledge into common sense words so you can teach the individual. The idea is to coach the athlete.

**Vinduskova**

We believe the most relevant factor (when considering a healthy competitor) for achieving optimal performance in a combined events competition is the athlete's ability to be in and stay in a state of "flow". Elite combined event athletes will produce their best results in a combined events competition as opposed to single event competitions they might do during the season. Performance effectiveness (PE) is an indicator that we use to identify and monitor most young combined events athletes.

$$PE = \frac{\text{decathlon performance}}{\text{personal best sum}} \cdot 100\ \%$$

**Nool**

For me, a strong will is the most important predictor of top-level success, without that you are going to be limited in how far your physical talent will take you. An athlete can train to be stronger psychologically and develop self-belief, especially if he or she has a good coach, but it really helps to start with the will to win already there in the individual. From the physical side, flexibility is an essential characteristic to start with and it must constantly be worked on in training. A combined event athlete needs this so he or she can learn and develop technique in all the disciplines, avoid injuries and recover from those that do occur. I think as a coach I would also look to see that the athlete's

muscle groups are strong and balanced. This is more important in combined events than in single disciplines where specialisation, and thus the importance of certain muscles and muscle groups, is normally the key to success.

***NSA:*** *While it is true that there is a level of compensation in each athlete's technical model(s), there is also the sense of a basic core model. What do you consider acceptable/not acceptable when it comes to variance from the core technical models?*

**Minichello**

"You can't beat biomechanics" is the first point. A good technical model leads to a consistency when trying to produce results. I must in fairness say it is easier for heptathletes to have better technical models as they have fewer events and can spend more time on the development of each one, compared to decathletes. There are messages that crossover the events and when you are coaching, emphasising these is key. It is also important to use the same descriptions, as it helps the athlete make the links. For example, in the throws it is important to develop a sense of timing through the movement, like the use of the legs, the trunk then the arms, and not try to shorten the movement with tension.

**Marra**

Core models are important. Maybe better stated would be core concepts! Here's a clear example, and maybe it will put to rest all the talk about why Ashton Eaton uses the shuffle in the shot put. You get three throws, not six, in the decathlon. What an athlete is trying to do is to get to a functional power position in each throw in order to apply the correct forces required to deliver the implement as far as possible. The shuffle puts Ash in this position nine out of ten times and we then let his athleticism take over. His personal best of 15.40m this year tells us we are correct in this thinking. Furthermore, you drive out of the back on your left leg with the shuffle. It is the opposite leg with the glide. Ash takes off his left leg in all jumps and the hurdles. This is what I mean by coaching the athlete.

**Vinduskova**

We believe coaches must be flexible with the core technical model for any discipline when implementing it with combined events athletes. Each individual athlete has certain biomechanical predispositions and, therefore, the technical model should be adjusted to the needs of the athlete. Once basic technical factors are developed, the model should be individualised to fit the athlete's strengths and limitations. Decathletes must be able to master three varying preparation strategies for take-off and take-off preparation in the jumping events, three varying strategies for the greatest velocity production during the release in each of throwing events, and to be fast during flat sprint and hurdle races. Whether the athlete is capable of this, will be evident during specialised training, when the athlete is between 19 and 22 years of age and is attempting to score over 8000 points.

**Nool**

Combined event athletes will always have to compensate technically because their bodies and conditioning are never going to be perfect for any one of the disciplines without detracting from one or more of the others. Moreover, it is rare for a combined event athlete to be able to develop his/her technique to the same level of the specialists in any event; they just don't have the time to work on the special training required. The practical effect of this depends on the athlete, in some events they will be closer to the ideal model and this is necessary in some of the disciplines in order to be close to the top. What the coach and athlete have to try to do is minimise the number of events where the athlete is far away from the ideal model you might see in a specialist. But you have to be careful. I found that in the years when I did lots of work on my weak events I did not get much improvement and the cost was that my strong events become unstable – it took a lot to get the feeling back, longer than before.

**NSA:** *How do you structure the annual programme of training cycles and competition? Can you give a general description of these cycles in terms of objectives?*

**Minichello**

I tend to use a single periodised year broken into a simple first phase of 13-16 weeks length, taking us from the start of training through to the first of January. A second phase of similar length from the New Year until about April is broken into four- or five-week blocks. The length and structure of a pre-comp phase and additional blocks of work depends on when we will have the first competition and the championships or the focus for that year. The indoor season usually gives a five-week block of high intensity low volume training associated with competition before going into the second phase. The number of combined events competitions that an athlete will do depends on their ability to recover following a competition. The longer it takes then the less competitions you will be able to fit in, as I am looking for progress of some kind from one competition to the next.

**Marra**

I have outlined the weekly programme we used starting in late November 2012. (see page 14-16). This was designed with safety in mind. And, as it works out, it gave us the number of reps each week with each skill that the athletes require to develop to their full potential.

*Harry Marra*

**Vinduskova**

Two macrocycles (Indoor/Outdoor) are divided into periods (Preparatory/Competition). These comprise phases (General Preparation, Specific Preparation, Pre-Competition, Competition) and mesocycle themes (work capacity, general strength, aerobic system, Special Work Capacity, Technique Coordination, perfecting exercises at submaximal intensity, competiton preparation – for individual disciplines and combined events). During the indoor season the objective of some coaches in our country is to devote 35-45% of training to the Preparation Phase, thereby creating a strong base for the entire season. Increased work capacity is the basic building block of our preparatory periods.

**Nool**

In my career, I used what could be called standard cycles but I still tried to maintain competition-like intensity to a certain extent throughout the year, so the structure of my programme was perhaps not so clear as for other athletes. In the autumn I emphasised general fitness and stability (through lots of running, jumps, strength training with lower weights/more reps) in order to build basic condition. But I would still sprint occasionally and throw with competition-like intensity. In the winter I kept up the conditioning work but the strength training was a mixture of low weights/many reps and increasingly heavy weights with few reps and I added technique work in all the disciplines. I would have a short competition period to assess where the focus should be in training to come. In the spring I did a lot of technique work, even if I still might have needed additional conditioning work. I did high-quality technique work for the field disciplines and speed training for the running events (short distances/long breaks) and my strength work was mainly heavy weights/low reps. The emphasis was guided by the weaknesses I had identified. The summer was the competition period, so the training was mainly focused on technique work at competition intensity levels. But I also did strength training at least once in every two weeks.

**NSA:** *Coaches build training units around training and activities that are general; related; or competition specific. The "related" covers those that involve similar motor patterns or fitness characteristics to the specifics of an event discipline. You will have your own variations. Are there any that you consider to be fundamental to providing a platform for the "competition specific"?*

**Minichello**

I follow very similar patterns to the competition structure, so hurdles are followed by high jump then shot. I also avoid pairings so I don't have athletes doing both shot and javelin, or long jump and high jump on the same days. I think it is important to be as fresh as possible when doing jumps or specific technical work. Training with fatigue I think risks injury and damages confidence in an athlete. I have one day a week within the programme that is specifically dedicated to lots of conditioning elements, which will also contain low-level movement drills such as skipping or hurdle walkover drills, the sort of work that develops co-ordination as well. I think also time has to be planned for covering any re-hab / pre-hab exercises that have been prescribed by the medical team, as in my experience these seem to slip out of the training.

**Marra**

The most important fundamental in this area that I can suggest is to be absolutely certain that the very first movement in any skill is exact, correct, consistent, and can be carried out in all situations (training, warm-up, competition, under pressure, etc.). Here's why…spin a top on a table, starting it incorrectly. There is no way it is going to correct itself during that rotation; it will only get worse. The same applies to any athlete. I can't emphasise this aspect enough. It is the core of all that I teach.

**Vinduskova**

During the Specific Preparation Phase and Pre-Competition Phase in the spring we recommend training the individual events according to the order they follow in a combined events competition. Sometimes the training order does vary depending on the time availability of the event specific coaches. We consider the placement of the hips and pelvic girdle to be an important technical factor and improper position at take-off/release will be detrimental to the result. This is emphasised in every technique-related activity or training unit.

**Nool**

The correct rhythm is what makes something competition specific for me. I think combined event athletes need to work on key events where you can't afford to lose the feeling of the rhythm of the event at competition speed. In my view, they must do training that simulates this all year round, at least every two weeks. For me, the keys were the 100m training (shorter distances at competition velocity) and the throwing events. The years when I didn't follow this idea I concentrated on discus and shot in the autumn but didn't do the fast work in running. I found that I improved the throwing events but when I started my normal running training later than usual I had lost a certain feeling, which took a long time to get back. That's why I think you have to do something at competition-like intensity for all the events all year round.

**NSA:** *What performance controls and development monitoring processes do you have in place through the annual programme to learn faster and make timely adjustments?*

**Minichello**

I do tests regularly during the year using a combination of lifts in the gym (cleans, snatch, etc.) some power tests (standing long jump overhead shot) and some event specific tests (javelin off three steps etc.). I find having worked for athletes for a while through this you gain a sense of how they are progressing or what they need to achieve in order to know they are ready to compete. During the winter or in the lead up to competitions we use few choice track sessions that give an indication of what may need to be added. However, athletes love to compete and test themselves. Even the most experienced insist that personal bests are all that matter. This can make things difficult for me as a coach if these are not achieved.

**Marra**

I use multi throws (OHB, UHF, DL HOP and PUSH) as a specific guideline to let me know the explosive component of the athletes I coach. It's as simple as that. These skills are

done periodically throughout the course of any training cycle. To learn faster, I employ the use of shadows in each event. I know enough about motor behaviour to understand that there is a direct cross transfer in pathway development if in fact you are doing the drills/skill in a part/relaxed method. We do these shadows often and get this transfer accomplished without the risk of overuse injuries.

**Vinduskova**

We use baseline testing approximately four times per year (2x indoor, 2x outdoor) along with continuous video recording analysis and pre/post training mental state questions, in order to track improvements and make adjustments when needed.

**Nool**

Monitoring is very important but it should be specific to the athlete. I had some standard things I used myself, but I would not think it would be the same for every decathlete; everyone has to find their own way. The important thing was that I compared results to what I had done previously in order to get indicators of where I was and what I needed to do. You know from experience how things feel as much as from the objective results. I knew from the standing long jump test that if I could do three metres I was in good shape for explosive events. For strength I would see how much I could snatch - 100kg being a good indicator. Later in my career I started testing my strength with weight lifting even in the summer. For running and speed I would do 30m with flying start, 6x60m with flying start and 250m every two weeks starting in December and closer to the season going to once per week. Another thing I always did was a maximum bench press and 800m run on Christmas day. This was good for me mentally. I used to think everyone else was resting that day, so I would get something special done.

**NSA:** *Among other things, resilience, resistance, patience and will to win are parts of what sets combined events athletes apart in terms of mental toughness. Can these be developed in athletes? If so, do you have some advice on how that is done and how they can be brought into effective action in competition?*

**Minichello**

Everything can be developed. It is so easy for athletes to put together wishful scores base on accumulation of personal bests and future personal bests. As a coach you have to manage expectations about what performances can they really achieve based on the levels of fatigue the event creates. Mental toughness comes from understanding how an athlete works psychologically during a competition and knowing when to say something or not. You should try to build self-reliance and at the same time try not to transfer your own expectations and anxieties on to the athlete. I have spent time with a psychologist to first understand myself and how I come across in pressure situations and then understanding the athlete and how we behave as a partnership. There are many psychological and management models out there and finding a few that work for you, I think, is of great value to any coach and athlete.

**Marra**

Yes, these qualities CAN be developed in athletes…and in fact, MUST be developed if they are to be successful as a combined event performer. Ashton is a very good athlete, but many others are also very good athletes. I believe Ashton's success is directly linked to his abilitiy to deal with all the nuances that surround a combined event competition. An important role for the coach is to assist the athlete in developing the mental and psychological aspects of the combined events in addition to teaching the skills. It is critical for the outcome.

**Vinduskova**

Most personality traits are developed during childhood and adolescence and are a result of environmental (external) and psychological (internal) stimuli during that period. Because of this great variance in personalities, and the fact that athletes of many different personalities reach successful performance results, we are not sure trying to change individual aspects of mental toughness is effective. Instead,

## Harry Marra's 2013 Winter-Spring Weekly Training Plan for Ashton Eaton and Brianne Theisen-Eaton

### MONDAY

**AM Session**

Warm-up:

Ashton: jog a lap, Brianne: 3 Progressive or jog a lap. Then both do:

1. HH stretch
2. Full medicine ball programme
3. Mirror sprint arms with weights
4. Light striders on/offs (Stretch after each)

Skills (Video each skill):

1. Shot Put: Short, specific warm-up, 4-6 throws full, drills/shadows after
2. Hurdles: Full DS sprint warm-up, plus wall drills, sides, tops, blocks

**11:30 – 14:00**

Lunch, sleep, fluids, relaxation

**PM Session**

Warm-up:

Secondary warm-up plus 10 minutes stretching

Skills (Video each skill):

1. Shot Put ( if not done in AM session )
2. Sand Shock Plyos prior to start of HJ practice
3. High Jump: Drills, skills, jumps (short and full approach)
4. Weight Training: Monday programme
5. 400m: Typically 100m runs in a variety of modes

Recovery:

1. Pool runs and warm-down
2. Contrast, bugs, stretching

### TUESDAY

**AM Session**

Warm-up:

1. Treadmill/jogging
2. Medicine ball wall
3. Sprint drill warm-up
4. On-offs
5. Medicine ball multi-throws
6. Flexibility
7. Pool runs & arms
8. etc.
9. Finish with Shot Put shadow (Review from yesterday, 5-6 minutes max)

**PM Session**

Warm-up:

1. Jog one lap
2. Medicine ball wall 6-8 minutes continually
3. HH stretch for 10 minutes (IT & Groin emphasis)
4. Bubkas and Rope-ups (2 sets)

Skills (Video each skill):

1. Discus: Mirrors, shadows, rhythm, stands, fulls, outdoors/indoors
2. Javelin: Stands, mirrors, single cross, approaches (coach to outline specifics)

Day Wrap-ups:

1. Aggressive multi-throws outdoors and or pull-up/chin-up circuit
2. Bubkas (Ashton) / Rope (Brianne)
3. 30 ABS, Chins, 40 ABS, Pull-ups, 40 ABS, MB Chest, 30 ABS – 5 minutes recovery then repeat

Recovery:

1. Pool runs Lafayettes with jets (12-14 seconds , 5-6 times)
2. Contrast, bugs, stretching
3. Massage

## WEDNESDAY

### AM SESSION

Warm-up:

1. Jog one lap
2. Light stretching
3. HH mobility X's 6 HH with medicine ball
4. Medicine ball slam exercises chest wall, slam downs, OHB both ways
5. Mirror sprint arms with weight (so LJ approach is timed up)
6. Sand pit shock plyos (for specific warm-up of legs prior to LJ practice), DLKTC, DLHTB, Standing LJ, etc.
7. Accelerations (to finalise warm-up for the LJ) on-offs or 30m accelerations (using LJ format of run) or falling 20's/30's, etc.
8. 3-4 x LJ short take-offs on to HJ mat (with landing) Time it up! Place T/O marks at 2.5m and 3m from the pit.

Skills (Video each skill):

1. Long Jump: 3-5 x full approach and take-offs (and/or step offs) followed by 68 x 4 L's shorts with landings either in LJ pit or on HJ mat

**11:30 – 14:30**

Lunch, sleep, fluids, relaxation

### PM SESSION

Warm-up:

Secondary warm-up specific to meet the needs of the events to be practiced, should include the following:

1. Sprint accelerations
2. Lower body stretching
3. Rope-ups
4. Pole runs off to side
5. Bubkas
6. etc.

Skills (Video each skill):

1. Pole Vault: 4's, 5's, 6's, lead-ups include rope-ups, Bubkas, etc., drills/fulls
2. 400m: Variety of 150s, 200s, 250s, 300s, etc.

Recovery:

1. Pool running or treadmill running 5-6 min run at 8 kph
2. Contrast, bugs, stretching/fluids/food

## THURSDAY *****RECOVERY DAY*****

### AM SESSION

Warm-up:

1. Jog one lap
2. Light stretching
3. Striders (stretch after each one)
4. Medicine ball wall 6 minutes continuous
5. HH stretch 10-12 minutes
6. Mirror arms sprint drills with weights

Skills:

1. Shot Put: Shadow 6-10 minutes (maximum)
2. Javelin: Shadow 6-10 minutes (maximum)
3. Weight training: Thursday programme
4. Multi-throws with medicine ball or outdoors with 6.8kg shot (Ashton) or 4kg shot (Brianne) – ABS x 200 (do between weight training and throws exercises)
5. PNF stretching afterwards

Recovery:

1. Pool run (jogging, emphasis place on the word "recovery)
2. Contrast, bugs, stretching/fluids/food

## FRIDAY ****Skill day…SHADOWS AND / OR FULL****

### AM SESSION

Warm-up:

1. Jog one lap
2. Light stretching
3. Full DS sprint warm-up programme
4. Medicine ball with wall & rolls
5. Mirror sprint arms with weights
6. HH stretch 10 minutes
7. Striders or some form of running chosen by the athlete to be certain they are loose band ready to run hills in the PM

Skills:

1. High Jump: Approach work only
2. Discus (Asthon): Drills, starts, stands, rhythm (No full throws today unless legs feel amazingly great. Remember, it's Friday)
3. DS full sprint warm-up drills plus striders in spikes ****
4. Block starts / reacts 20-30m x 3-4****
5. 200-400m hills ****

*******Each of the above can be moved to Saturday (see below)**

Recovery:

1. Pool running
2. Treadmill running 5-6 min run at 8 kph
3. Contrast, bugs, stretching/fluids/food
4. Massage

## SATURDAY

Warm-up:

1. As need for the events to practised but will definitely include:
2. PNF
3. HH Stretch
4. Full medicine ball
5. etc.

Skills:

1. Events to be decided according to individual needs and how the athletes feel at this point in the week.
2. Weight training: Saturday programme
3. DS sprint warm-up drills plus striders
4. Block reacts and fulls as final prep for hill training (if not done on Friday)
5. 200-400m hills (if not done on Friday)
6. If no hill, sand shock plyos (controlled volume)
7. ABS x 200

Recovery:

1. 15 minutes group stretching followed by a debriefing of the week
2. Contrast

## SUNDAY

1. Rest and relaxation
2. Group stretching at 19:30

*Brianne Theisen-Eaton*

*Ashton Eaton*

we believe the mental training and preparation for achieving an optimum arousal state, or "flow" state, is extremely important for the athletes' development of performance enhancing mental factors. In these hurried times, we often see young athletes who are not able to be patient, and with quick increases of specific loads they actually decrease their stamina from both a health and psychological point of view. The foundation is to explain to the athletes that point increases of approximately 100 points are an indicator of proper "growth" and that large point improvements are difficult to repeat.

**Nool**

Many young athletes have to learn that the decathlon is only done when you get past the finish line in the 1500m. They have to develop the ability to concentrate on the discipline at hand and forget the previous event, good or bad, much like a golfer has to forget the previous hole. It is the same thing in the heptathlon. You have to focus on what you are doing and only that; if you think about what the others are doing you will have trouble. In training I would sometimes do five events in different orders and combinations going from one to the next without a specific warm-up but trying to do the best I could in each. The idea was to improve concentration by blocking out everything else that could have been right or wrong about what I was doing. Over the years I developed the ability to find my best on the third attempts. I know some athletes used to recalculate their possible end scores after each event. Doing that helps keep down emotions because you are looking ahead and know what is possible rather than dwelling on negative aspects.

**NSA:** *Can you please give examples of what you build into the programme for active or passive recovery and do you develop techniques for mental, physical or emotional recovery during the competition itself?*

**Minichello**

For physical recovery we use massage, jacuzzi and steam room. Building a number of rest periods into the training plan allows, I think, for emotional recovery. There are of course the rest periods after competitions that are a very necessary part of training.

**Marra**

We train for the running events 100m to 1500m as much in the pool as we do on dry land. Yes! The pool is also used for form running skill development with each athlete. Just prior to Ash's 100m personal best (10.19 sec) he spent 20 minutes in a swimming pool doing relaxed form runs… he will tell you directly that he attributes his fast time to those pool runs. In addition, we always warm down in a pool, especially after Day 1 of a competition. We also use contrast (hot/cold) baths for recovery. Some athletes just like cold but Ash and Brianne both prefer the contrast. At the end of the season we also take at least eight weeks fully away from all athletics related activities. I do not communicate with the athletes and vice versa. We all need our own space/time to re-charge for the rigors ahead in the coming year. Too many coaches over coach and are nit picking their athletes to do this, do that during the off-season. Let it alone….relax.

**Vinduskova**

It is important that combined event athletes find a balance between training work and the final result. This is because, more training does not always mean better results and quite often we witness an improvement in one event at the expense of another. The basis is to know how to rest and regenerate, because everyone knows how to work hard! For active recovery we use yoga, meditation, regeneration (massage, cryobooth, sauna, therapy), swimming, fartlek. For passive recovery we use regeneration or a complete off-day. Mental and emotional recovery is worked on continuously during regular training and through specific conversations about various aspects of the competition. Competition stories from older athletes significantly help to develop the proper preparedness of the younger developmental athletes. In our country, our advantage is that we have a history of great decathletes and therefore young athletes believe that under these conditions they can achieve an

elite level. Finally, the competition schedules for combined events must be closely coordinated to promote recovery.

**Nool**

When I was a young athlete, the focus was on sleeping enough. As odd as it sounds now, even in training I practiced sleeping so that I could rest properly between the events. I would fall asleep with keys in my fingers and when the keys dropped down it was enough and I would be back to work. In terms of the whole training cycle, training camps in warm weather gave me more energy. It was always good to be sitting by the pool after training and on days off. I usually trained six day per week, taking Sundays off. In the winter after the competition period I would take one easy training week and after the summer season I would take two weeks vacation at the end of the year, but it was still active – swimming, running, diving, tennis. It was enough for me.

**NSA:** *So how about you? What do you currently do to refresh your own knowledge and even further improve your effectiveness, and what do you do to manage your own well-being in terms of exercise, nutrition and regeneration?*

**Minichello**

I am constantly reading and talking to coaches for insight it to how they organise and plan their training routines. More and more I am looking to see what can be learned from other sports and what is new. In terms of my own well-being, it is more a case of "not practising what I preach" I play social basketball and a little golf as they offer a competitive challenge, I rarely run or go to the gym. I took my a break from training for the first time in seven seasons this year. Not an example to follow.

**Marra**

Four years of coaching Ash and Brianne here in Oregon have exacted a great toll on me as a coach. It's understandable…expectations for outcomes were high. Ash has improved 1000 points and Brianne nearly 500, so we can say the expectations have been met and then some! This year, I will take three full months of rest and relaxation before we start for 2014. I need this. I had little to no downtime after the Olympics in London because of many circumstances.

**Vinduskova**

Mentally, I read a lot of expert research work on the combined events, participate in conferences and communicate with combined events coaches and athletes-students (Dvoŕák, Karas, Ptáčník, Kupka,Černý, Perun, Svoboda – Klučinová, Lukáš). I also continually teach coaches who specialise in both basic training (for 12 to 15 year-old athletes) and in the combined events. Physically, I do swimming, home gymnastics, bike tours in the summer, downhill and cross-country skiing in the winter and I get physiotherapy and massage. Nutritionally, it is healthy eating (no fast food!), no smoking, red wine only rarely and otherwise no alcohol.

**Nool**

I am now a father, a member of parliament in my country, I run a private athletics school and I have number of positions in national and international sport administration, so you can imagine time is tight for me. With that said, I still manage to take care of myself by training regularly – mostly running and some strength work. A few years back I appeared on the Estonian version of Dancing with the Stars, which was actually a physical challenge. I have even kept up my tradition of doing an 800m time-trial on Christmas day.