



## Training towards the ultimate athletic physique

*This is a continuation of the last article 'What elite functional athletes should look like.'*

I believe if everyone shared similar clean nutritional habits and effective movement patterns, our bodies would all generally look alike. Sure, there would be some genetic variations, but we would all be healthy, lean, and strong. This is what I refer to as your genetic setpoint, where your body is happy and healthy. Reaching and maintaining this setpoint is often the first step in building the ultimate physique with athletes. Once the setpoint has been established and we can truly see the athlete's baseline, we can start programming based on the athlete's goals. Think of this phase as stripping out all the bad habits that an athlete has acquired and building them back with perfect form and habits. This phase can take several weeks or several months per athlete.



The next step is effective programming. Effective programming is referred to as periodization and is based on the athlete and the athlete's desired outcomes. Almost every athlete I have ever worked with has seasons in training. The seasons are typically 'in-season' and 'off-season.' 'In-season' is when the athlete is competing and needs to be performing at their highest level. During 'in-season' the athlete should train at a lower intensity with the goal of staying primed, injury free, and ready to optimize performance. This typically looks like an athlete performing lots of agility, mobility, and balance moves at a moderate intensity. We do not want the intensity to create exhaustion that will impede the athlete's performance at practice or gameday. 'Off-Season' training is when the athlete is not competing and can shift their focus in the gym and practice to their desired hypertrophy goal which is typically strength, speed, and power. Athletes can push harder and cause more damage during the off-season because the fatigue will not impede their performance.

Understanding exercise adaptation is important when designing effective programming. When the body undergoes a stimulus, a signal is sent to the brain to instruct the body on how to react. With continued and consistent signals, the brain will instruct the body on how to adapt to deal with the stress. This adaptation is often a change in amount and types of muscle fibers, but can also be bodyfat stores, vasculature, mitochondrial density, and much more. Everybody has seen the comparison of the sprinter versus the marathon runner. Though they were most likely born with a certain amount of specific muscle fibers that favor their distance, they still have evolved towards the stimulus. The sprinter has thick musculature to be explosive for short periods where the distance runner has thinner muscles for efficiency over long distances. The goal for elite functional athletes is to find some kind of middle ground; to be able to sprint well, run a mile well, throw well, jump well, maybe run a 5k

well, etc. This is why we use decathletes as a functional training goal with most athletes. Check out the build on these elite decathletes! That physique requires very effective periodization! So how do decathletes train so many stimuluses at once? – insert effective periodization. Let's break this down into an easy list.



First off, you must follow programming that keeps the athlete's injury free. We call this the 'foundational/prehab phase.' Perform a comprehensive assessment and see what needs work. Once the athlete is as bulletproof as possible, and we have strengthened their kinetic chain as much as needed, we can move on to more sport specific movement patterns. Staying injury free is the most important step in all of training. Often times, simply the athlete with the most good reps outperforms the competition and the injury free athlete always has more good reps than others. There is an argument for never pushing beyond the 'prehab phase' due to risk of injury. The majority of the movements in the prehab phase are calisthenic based, maybe with some light variable resistance. The athlete's physique will often 'lean out' in the prehab phase by dropping bodyfat and adding muscle symmetrically around their kinetic chain. We call this newfound muscle the athlete's 'suspension', and this baseline is where we see the athletes

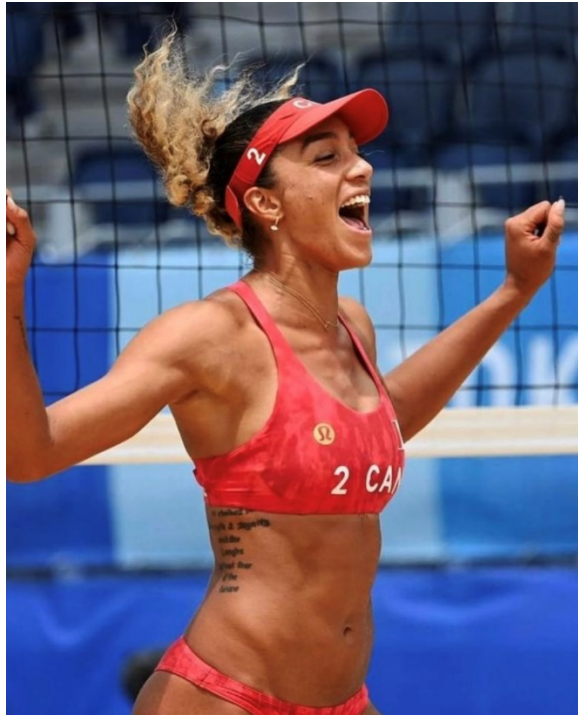
genetic setpoint. This setpoint is kind of a crystal ball for the athlete's future potential.

Once foundational movements patterns have been mastered, the athletes enter Phase 2 of the programming. We call phase 2 'optimization', and this is where we can add resistance or variations to the movements based on the athlete's needs. The movements are often similar to the foundational movements with added tempo, volume, breathwork, environmental changes, etc. This is my favorite phase and often times athletes will exist in Phase 2 with advanced bodyweight movements for years. You would be surprised how much progress athletes can see by simply changing movement patterns and variables. Athletes will continue to add functional muscle to their physique sometimes indefinitely in Phase 2. Phase 2 is the base for the 'in-season' optimization programming for MVP Fitness. *I have been in this phase for many years now with continued results. Phase 3 always seems to injure me as an aging athlete. Two of my favorite aging athletes ever, Laird and Gabby, have figured out how to continually push their limits in their self-made programming, where they utilize pool workouts to minimize impact while maximizing intensity. Check it out at [Learn About XPT: The Extreme Performance Training Program | XPT® \(xptlife.com\)](https://www.xptlife.com)*



The next step in phase 2 is to add these movement patterns to a circuit that matches the demands and duration of the athletes sport.

If you typically get five or ten minutes before a break in your sport, then you should train like this during the 'in-season.' This finished version of Phase 2 will send the adaptation signal loud and clear so the athlete can evolve to the demands of their sport.



Once the Phase 2 movement patterns have been optimized with light resistance and variations, we add heavier resistance and more complex variations to the movement patterns. This is Phase 3 which is normally utilized in the 'off-season.' Phase 3 is the hypertrophy 'adaptation phase' where athletes lift heavier weights and take longer breaks with the primary goal of adding size and strength. Most of the time, we still utilize variable resistance (bands) to minimize injury. We believe resistance bands are the gold standard for athletes adding strength and muscle in the safest possible way. But we also use free weights and much more eccentric work but under very strict guidelines in Phase 3. Momentum is ok on movements if your sport requires it, but never push too far beyond your comfort zone. We see far too many athletes back in phase 1 because their ego led them to push beyond their means.

'In-season' programming usually entails 'two a days;' a circuit-based workout in the morning and practice in the afternoon or vice versa. We tailor the workouts to the week's demands and normally 'taper' prior to performance. The ultimate 'in-season' goal is to keep the athlete injury free, primed, and ready to perform at the drop of a dime. 'In Season' training often lasts 7-9 months and even longer with some sports, which gets super nuanced. Year-round training is very difficult to periodize but as it becomes more common, effective programming is even more necessary. I highly recommend a skilled trainer to help the athlete if they are a 'year-round' performer.

The 'off-season' is often a shorter time frame nowadays and the athletes still practice their sport a few days per week. As mentioned earlier, it is very difficult to add muscle if you are performing endurance with strength work. So, we normally alternate days between strength training and practice/endurance if possible. A typical 'off-season' week would be Monday, Wednesday, and Friday strength training and Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday practice/endurance. The strength workouts would be individual to the athlete's goals. For instance, if they needed lower body strength, we would focus on compound lifts such as squats, lunges, and dead lifts. The strength workouts are normally full body, but we emphasize the athlete's target. It's worth mentioning that legs should be emphasized on almost every athlete in the 'off-season' because the legs are often too fatigued to build during 'in-season' training. Every muscle in the body will benefit from safely exhausting the legs during training. We often tell our athletes that if they want to strengthen their upper body muscles more like chest or biceps, to train legs more. Legs are the biggest muscle groups in the body and should almost 100% of the time with athletes, be trained more often than upper body.



Remember, and I stress, that mixing adaptation signals can be very counterproductive! If you want to have the most functional athletic physique your genetic potential would allow, you must utilize effective periodization and send the right signal at the right time for optimal adaptation. For instance, if the goal is to gain explosive strength in the lower body, we might perform some deficit jumps followed by sled push sprints for a few sets with long rest periods in between. This type of set would signal the body to recruit more type 2 fast twitch muscle fibers. Over the course of the next few days, if you recover correctly, you should respond with muscle hypertrophy and be able to perform the same workout better equipped and more efficiently next time. But if you followed the workout with some endurance work, the body might also send a signal to lean out and atrophy some muscle so the athlete can be more

aerodynamic. Mixed signals are fine if you are a recreational athlete trying to be fit and healthy. But if you are an elite athlete looking to optimize your performance, effective periodization is paramount for your progress.

Many other components factor into the ultimate functional athletic physique. Sleep, stress management, and nutrition weigh in on a comprehensive program and I encourage all athletes to 'dial in' each of these areas for optimal results. Connectivity and mental fortitude are necessary for the longevity of the programming too. Here is an article on athletic nutritional programming to help get you started on nutrition. [Articles – MVP Fitness Training](#).

There are many effective programs out there that accomplish the adaptation responses well. We use the MVP programming that you can find at [Workouts – MVP Fitness Training](#). If you would like to create your own programming, Dr. Andy Galpin is probably the world's most renowned trainer that has helped create most of the programming that the world's most elite athletes follow. I highly recommend looking Dr Galpin up. [Andy Galpin, PhD](#).

If you have any questions regarding your goals, we would love to help out. Please visit [www.mvpfitness.com](http://www.mvpfitness.com) for any questions you may have.

**OPTIMIZING ATHLETES**