

Conditioning Tips for the Rescue Professional:
Prepare for the Worst, Hope for the Best
By John Amtmann, Ed.D.

Sports, mainstream and non-mainstream, can be very challenging mentally and physically. I admire the athleticism of the non-mainstream athlete (climber, kayaker, skier, etc...) as much as the mainstream basketball or football player. It is essential that coaches of all sports understand the requirements of their particular sport, and when I work with athletes I always set up the training program to prepare the athlete for the worst case scenario, but hope for the best overall outcome. For example, a grappling athlete needs to be able to out-work his/her opponent for the full duration of the regulation match AND the overtime round if needed – possibly 6-8 times during a tournament, but hope for a quick win by pin early on in the match. Successful coaches realize this and take the steps to prepare the athletes during the sport practices as well as additional strength and conditioning sessions.

It is just as important for the rescue professional to physically prepare for the inevitable rescue that will require solid physical conditioning. If you think about it, athletes competing on a regular basis have an advantage because they know when they'll be expected to perform. For some athletes, it's weekly or bi-weekly during the season. Some athletes have a full 12 weeks to prepare for their event. It's easy for the coaches to maintain a consistent training regimen when the dates of the events are known. For the rescue professional the big call could be today, tomorrow or 10 months from now. Despite when that call actually is, you will have to be physically prepared.

When I work with the general public, I am much more forgiving when developing exercise programs. If the exercise program is too intense for the 50 year old administrative assistant who hasn't exercised in over 20 years, the person will usually just end up quitting – so it's better to gently train with low intensity than to not train at all. With athletes and/or rescue professionals, however, we have to train with the thought that we are preparing for that worst case scenario. Let's not fool ourselves, a high level of physical fitness is beneficial in performing the basic duties of swiftwater rescue.

The tips I would like to emphasize specifically for the professional rescuer for this edition of *WRI Newsletter*, include:

- Cross Train – train for cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, **and** strength endurance. In future issues we will provide you with time-efficient programs that will address all of these components in one training session per day.
- Train the entire body in a balanced fashion – don't ignore any major muscle group. When the entire body improves in strength overall structural integrity improves and resistance to injury is enhanced.
- Train consistently – realize that your conditioning is directly related to your abilities as a rescue professional. Make it a part of your daily routine...I guess you can take Sundays off.
- Train with intensity – Prepare for the worst case scenario...

...but hope for the best.