

National Federation of State
High School Associations

Coaching NFHS TODAY™



SHARE

SEARCH

Advanced Search

Login

[Home](#) [About Us](#) [Writers' Guidelines](#) [Advertising](#) [Contact Us](#)

Five Steps to Nutrition-driven Sports Performance

By Phil Block, MS, AFAA, SPC

Coaches are great at motivating and training athletes to perform. Innovations in imaging, science-based workout routines and organizational management have improved modern coaching and its delivery in very exciting ways.

Unfortunately, however, our practice still falls short when it comes to some of the more basic skills of athlete management. In particular, sports nutrition and its application seems to remain a mystery to many coaches; and beyond power bars and sports drinks, many coaches do not feel qualified to discuss this with their athletes.

While coaches should be cautious about dietary recommendations, as they form the foundational structure of most athletes' performances, they should be prepared to provide basic dietary science. Good nutrition can make an average athlete great.



Most coaches are unaware of what their athletes eat on a daily basis. There are many research studies demonstrating the consequences of subpar nutrition on performance. These effects cannot be fully recovered through supplements and ergogenic aids (although they can certainly help). It is important to recognize that a poor diet has the greatest effect on the athlete's day-to-day training and not necessarily the "performance trial" or "game." Day-to-day monitoring of an athlete's diet helps to ensure the effectiveness of day-to-day training and results in the best end-performance.

There are several aspects of an athlete's diet that contribute to about 70 percent of the nutrition-driven performance of the athlete, so it is important to focus on these five subjects: caloric intake, nutrient flux, carbohydrate modulation, pre-performance nutrition and recovery nutrition (it sounds more intimidating than it is).

The single, most important determination of an athlete's performance is caloric intake. Almost every sport or performance-based activity has an "ideal" body size and type that helps "guarantee" athletic success. Although there are the "Babe Ruth's" of the world, the majority of the top performers fit the "ideal" mold.

We are wise to learn from nature and study, for instance, the body types that make stars like David Beckham and Michael Phelps. While certainly drive and desire push these individuals to perform at a high level, nature has adapted their bodies into high-performance, sports-specific machines. How often have we encountered the "natural," who due to blessed genetic endowment is perfect for a particular sport? Why can't we "grow" our athletes to make up for this lack of natural genetics?

Perhaps we can, in effect, "grow" our athletes to develop sports-specific bodies, and the primary determinant of this is the lowly "calorie." No matter what you hear, where you hear it or who you hear it from, the laws of physics have never changed and calorie balance is simple physics. When you eat more calories than you expend, you will gain weight, and when you expend fewer calories than you eat, you will lose weight. The complexity of weight loss and gain, unfortunately, is at the individual psychological (and sometimes to a lesser degree, physiological) level. In our athletes, however, this is something we can have a big hand in and change.

Every performance-based athlete must be motivated to monitor his or her own food intake. As coaches, we need to require our athletes to begin recording what and when they eat. This holds the athlete accountable and allows us to get a general idea of the overall diets of our athletes. What football coach wouldn't want to make his or her entire offensive line gain 20 pounds over the next six months? Optimal caloric intake can make this possible. When this is coupled with a great workout routine, it's amazing to see what profound effects very simple day-to-day nutrition monitoring can make on the performance of an entire team.

In many cases, it may be more important to monitor how much an athlete eats before looking at what the athlete is actually eating. Remember, most of us need to learn to walk before we start running, and looking at an athlete's calorie intake is the "walking" of sports nutrition.

The first and most important step in developing nutrition-driven sports performance is ensuring your athletes are eating enough (or are not eating too much if this is the case) food. Coaches should avoid actually "counting calories," but instead simply get the general "picture" as to how much food the athlete needs to consume to maintain an ideal performance weight.

The following guide is an example of how a coach should begin monitoring his or her athletes' caloric intakes.

1. Weigh your athlete(s).
2. Ask your athlete(s) to spend two weeks mentally tracking their food intake. Ask them to focus on when, what and how much they are eating every day (including the weekends).

SMI AWARDS

3. After two weeks, ask your athlete(s) to begin keeping a "food journal," tracking food and information for several weeks. These journals should be specific and detailed, with time of intake, quantity and even brand-names included.
4. Have your athlete(s) share these journals with you.
5. Decide where the athlete needs to go (weight gain, weight loss), and make recommendations accordingly.
6. Re-weigh the athlete(s) every two weeks to monitor progress.

About the Author: Phil Block is on the staff at Southwest Sports Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For more information about sports nutrition, contact Block at phil@swsinm.com or visit the SWSI Web site at www.swsinm.com.



Copyright ©2011 National Federation of State
High School Associations. All Rights
Reserved.

National Federation of State High School Associations
PO Box 690 • Indianapolis, IN 46206 • PHONE: 317.972.6900 • FAX:
317.822.5700



NFHS High School
Hall of Fame



National Interscholastic
Athletic Administrators
Association

[Login](#) | [Advanced Search](#) | [Event Calendar](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Home](#)

Powered By [NimbleUser](#)