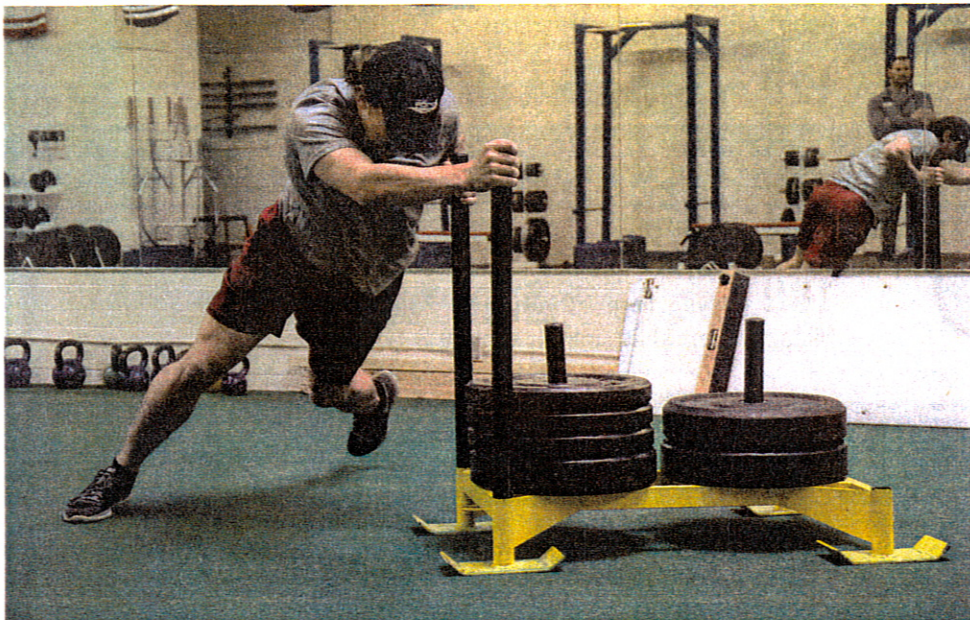


TRAIN LIKE A TORTOISE, PLAY LIKE A HARE

Hockey is a game of short-burst power, strength on the puck and the ability to repeat those feats over the course of a game. Obviously, when it comes to play on the ice, a hare would fare a lot better than a tortoise. When it comes to training, though, it pays off to take the tortoise's approach.



Aesop's "The Tortoise and the Hare" can be applied to countless situations, and it actually illustrates something that's happening in youth conditioning these days. Part of our job as professionals is to inform families of the best training practices for their young athletes, and this fable describes a lot. Because of the increasing intensity of youth sports and the rising demand for "extracurricular" training like speed work, strength training, and private lessons, there are now many options available for each of those demands. The problem is, many of the "professionals" who run these sessions may not have the education or credentials to be fit for coaching young athletes. Take for example the "former athlete" who played at a higher level than most, who coaches youngsters now that his playing career is over. In strength and conditioning, many times what happens is these new coaches fall back on the training they did as an athlete, and simply apply that to the crowd they are working with. It's the "well, it worked for me" mentality. The problem with this is there have been many advances over the last 10 years that have increased safety and improved the effectiveness of the workouts dramatically. So, to stick with the old outdated ways of doing things is not overly effective and is also

taking unnecessary risk with young athletes (check out a more in-depth discussion about these ideas on our youth training roundtable discussion for the Strength Coach Podcast, Episode 210, on Strengthcoachpodcast.com)

One of the main factors that affects the youth training landscape is the thought that for a workout to be effective, it should be very high intensity. This is another way that people are treating young athletes like mini adults, which is not the case. Certain methods of high intensity interval training have been popularized in the media and are now being applied to kids. Some parents love it because their daughter "gets her butt kicked" every time she works out there, but the truth is that's not the safest or the most effective way to train a young athlete. Here's where I'm reminded of "The Tortoise and the Hare." Let's take a look at two very different styles of training that these 2 animals might undertake.

THE HARE: The Hare trains five days a week at facilities that crank up the intensity to full blast for a month or two, scream, yell, pile on the weight, and push athletes to the brink. It's really tough, but hey, he leaves sweaty and tired

and isn't that what it's all about? This kind of training is usually followed by several months off (once a sport season begins), because who has the time or energy to keep that up in-season? So the Hare goes through these intense, intermittent bouts of training, followed by periods of little to no strength training, but boy, does he work hard for a month at a time.

THE TORTOISE: The Tortoise makes a modest two day a week commitment, and knows he is going to stay consistent with it for the year. The intensity is up to him, but since he has the support of caring coaches, and isn't burned out from insane workouts, he pushes himself to get stronger in each session. The movements are challenging but unsexy, there's not a lot of trendy equipment to use, and every movement has a purpose (that isn't just "to make him tired"). He will make some minor gains over the first month, but with a focus on quality and a commitment to longer-term training, the improvements will start piling up and at the end of the first year you will see a completely different Tortoise!

I'm guessing (hoping!) you know who wins this race. When young athletes are developing, the name of the game should be slow and steady improvement. Please don't misunderstand me here. The tortoise still goes fast in training, like working on sprints, power development and plyometrics. He still works hard and gets tired occasionally. We still push the tortoise in training, but the idea is to give small doses of stress in each session. This gives his body a chance to mature, adapt and recover from consistent levels of manageable stress instead of being buried by it.

Training like a Tortoise may not be sexy or exciting, but when he gets to the finish line, he will be healthier, stronger and in front of the Hare. By applying the "smallest effective dose" over the long term, young athletes learn to be fast, efficient, and powerful, which are exactly the same attributes they need out on the ice.

Let's train like a tortoise, baby!

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