

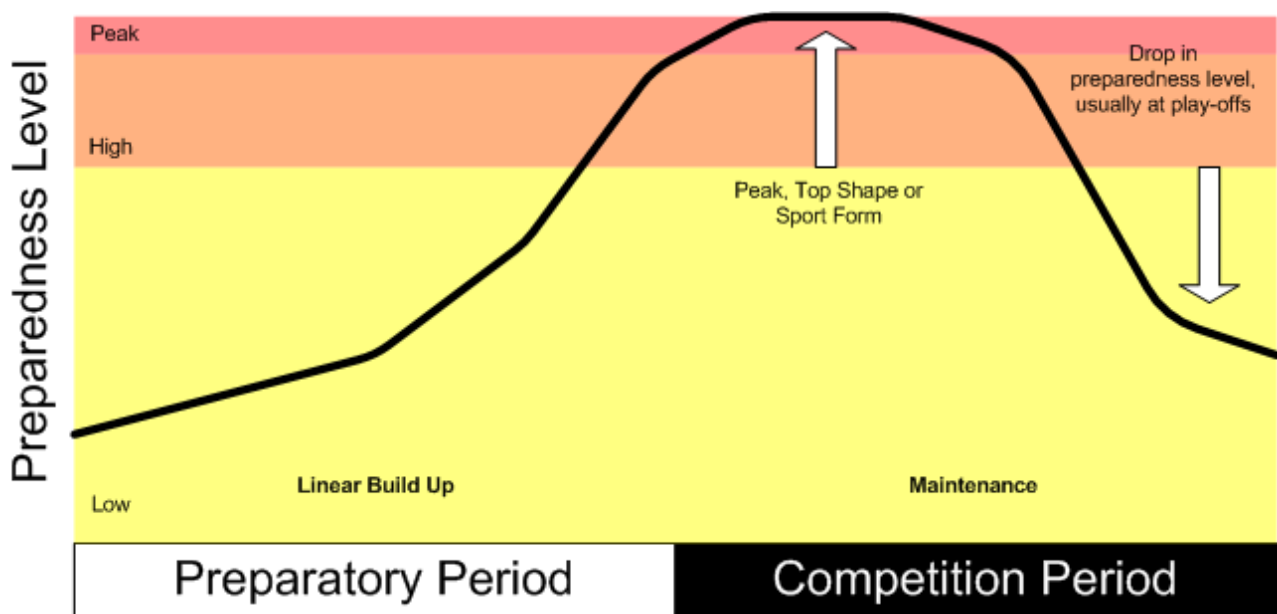
Planning the Competition Period in Soccer

Mladen Jovanović

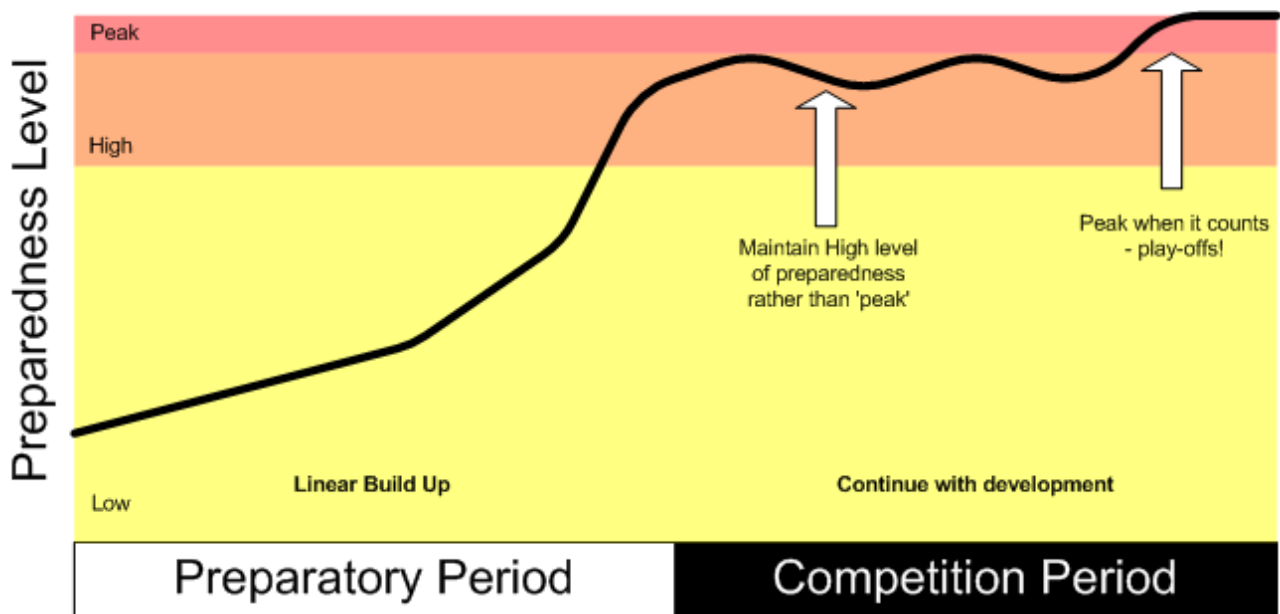
Soccer, as we all know, is very complex sport. When I say complex, I mean that success in soccer is dependent on lot of factors, individual and collective (team). Individual factors are usually technical, tactical, psychological and physical preparedness, with numerous sub-factors among each of them. Team factors are especially complex and depend on team organization, style, cooperation, team spirit, communication and other numerous factors.

The goal of training is to bring up those factors to an appropriate (maximum?; optimal?) levels, and also during the important time of the year. The problem is that 'important time of the year' is longer and longer in modern soccer competitions.

Conventional wisdom suggests that preparedness should be increased during the preparatory period and peaked (reaching of 'sport form' or 'top shape') during the competition period. But the problem is that the 'peak' cannot be held for long, and usually after a peak there is a drop in quality of performance. This wave-like cycles are something that is natural and normal. Another suggestion is that preparedness developed in preparatory period should be 'maintained' during the competition period via maintenance loads. The second problem is that the competition period is longer than preparatory period in most of the cases, thus maintenance is not an option, due the fact that you simply cannot maintain something that is not developed in the first place. This two suggestions (peak and maintenance) comes from individual sports with short competition period, and it is questionable whether this approach is appropriate for long season sports such as professional soccer. This conventional wisdom may be also called in another names: traditional periodization, linear system, etc, etc.



A possible solution to this problem may be two common sense suggestions: (1) do not peak too early, and (2) do NOT maintain preparedness, but rather work on its further development (but with clearly defined priorities). Theoretically this may look like depicted on the following picture.



The following questions may arise from the mentioned theoretical approach: (1) how to avoiding 'peaking' too soon, and (2) how to continue with development of preparedness in competition period without overtraining and burning-out and without affecting match performance negatively?

In his book 'Total Soccer Fitness' (2007), Ian Jeffreys suggested the usage of 'summated microcycle' during the competition period (in-season), which stimulated me to develop this 'theoretical' solution to the mentioned problems. I say 'theoretical' for the reason that I haven't tried this approach in practice yet, due the reasons that I will not adress here, so basically this is a theoretical solution which have to be checked in practice.

The Solution

Those who have read my 'manual' – *Physical Preparation for Soccer*, originally published at www.soccerspecific.com, are fammiliar with my 'systematic' approach that splits the training system into following components:

1. Technical work component
2. Tactical work component
3. Speed training component
4. Strength training component
5. Plyometric training component
6. Work Capacity component
7. Metabolic Conditioning component

Each of the mentioned seven components have its own goals, methods, loads and means[general, specific, competition], along with classification of type of fatigue they develop or CNS impact [for more info see the 'manual'].

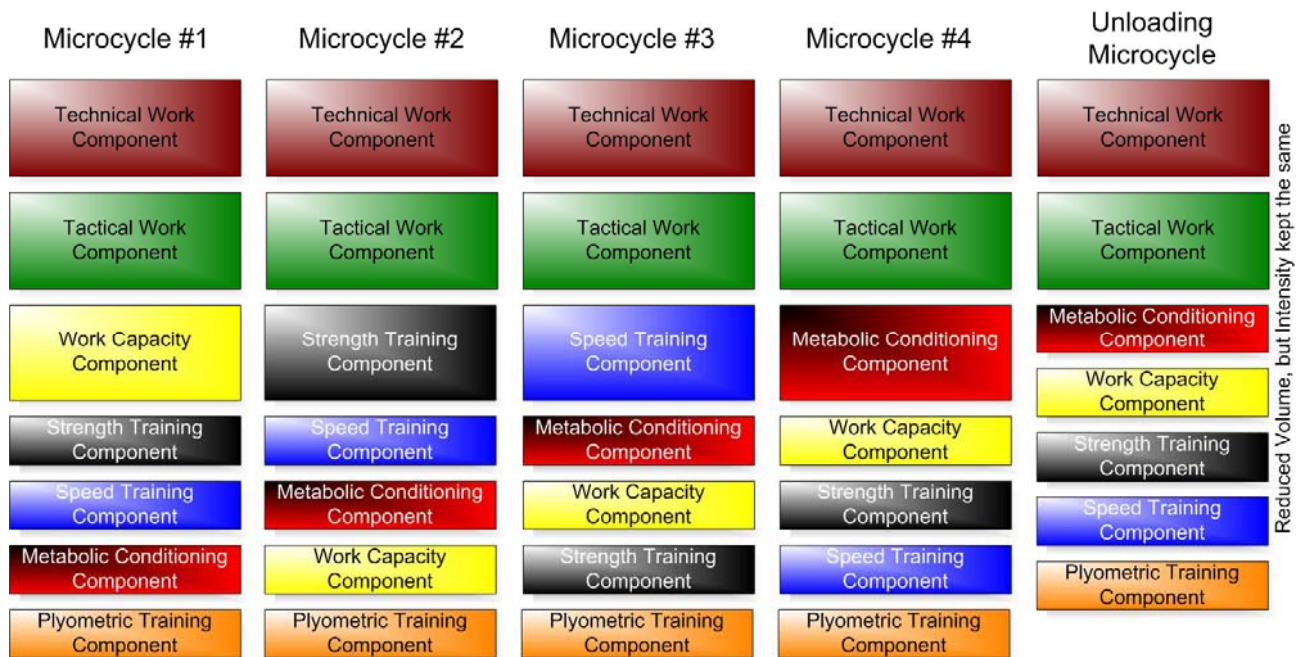
Since the priority in competition period is Technical and Tactical development (emphasis of *Technical* and *Tactical Work Components*) and yet all other components should continue to be developed (according to this model and authors opinion) , the question arise how to continue to develop all seven components without overtraining or limiting crucial technical and tactical training in filled competition calendar?

The solution to this problem is simple – 'summated microcycle'. In summated microcycle, *Technical* and *Tactical work* is allways emphasised, while emphasis on other 5 components is

rotated every 1-2 weeks. The only exception to this rule is *Plyometric training component*, which is never especially emphasized, to prevent too much joint stress in competition period. Yet, this doesn't mean that there is no plyometric activities, just they do not get their special emphasis.

This kind of organization of training will allow great Tactical and Tactical development, along with physical development without overtraining and overburning.

Following whole 1-2 'rotations' of emphasis of all Components, one 'unloading' microcycle may be planned. In this 'unloading' microcycle there is no emphasis on any other component except *Technical* and *Tactical Work Components*, but still training structure is kept the same, with intensity maintained and volume reduced to appropriate amount (i.e. 60%) to allow recovery and 'refill', without loss of preparedness level.



The example usage of this approach for 16 weeks long competition period (first/second half season) may be something like this:

- wk1: Work Capacity
- wk2: Strength
- wk3: Speed
- wk4: Metabolic Conditioning
- wk5: Work Capacity
- wk6: Strength
- wk7: Speed
- wk8: Metabolic Conditioning
- wk9: Unload 60% of Total Training Volume
- wk10: Work Capacity
- wk11: Strength
- wk12: Speed
- wk13: Metabolic Conditioning
- wk14: Work Capacity
- wk15: Taper 60% of Total Training Volume (play offs)
- wk16: Taper 30% of Total Training Volume (play offs)

Specific sequencing of emphasis depends on team evaluation, strengths, weaknesses, competition calendar, opponets etc, etc. Bench guys may have little bit different emphasis, or additional strength training session.

Taper at the end of competition period is actually 'unloading' period with progressively reduced volume of training, but same intensity and training structure. Taper is necessary to allow peak, reduce fatigue and overreaching without drop in preparedness and thus performance.

Utilizing this approach we solved the mentioned two problems: (1) we avoided 'peaking' too soon (by rotating emphasis), and (2) we continued with development of preparedness in competition period without overtraining and burning-out with 'emphasis switching'. 'Waves' in preparedness would be induced by emphasis switch and opponents, for example when opponent is weaker, training volume for a given microcycle may be increased, or if opponent is very strong training volume for given microcycle may be reduced. This way the 'peak' is avoided by constant variation in training, its emphasis and means used and volume dictated by opponent, travel, etc. Taper at the end of the season (or half-season), will help to express real preparedness without fatigue, overreaching.

Anyway, the question is how to implement this in real-life week schedule and how to actually 'emphasise' a given training component? It is easy – just increase the frequency of training aimed at improving certain component. For example, if speed training is done once per week on 'normal' weeks, during speed emphasise microcycle it is done twice per week, etc. Thus, in this model the frequency of training determines emphasis of the week. Here are the hypothetical examples of different microcycles:

Work Capacity Emphasis

Day	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	Warm-up	Work Capacity 'Recovery'	OFF	Speed Plyos Strength <i>LowerBody</i>	Technical Work Tactical Work Strength <i>UpperBody</i>			Warm-up
Evening	Match			Technical Work Tactical Work Work Capacity	Technical Work Tactical Work Metabolic Conditioning	Technical Work Tactical Work Work Capacity	Technical Work Tactical Work	Match

Strength Training Emphasis

Day	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	Warm-up	Work Capacity 'Recovery'	OFF	Speed Plyos Strength <i>TotalBody</i>	Technical Work Tactical Work	Technical Work Tactical Work Strength <i>TotalBody</i>		
Evening	Match			Technical Work Tactical Work Metabolic Conditioning		Technical Work Tactical Work Work Capacity	Technical Work Tactical Work	Match

Speed Training Emphasis

Day	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	Warm-up	Work Capacity Recovery	OFF	Speed Plyos Strength <i>LowerBody</i>	Technical Work Tactical Work Work Capacity	Speed Technical Work Tactical Work Strength <i>UpperBody</i>		
Evening	Match			Technical Work Tactical Work Metabolic Conditioning		Technical Work Tactical Work	Technical Work Tactical Work	Match

Metabolic Conditioning Emphasis

Day	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	Warm-up	Work Capacity Recovery	OFF	Speed Plyos Strength <i>LowerBody</i>	Technical Work Tactical Work Work Capacity	Technical Work Tactical Work Metabolic Conditioning		
Evening	Match			Technical Work Tactical Work Metabolic Conditioning		Technical Work Tactical Work Strength <i>UpperBody</i>	Technical Work Tactical Work	Match

Unload Week

Day	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	Warm-up	Work Capacity Recovery	OFF	Speed Plyos Strength <i>LowerBody</i> Lower volume	Technical Work Tactical Work Strength <i>UpperBody</i> Lower volume			
Evening	Match			Technical Work Tactical Work Work Capacity Lower volume	Technical Work Tactical Work Metabolic Conditioning Lower volume	Technical Work Tactical Work	Technical Work Tactical Work	Match

Please note that mentioned examples are only hypothetical and depends on lot of factors (players evaluation, goals and context). Yet, some principles in microcycle design were taken into account: speed training when fresh as possible, CNS high intensity training on the same day, strength and speed training (high quality demand) not on the same training session as metabolic conditioning and work capacity training, or even not on the same day (if possible), easy days, etc, etc.

It must be said that bench guys may have their own structure of microcycle (and thus emphasis). It is also interesting to note that players may switch from bench to first team during the season. This way the coach plan the 'shape' (or sport form) of the key players and manage to qualitatively cover the full competitive season. For example, bench guys may have two full-body strength training sessions, while first team have lower/upper split, where 'lower' is done as far away from the upcoming match to keep the legs fresh as possible. Again, everything depends on goals and their priorities, along with context where those goals must be reached.

Another suggestion that may be given is that microcycles where two games are played per week may be considered as work capacity emphasis and planned accordingly.

I hope I gave you some information to consider. Please note that more detailed suggestions are not possible, due the fact that there is not good or bad in training, but rather optimal or not for a given set of goals, circumstances and athletes you deal with.

Mladen Jovanović is a head strength and conditioning coach in F.C. RAD in Belgrade. Mladen is about to graduate at Faculty of Sport and Physical Education at University in Belgrade. His final paper is titled 'Training and testing agility in sports'. Mladen plans are to emigrate after graduation and to continue his studies regarding physiology of HIIE sports and also continue his profession of strength and conditioning coach, preferably in soccer. Mladen can be reached via email: dux82@gmail.com