Human Kinetics

Hashtag *#TrainingLoad2016*—Spreading the Word

Some 20-odd years ago one of our mentors said, "You can't manage what you don't monitor," words that still hold true today. Monitoring the load placed on athletes in both training and competition has become a "hot topic" in sport science, with journals displaying an exponential increase in empirical- and applied-research publications in this field. Multi-million-dollar industries have even been created aimed at developing new software and technologies to allow us to better quantify the internal and external loads placed on athletes[1] and help protect them from nonfunctional overreaching, injury, and illness.

Despite the bourgeoning interest in this area, much of what is known about athlete-load monitoring still comes from personal experiences and anecdotal information or remains unpublished.[2] To help address this issue, Aspire Academy hosted the "Monitoring Athlete Training Loads—The Hows and Whys" conference from February 23 to 25, 2016, in Doha, Qatar. The conference featured 33 presentations by multidisciplinary experts from around the world and attracted a capacity audience of 240 delegates (including ~150 internationals from 39 different countries) comprising sport scientists, coaches, and athletes. The conference program included both presentations and expert-panel sessions, with the latter being an open Q&A format focused on real-world application of the research and practices. Sixteen young investigators were also awarded invitations to present their research findings, as they are representative of the future of this area.

Interest in the conference extended way beyond those who attended, as highlighted by the fact that the conference hashtag, #TrainingLoad16, trended on Twitter throughout its duration and reached over 1.36 million followers. Furthermore, videos of the conference presentations posted online (http://www.aspire.qa/trainingload2016/sessions.html) have been viewed tens of thousands of times and still continue to attract worldwide interest.

After the conference, delegates were surveyed on their satisfaction with the event, with the vast majority of responses being extremely positive. Proof of this was that a few of the presenters and numerous delegates actually stated that it was the best conference they had attended! So what made this conference so successful? The conference organizers and guest editors of this edition sat down and reflected on this question. Following are our key conclusions and lessons learned that may benefit future events:

- *Conference Theme:* Since monitoring training loads is currently such a hot topic, interest was obviously sparked in potential delegates and followers. The subtext of the conference was research to practice, and delegates appreciated the combination of theory and application. As innovation continues, future events should capture advances in evidence-based practice.

- *Quality Speakers:* There was a very good mix of established world-leading authorities and new up-and-coming investigators, leading to a vibrant and dynamic interaction in both the conference and the social program.

- *Targeted Content:* Offer a wide range of multidisciplinary presentations covering areas such as contemporary research, practical applications, and future directions. Also, ask speakers to provide the audience with some "take home" messages.

- *Conference Schedule:* Keep the presentations and activities relatively short. Include regular breaks to keep delegates engaged and offer a variety of social activities. Networking is a key aspect of a good conference, so timetables should facilitate it.

- *Operational Issues:* Advertise the conference early to create expectations and interest in attending. Select a suitable venue (comfortable seating, air conditioning, good transport links, Wi-Fi access, etc). Keep delegate costs to a minimum with reasonable fees, small concessions, and scholarship offers, wherever possible, to help attract more participants. Also, brief your staff; there's nothing like friendly efficient conference staff to make delegates feel well cared for.

- *Conference Size:* Small boutique-style conferences have the advantage of being more intimate and less intimidating, thereby allowing delegates to more easily interact and expand their professional and friendship networks.

- *Record/Share It:* Not everyone who wants to attend a conference will be able to make it, and even those who do may miss some presentations. To address this, encourage and support the publication of presentations, the creation of networks, and the online posting of presentation videos or notes. Such resources help conferences stay in the minds of the presenters and delegates long after they are over.

- *Have Fun:* If you keep the conference atmosphere relaxed you can help guarantee that your attendees will be relaxed, as well.

Training-load monitoring has become ubiquitous in the world of professional sport. It helps inform the attainment of peak performance, protects against injury, and provides an evidence-based and systematic approach to management decisions. With the range of innovations in both hardware and software and the emergence of ever-more-complicated analytics, the future possibilities in this field will become increasingly exciting.

Taking into account the success of this conference and to further extend its impact and legacy, the Aspire Academy has partnered with *IJSPP* to produce this open-access special-edition supplement, in which a series of contemporary reviews and original research authored by some of the conference presenters is published. We trust that you will enjoy reading these papers, that they will be of benefit to you in your future research or practice, and that this knowledge will provide a powerful and impactful resource for the next decade of development in monitoring the load on athletes.

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References

1. Thompson WR. Worldwide survey of fitness trends for 2016: 10th anniversary edition. *ACSM Health Fitness J.* 2015;19:9–18.
2. Halson SL. Monitoring training load to understand fatigue in athletes. *Sports Med.* 2014:44(Suppl 2):S139–S147.