

What is Performance Enhancement?

By John Hayley

I have a deal for you.

You drive a fancy new min-van. It's got all the hoity-toity TV screens, DVD players and cup holders in it.

I drive a cool new sports car. I can take turns at 50 mph, and accelerate and decelerate on a dime.

Now, let's swap engines. Your mini-van now has all the power of my sports car...but here's the catch: The steering system, brakes, tires and suspension all stay in my sports car.

When it comes to fitness training, this is how many of us treat our bodies. Your body looks great, but does it work as well as it looks? Sitting on machines can have a great impact on how your body looks, but can hamper you greatly when it is time to take that body out of the gym.

This article will focus on three overlooked components to many fitness programs and how giving them the attention they deserve can help you improve your performance and decrease the chances of injury in sports or participating in the game of life. Those three areas are: Core Strength, Agility/Dynamic Balance, and Useable Strength.

Core Strength

You may be wondering, just what is the "core" when we discuss Core Strength?

It is all of the muscles that act on and stabilize the trunk area of the body. The core has many functions. It can flex, extend, laterally flex, rotate and stabilize. For example, in sports, most of this happens simultaneously. So why, then, for most of us does core training consist of merely sit-ups and ab-crunch machines? That is similar to taking that sports car and driving strictly straight ahead. Remember, the core is all of the muscles. Those include your butt, hamstrings, quads, low back, abs, and obliques. So get off that ab-machine and grab a medicine ball!

Medicine Ball Exercise

Start with your feet about shoulder-width apart. Bring the ball down to your right foot by pivoting on your toes to the right, bending your knees, and leaning forward with your trunk. Then bring the ball back over your left shoulder by reversing the pivot of your feet, standing up and rotating your trunk to the left. Do that 10 times and then repeat by bringing the ball from your left foot over your right shoulder. Start slowly and gradually increase the speed of your movement and weight of the ball.

You have just flexed, extended, laterally flexed, rotated and stabilized as well as activated the musculature in your lower body. Don't be surprised if this movement looks eerily similar to an overhand serve in tennis, a home-run swing in softball, or even turning the soil over in the garden—train the way you use your body. Emphasize the "go" muscles rather than the "show" muscles!



Hayley doing the 4 Corner Drill.

Agility/Dynamic Balance

You may be thinking, "But I'm not a serious athlete!"

Agility/Dynamic Balance goes beyond courts and fields, though it does enhance your ability to quickly and precisely change direction. Sure, if you are quicker and more agile, then you will be a better athlete. But even more importantly, it will help you stay healthy, which should be priority #1.

Train your body to not only have better balance but to also get those feet off the ground faster. Don't let your center of gravity control you, because once it does, you are guaranteed to visit the orthopedic surgeon. Leave him alone—he already has a nice enough car. Get off that treadmill and elliptical trainer and set up some cones!

4 Corner Drill

Set up 4 cones in a box shape about 5 yards apart from each other. Start at the cone on the bottom right. Jog to the first cone, shuffle left to next cone, jog backwards to the next cone and shuffle right to the last cone. Work on staying as close to the cones as possible and try to be as efficient and balanced as possible. Take away all unnecessary steps. Once your technique is good, increase your speed.

Make this exercise part of your warm-up every day before workouts and/or game/practice rituals. It is also good to mix this in as "active rest" in between sets of weight training. After all, a pivotal way to avoid injury is to be agile and balanced when you're tired.

Useable Strength

So where exactly do they put the leg extension machine on the field?

Useable strength is strength that you can easily transfer onto the courts or fields that you play. Most people spend a lot of time sculpting lean, muscular legs on a leg extension machine. Is that really how your legs work in real life, though? Drop the machine and pick up your body!

Single Leg Squat

Grab onto a bar or pole with your hands at chest height. Pick up your left foot up. On your right foot, keeping the heel on the ground, stick your butt out and bend at the knee, trying to get your butt as low to the ground as possible. It's OK to lean a little forward but try to

Photo by Lee Balgemann

keep the shoulders back as much as possible. Also make sure your knee does not travel past your big toe. Do 10 reps; repeat with the left leg. To advance the exercise, try to do it without holding on to anything.

Even while you might be on both feet at the same time while playing sports, the distribution of weight and strength is never equal. The key to staying on top of your game, and away from injury, is to make sure that all of your body is in balance and of equal

strength.

It now appears that your mini-van has gained cult status. No one has ever seen a van with that type of handling and acceleration before. But if you want to keep that van on the road and out of the body shop, remember that you'll need to keep working on the three key areas we've covered: core strength, agility and useable strength. So even if your van never makes it to the court or field, realize that you will be taking it to the home, office or just trying to keep up with the kids. You will need all three components to stay on top of your game and injury free.

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Spin For Kiwanis Kids

In 1986, George Hood established a new Guinness World Record for jumping rope, going 13-plus hours. But someone broke the mark before Guinness published its next edition.

Last January, the 49-year-old Aurora man took another crack at a Guinness World Record—82 hours on a stationary "spin" cycle. He captured headlines by going for nearly 92 hours [actual spinning time: 85 hours with allowed breaks] at the Five Seasons Sports Club in Burr Ridge while raising \$30,000 for families of fallen police officers.

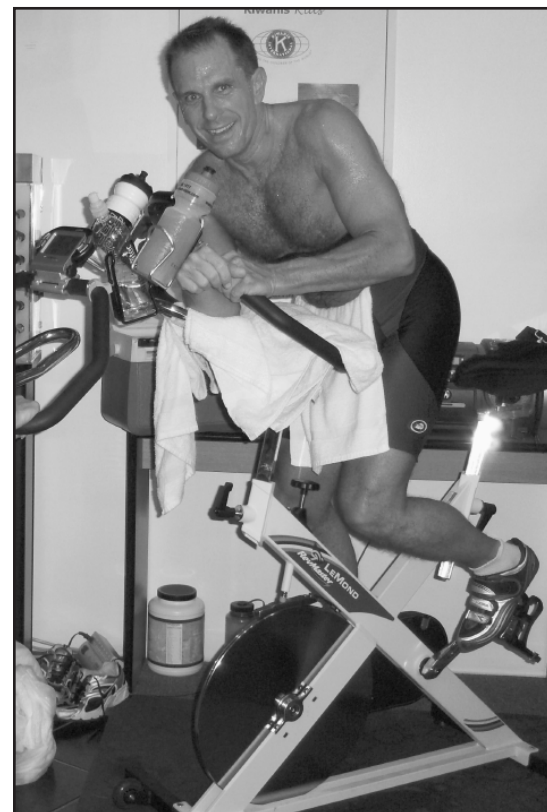
In late April, Guinness World Record officials regretfully informed Hood that his January ride would not receive the Guinness certification because of an administrative technicality. Ironically, his apparently successful January bid had been stymied by volunteers' bookkeeping errors.

Always up for challenge and opportunity, Hood, at the time was already working on his next project; a fund raising 101 hour ultra spin marathon requested by the Kiwanis Club of Willowbrook-Burr Ridge. Billed as The George Hood Century 'Spin' For Kiwanis Kids, the ultra spin is set to take place at the Four Seasons from Tuesday, July 10th through Saturday, July 14th, to benefit the Kiwanis' Twin Lakes Camp for children and young adults with special needs.

Twin Lakes was founded in 1910 by Chicago teacher, Florence Prouty Robinson, who was the first educator to teach a crippled children class in the City's public school system in 1899. In 1947, the camp was taken over by the Kiwanis organization. Located just 90 miles southeast of Chicago, the 15 wooded acre camp site continues to be a summer haven for children today.

Hood's decision to honor this request was an easy one to make, "I'm inspired by how these kids respond to the adversity in their lives," said the DEA supervisory special agent. Supported by a core of Kiwanis volunteers, Hood hopes to top the funds raised from his January spin.

To see how you can contribute by getting involved visit www.RideGeorgeRide.org or call Matt Baron at 708-860-1380. -CWM



Spin Master, George Hood's training schedule varies like that of a marathon runner. There are days when he gets a "quick" 3 hour spin in, (sometimes getting up at 1 in the morning to do it), and other days when he must revise his work schedule and private life around a grueling 25 hour ride. With limited allowed breaks, Hood also had to condition himself for sleep deprivation over the course of the 5 day event.

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