



THE ATHLETIC TRAINING AT CLAUDIO RANIERI'S LEICESTER: IDEAS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

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Abstract

What the football trainer Claudio Ranieri has held up as a real miracle, in the Premier League's season 2016, it has been recognized much of the credit to the point where the Italian trainer was nicknamed King Claudius. But what were the keys that have allowed his team to win Premier League? Ranieri has used innovative methods or he simply adapted classical methods to the group? What role did the athletic training in all this? This article is trying to analyze all these questions, with particular attention to athletic training.

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JEL classification: I20, I21

Introduction and content

"The mentality is the first thing that makes the difference" – it's probably the first concept emerges from the technical interviews with Ranieri. He was able to set up the game and the team's trainings not only according to their characteristics but also according to what were their needs. This has resulted in 101% efficiency, something that many other famous coaches can not achieve. Also by strengthening an already united group he has created a congenial environment through the characteristics of the players and staff.

From a methodological point of view, other phrase is mirroring his football philosophy: *"I don't like to say that we do schemes on offense, football is played with a very good organization in defence, then in the final third it depends on our ideas"*. Obviously this is a game model that blends easily with the way of playing Premier. In summary, having an organized defense along versatile and intelligent forward players (hence unpredictable) is the main technical and tactical thinking. This approach makes even more difficult the job of the analysts from opposing teams, which is still the most important source of information about the rivals.

The component of athletics in Leicester's training

From the athletic point of view, the Ranieri's teams have always done a good end of the seasons. Happened to Parma 2006/07 with a recovery salvation

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and A.S. Roma in 2009/10 in the year of the comeback on Internazionale Milano. Precisely, in this two seasons, the technician has entered in “rush” mode, so it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the preparation is not related to him. This always reinforces the hypothesis of the most of those who believe what the motivation is important to keep the right intensity in trainings and “*really give everything*” in game.

Not surprisingly, according to the players in the past season he decided to give *one more day of rest* to the players (Wednesday), concentrating two short bursts of weakly peak loads (presumably on Tuesday and Thursday). This is not typical for an Italian coach, usually used to manage one small load, but more “modulated” in the middle of the week. This has been possible to the big dedication and commitment (higher than the norm, according to the technician) of the players in all workouts.

Elements of athletics training of Leicester

The most peculiar aspects of athletics in training management are provided by an article published on the BBC website called “The science behind the title”, which shows that the reality is a lot more calculated.

Diligent owners, resourceful scouting and an effervescent manager have played the telling part. But an innovative sports science and medical team, carefully integrated into the decision-making process, has created a perfect model for success.

Leicester are not alone in using cutting-edge technology in the Premier League, of course, but using beetroot shots as a performance enhancer and ice chambers to improve recovery do mark them out from the crowd.

The key difference is how manager Claudio Ranieri includes them in his plans. As former Liverpool fitness and conditioning coach Darren Burgess told BBC Sport: “Quite often, the coaches don't listen.”

The result? A team that has suffered the fewest injuries, according to Physioroom.com and used fewer players than any other Premier League club this season. Perfect for a team with relatively limited resources that employs a fast counter-attacking game.

In order to understand how the example of Leicester can be useful for the athletic program of others, there are some specific elements of their athletic training resumed next:

1. *Not have lots of cup* - it represents the variable that more than others has a positive effect on athletic programming, thinking that Leicester rested (Wednesday) when the other rival teams to championship had to deal midweek. This made it possible to recharge the batteries and be able to recover fuel throughout the whole week. Not surprisingly, Ranieri's team had fewer injuries of all the others and as a result was able to use less total players in the season, allowing himself (more often than others) to field the best.

2. *Keep strong upon the signs of medical staff* - many medical staff (teams



of British and not) complain that coaches do not always take into account their suggestions. Not infrequently some players are made to play to the limit of the accident, with the risk of subsequent absences from matches in the event of injury then. In this type of decision (when it comes to cases "to the limit"), heavy weight's got the coach; Ranieri has been recognized by his staff as *a coach more than others listened to their suggestions*, definitely helping the work of prevention and treatment set up by the medical staff. We recall that we had already dedicated a post to the relationship between accidents and results, taking a cue from a major study, which found in its professional teams a correlation between injury in the season and the final ranking. On this should reflect primarily the coaches of amateur teams, which often fielding players in "dubious" athletic conditions (at risk of injury), only for the "fear" of losing a game, or at least to be excused.

3. *Careful planning and assessment training load* - as already mentioned above, the weekly programming foresaw two load intense peaks (at the beginning and after the middle) and the rest day on Wednesday . In the "standard week" of the other teams, it tends to keep the medium to high load on the central part of the week (Tuesday through Friday), but *by modulating the type of stimulus* (Aerobic, Strength, and Speed specific works). Not only that, probably (we deduce from the findings of the BBC article) the loads to which Ranieri submitted its players, had a high level of specificity (work a lot with the ball), to allow you to make the most of *limited time available*. This, however, allowed his boys to remain highly motivated (we all know that the football players just like to run without the ball) and maintain higher intensity than normal during specific exercises. In conclusion: little work but very specific and high intensity ; *if the accident rate remains low and if you have motivated players, it is definitely a particularly effective strategy*.

4. *Training on horizontal force* – the efficiency of Leicester reboots the 2016 season, according to one of the secondary coach, it was also the result of a specific athletic training based on speed. The goal actions of the team were almost always accompanied by situations of high intensity race, so it it logic to imagine that during the restarts are present not only high levels of acceleration but also of speed. Another interesting aspect is the special attention devoted to the enhancement of the posterior chain muscles . Traditionally it has been brought to hypothesise that the work with weights in professional teams will be mainly explosimeter development, through the expansion of the cains that allow the extension of the ankle-knee-hip joints such as the squat. The staff of Leicester instead particularly focused attention on the rear chain of the thigh, using a particular tool that simultaneously execution, evaluating the parameters of strength and unbalance of the rear of the thigh. Basically, the exercise that you make is the Nordic Hamstring, which we had already spoken to the prevention of accidents; staff Ranieri is not limited to use for the prevention (probably along with other movements), but also for strengthening the muscles needed to run at high speed (hamstrings).



This type of exercise is beneficial in the prevention of accidents, but it must be combined with exercises core stability and functional training, which serve (the first) to adequately balance the muscles of the trunk and (seconds) to turn biomechanically the upgrading work efficiency gains of movements. Not only the Nordic Hamstrings must be made with extreme awareness in adequately distribute the weight (during the descent) on both legs; In fact, it is widely known that, particularly among amateurs, the dominant leg in the back of the thigh is stronger than the contralateral, consequently, the distribution of the load must be made with extreme caution so as not to exacerbate still more differences.

5. *Comparison with the key figure players* - the staff of professional teams have access to a data variability (obtained from instruments and protocols) that theoretically allow you to better understand how a player is training and its level of objective fatigue (examinations) or subjective (perceived exertion). Ranieri with his staff have tried all season to share with their players the data (acceleration / deceleration, change of direction, etc.) from the games and the specific training, just for making them responsible and give them as much feedback as possible of the work done. Surely this has a great influence on motivation in addressing the training.

From the point of view of subjective evaluation, the team of Leicester was not limited to RPE, but tried (through detailed questionnaires) to better understand the state of *physical and mental health and recovery* (sleeping hours, etc.). fundamental elements, just for the fact of giving one more day of recovery. Unfortunately Article BBC is not clear if the Leicester also evaluation of its metabolic power in the game or in training.

6. *Ice chamber and beet juice* – the criosauna (ice chamber) is used to improve the recovery. To Leicester is not considered a novelty because criosauna idea appear to Euro Championships after Bonucci spread on social networks a photo (who along with De Rossi and Chiellini was preparing to enter). Now all professional teams use criosauna in different forms.

Integration with beet juice has recently received a lot of scientific interest, since it has been seen that the intake of inorganic nitrates from plant sources can reduce the metabolic cost for the year and then improve (albeit minimally) the performance resistance . The beet juice is particularly rich in these substances and is readily available commercially in the form of juice or extract. The results obtained at the level of scientific literature are, however, referring to endurance sports and feature enhancements prestativi around 3% with strong variations between the subject and the subject ; it is reasonable to assume that the effect of this is greater juice to patients who consume few vegetables (because they have lower levels of nitrates in the blood). However, still more research is needed to confirm that this type of integration can also be useful in sports intermittent characteristics such as football. For the current knowledge (especially at the amateur level), it is not advisable to invest in this type of integration as instead it is particularly important to follow a proper diet



Conclusions

A unified group, highly motivated, adapt to the training plan and strategies of play can really produce great results.

In details at a professional level, the care of the defensive aspects must be manic. At the amateur level instead (when the time to train is little) in my opinion, *it still loses too much time dealing mnemonic offensive schemes that do nothing to reduce the density of training*.

If the specific athletic work is done with the motivation and awareness, you can reduce dry run (little loved by the players) in favor of the one with the ball. Same considerations in my opinion can be made for amateurs, but as long as:

1. the players are aware of the right intensity to keep the ball in the work with and highly motivated.
2. they face a preventive work particularly accurate (because the risk of accidents, with the specific work, increases) with functional training.
3. we will do as much as possible to perceive any declines due to deficiency condition and respecting the concept of athletic preparation of the players.

The last aspect which in my opinion is the most interesting for a coach is the training of the horizontal force. With the weight training often tend to exploit the load gravity conditions (ie lifting of weights vertically) to stimulate *the extension of the joints (ankle, knee, hip)*, that is a key aspect in acceleration.

Shortly rather is not know how to use special means to train in a specific horizontal force, which in my opinion would provide more training effect against acceleration (because basically the player horizontally moves to the field). The means that can now count among the most useful are:

- *Sprint witnessed* - it comes through a TRX to "facilitate" the execution of the sprint. For acceleration, it seems more effective than sprinting with strength.
- *Using the torsion pulley in pairs* - this is a sprint with resistance (provided by the companion of the extreme TRX). It is more effective for being launched over 12-13m.
- *Using isokinetic machine* - a correct use of isokinetic machine with adequate length of wire and pulleys, it allows to perform particularly intense muscular actions and train (higher than those obtainable by the methods above).
- *Exercises pushing, fighting and plate-loaded traction*

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