

PRE-COMPETITION PREPARATION OF PARA TAEKWONDO ATHLETES

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Abstract

Pre-competition preparation is a decisive stage in the training cycle of para taekwondo athletes, directly influencing performance outcomes and competitive success. This phase involves a structured integration of physical conditioning, technical and tactical refinement, psychological readiness, and recovery strategies. Due to the diversity of impairments among para athletes, individualized training programs and adaptive methodologies are essential. The present article examines the key components of pre-competition preparation, highlights modern approaches in adaptive sports training, and outlines practical strategies to optimize performance while minimizing injury risk. The findings emphasize that a holistic and athlete-centered approach enhances both physical capability and mental resilience, leading to improved performance in competition settings.

Keywords: Para taekwondo, pre-competition preparation, adaptive training, disability sports, physical conditioning, tactical training, psychological readiness, performance optimization, recovery strategies.

Introduction

Para taekwondo has rapidly evolved into a globally recognized sport, particularly after its inclusion in the Paralympic Games. It provides athletes with physical impairments an opportunity to compete at elite levels while promoting inclusivity and athletic excellence. However, due to the diversity in functional abilities, training systems must be carefully adapted to meet the specific needs of each athlete.

The pre-competition phase is one of the most critical periods in an athlete's annual training cycle. It represents the transition from general preparation to peak performance. During this stage, the primary goal is to refine physical, technical, and psychological capacities to ensure optimal readiness for competition.

Unlike conventional taekwondo, para taekwondo requires a more individualized and scientific approach. Coaches must consider classification categories, mobility limitations, and injury risks when designing training programs. Therefore, understanding the structure and components of pre-competition preparation is essential for achieving success in this sport.

1. Physical Preparation

Physical conditioning forms the foundation of performance in para taekwondo. During the pre-competition phase, training intensity increases while volume is carefully controlled to prevent overtraining.

1.1 Strength Development

Strength is essential for executing powerful kicks and maintaining stability during combat. For para-athletes:

- Functional strength training is prioritized
- Exercises are adapted to target available muscle groups
- Core stability is emphasized to improve balance

Resistance training programs often include bodyweight exercises, resistance bands, and modified weightlifting techniques. The focus is on improving neuromuscular coordination and maximizing efficiency rather than simply increasing muscle mass.

1.2 Speed and Agility

Speed is a key factor in scoring points during matches. Athletes must react quickly to opponents' movements. Training methods include:

- Reaction drills
- Short-distance explosive movements
- Adaptive agility exercises

For athletes with lower limb impairments, upper-body reaction time and coordination become even more critical.

1.3 Endurance

Endurance training ensures that athletes can maintain performance throughout the match. Pre-competition endurance work includes:

- High-intensity interval training (HIIT)
- Sport-specific conditioning
- Controlled sparring sessions

The goal is to simulate match conditions while avoiding excessive fatigue.

1.4 Flexibility and Mobility

Flexibility is vital for executing high and controlled kicks. Stretching routines are adapted according to the athlete's physical condition. Mobility training also helps reduce injury risk and improve movement efficiency.

2. Technical and Tactical Preparation

Technical and tactical readiness distinguishes elite athletes from average competitors. During the pre-competition phase, emphasis shifts toward precision, timing, and strategy.

2.1 Technical Skills

Athletes refine essential techniques such as:

- Kicking accuracy and speed
- Defensive movements
- Counterattacks

Repetition and correction are key elements of technical training. Coaches provide continuous feedback to ensure proper execution.

2.2 Tactical Training

Tactical preparation involves decision-making and strategic planning. Important aspects include:

- Opponent analysis
- Match scenario simulations

- Time management during rounds

Athletes learn how to exploit opponents' weaknesses while protecting their own vulnerabilities.

2.3 Adaptation to Classification

Para taekwondo athletes compete in classification categories based on their impairments.

Tactical approaches must be tailored accordingly. For example:

- Athletes with upper limb impairments rely more on lower-body techniques
- Balance limitations influence movement strategies

Understanding classification rules is crucial for effective tactical planning.

3. Psychological Preparation

Mental preparation plays a decisive role in competition outcomes. Athletes often face pressure, anxiety, and high expectations.

3.1 Stress Management

Managing stress is essential for maintaining focus. Techniques include:

- Breathing exercises
- Relaxation methods
- Mindfulness training

3.2 Motivation and Confidence

Confidence directly affects performance. Coaches help athletes build self-belief through:

- Positive reinforcement
- Gradual exposure to competition-like situations
- Goal-setting strategies

3.3 Visualization Techniques

Visualization helps athletes mentally rehearse movements and strategies. This improves reaction time and decision-making during matches.

3.4 Emotional Control

Athletes must control emotions such as fear or frustration. Emotional stability ensures better tactical decisions and consistent performance.

4. Recovery and Nutrition

Recovery is a key component of pre-competition preparation, ensuring that athletes reach peak condition without fatigue.

4.1 Recovery Strategies

- Active recovery sessions
- Massage and physiotherapy
- Adequate sleep

Recovery programs are individualized to address specific needs and prevent injuries.

4.2 Nutrition

Nutrition supports training and recovery. Key principles include:

- Balanced intake of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats
- Proper hydration
- Timing of meals around training sessions

Athletes may also follow specialized diets depending on their classification and energy demands.

5. Injury Prevention

Injury prevention is particularly important in para sports. Pre-competition preparation includes:

- Warm-up and cool-down routines
- Strengthening vulnerable joints
- Monitoring training load

Preventing injuries ensures continuity in training and optimal performance during competition.

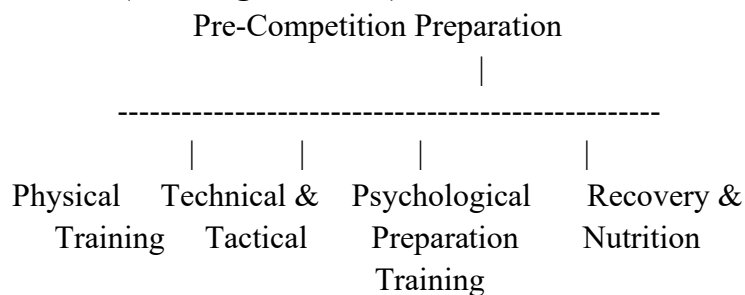
6. Integration of Training Components

Successful pre-competition preparation requires the integration of all components:

- Physical conditioning supports technical execution
- Tactical awareness enhances psychological confidence
- Recovery ensures sustainability of performance

Coaches must carefully balance training intensity, volume, and recovery to achieve peak performance at the right time.

Graphic Representation (Training Structure)



Discussion

The effectiveness of pre-competition preparation depends on the ability to individualize training programs. Para taekwondo athletes present unique challenges due to varying impairments, requiring adaptive methods and innovative coaching strategies.

Modern approaches emphasize evidence-based training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the use of technology for performance monitoring. Coaches, physiotherapists, and sports psychologists must work together to ensure comprehensive athlete development.

Conclusion

Pre-competition preparation in para taekwondo is a complex and multifaceted process that requires careful planning and execution. By integrating physical conditioning, technical and tactical training, psychological readiness, and recovery strategies, athletes can achieve optimal performance levels.

Individualization remains the key factor in success. Training programs must be tailored to the athlete's functional abilities, classification, and competitive goals. A holistic approach not only enhances performance but also promotes long-term athlete development and well-being.

Ultimately, effective pre-competition preparation enables para taekwondo athletes to compete with confidence, resilience, and excellence on the international stage.

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