

Ain't No Cure For The Summertime "Moves"

Wolf's Law- Growth Occurs in the Direction of Applied Pressure

by Alan Lambert

In the study of human growth and development one of the most basic of all laws is called Wolf's Law. It is a law regarding growth of bone cells and simply stated it says that the greatest amount of growth will be in the direction of a consistently applied pressure. So you say, what's that got to do with my becoming a great basketball player? Well I believe Wolf's Law can be directly applied to your growth as a player. You need to apply a constant pressure (work ethic) to the weaknesses of your game to become a solid and more consistent performer on the court. Working out whenever you feel like it won't cut it if you expect to go to the next level. Those that achieve greatness, never minded work and in fact even took joy in the extra hours and effort to stretch their abilities.

Summer is one of the most valuable times in the life of any player. It is a chance to recover physically from a long season (or seasons if you are multiple sport players in high school or college). It is also the time in which, with proper planning and consistent effort (applied pressure) the greatest amount of growth can occur. During the season, coaches don't always have enough time to work with you individually because of team demands. Neither you nor your coach can afford to take chances in execution when championships are on the line. That isn't the case in the summer. There is a certain freedom that is crying out for personal growth "in the summertime". You can literally do what you want to do in the summer, but that is a whole lot different than doing what you "NEED" to do. Today's playground pointer is directed at giving you serious advice on how to use the summertime to grow as a player.

Seven Areas You Must Address in the Off Season



1. Give Yourself An Honest Personal Assessment Following Your Season- The best players I have ever coached had three qualities. First, they had a confidence in themselves that wasn't cockiness but a self-awareness of who they were as a person, as a player and where they needed improvement. Second, these players were honest with themselves about their abilities. They didn't talk a good game and play like a dog. They clearly understood their strengths and weaknesses, constantly evaluating what they could improve and working on those improvements. They didn't listen to parents, or teammates who fluffed them up regarding their abilities, nor did they accept when teammates said there were things they couldn't do when in fact they could perform those skills. That honest assessment enabled each of them to work hard in a much more focused fashion to improve their game based on reality. Finally, they were constantly listening to those who knew the game and taking that advice and making a concerted effort to change for the better. As you head into your summer program do yourself a big favor and don't start unless you have taken a long hard look at your strengths and weaknesses and made a list of areas you really need improvement. If you can't make that honest assessment by yourself than talk to your coach and others who you know and trust in their knowledge and judgment of the game. If you fail to make an honest assessment of where your game is at, you will almost certainly throw away your summer no matter how hard you work.



2. Plan A Program That Addresses Your Specific Needs- While this may seem like the most obvious of my seven points today it will undoubtedly be the one you will most likely mess up. At age 15-17 (looking back) I didn't have a clue what my most critical areas for improvement were. If I had assessed, and addressed those specific needs I would have known that I needed to improve my anaerobic power and conditioning, my middle body strength so that I could more effectively convert energy in my legs into an explosive jump which would have significantly improved by shooting ability, and body control. I also would have spent a considerably greater amount of time working on my shooting consistency off the dribble, and off the screen, and increasing my shooting range. I would have brought my modest left handing dribbling skill up to and beyond the level of my strong right hand. See the problem for me as a younger player was I worked on everything, but improved little and slowly. You can be constantly on the court every day all summer and end up with little to show for it when your season starts. Specificity of training is what it's all about in today's game. You need to work on many areas to be an all-around player, but you need to absolutely DRILL TO PERFECTION your weaknesses and those mostly likely to produce the biggest change in your game. You can stick your head in the sand like the ostrich, but you sure leave your neck exposed when it comes time to perform. A well planned program will include each of these seven areas I am addressing today.



3. Address All Your Energy Systems In Your Training Programs- Improving as a player also means that you must address a training program in and out of season that improves each of your body's energy systems. A player could be unbelievably fit to run on a treadmill for 2 hours at a high rate of speed, and yet end up sucking wind after a 5 minute high-intensity anaerobic workout on the basketball court. Sadly to say too many of today's athletes try to play the game of basketball without adequately preparing themselves for diverse energy demands of the game. In your summer program you must not only address, aerobic, and anaerobic components of fitness but factors which directly influence your athletic abilities as well (things such as agility, balance, coordination, endurance, speed and power). Typically the modern basketball player becomes extremely good at specific skills but pays too little attention to their physical development which lays the groundwork for being able to execute under duress. Your summer program should also include proper warm-up and stretching which becomes a habit with practice. Most young players see little need to stretch and work on flexibility, but it has been my experience that to play at the highest levels and survive into your 30's at a high level, those that have excellent stretching habits can maintain strength through a larger range of motion thus increasing their ability to generate power and significantly reduce the risk of serious injuries. I hear you saying...yeah..yeah I know....but the "honest truth" is stretching before and after practice = longevity as a player. Start while you are young and do it before and after you workout, and it will become a habit for life. Aerobic exercise is that which conditions the body's cardiovascular system, through long-extended low-intensity exercise, to be able to perform using oxygen as the source of energy. Basketball however requires short intense periods which expend a great deal of energy at a very rapid rate. Therefore to be a great player you must also have a well trained anaerobic system to excel in order to sustain maximal power efforts of 2-3 minutes. Your body has three essential energy sources. In the anaerobic system, food energy (ATP) comes from what is called ATP-PC (Phosphocreatine) which is stored directly in the muscle and when used only lasts about 10 seconds (such as required in a quick explosive power move). The second more commonly used anaerobic food source is called Anaerobic Glycolysis. This is where carbohydrates stored in the blood system can be broken down and transformed into energy at a high rate for approximately 2-3 minutes. Fatigue usually sets in after this time period (several minutes) until a period of rest allows the body to remove the residue of this energy transformation called lactic acid. The final food source is of our aerobic in which oxygen supplies a slow steady stream of ATP for exercises lasting more than 2-3 minutes. In reality a game of basketball requires about 20% aerobic, and 80% anaerobic power although many factors cause this to vary from individual to individual. The bottom line for you young players is you need long term, low intensity training for 20-60 minutes a couple of times per week (things like swimming, biking, and jogging) to build a baseline level aerobic fitness level to carry you through the course of a season.

Your summer program should also include specific drills to train your anaerobic system. These are high intensity, short duration drills or exercises with 1-2 minute periods of rest in between. I would highly recommend drills like those found in [Greg Brittenham's Conditioning for Basketball: 50 Court Drills](#) (available both in book and on video) for Players because they are basketball specific and enable to work on your basketball skills while you train your anaerobic system. These types of drills enable you to build muscular strength, endurance, increase flexibility, and improve your body composition. Increase in muscular strength allows you to generate and exert maximal force (in other words you can hold your position on the court when contact is made without affecting your performance). Muscular endurance allows you to exert force repeatedly over extended periods of time (critical to performance late in games). Increased flexibility enables joints to move freely through a full range of motion without stiffness or pain which leads to efficient and more coordinated movement. Body composition -your percentage of body fat (8-13% for males, 16-20% for females)- may not inhibit you in performing a given skill in a game but over time players with higher body fat content are much more susceptible to injury and fatigue. One well known NBA player was able to significantly change his sprint dash times, improve his vertical jump, and lower his agility run times by simply dropping his body fat 7%. If you are overweight, you must be under-performing. Finally, part of your summer program means eating and sleeping right as well. Just because you are out of season doesn't mean you can ignore taking care of your body. The NBA players these days literally work out year round.

There are a few basic conditioning principles you should understand as well. These are adaptation, intensity, duration, frequency, periodization, progression, and proper periods of rest. Everyone's body will adapt to progressive overload if it is carefully challenged. If the physical stress a body experiences is not too severe the "body" will adapt for the positive. Intensity is a critical factor in your summer workouts. Intensity is affected by both the degree of difficulty and by the length in time of your workouts. You need to have a combination of both aerobic and anaerobic exercises to enable the body to build a tolerance to lactate levels and facilitate rapid recovery as you compete. Duration is the length of a training session. If you are using drills of high intensity your training period should be short. Lower level intensity workouts must involve extended duration (such as running or swimming) to be effective in challenging your body to adapt. Frequency is how often you train (2, 3 or 4 times per week). The best results from training are achieved when you apply stress at a proper level of intensity, for a set duration, several times per week adjusted through the summer. If you follow proper training guidelines training improvement will occur. Periodization is how the training of an athlete or team is organized throughout a year long cycle. Proper training results in both peak conditioning and performance at the time of year it is required.

Remember that a good periodization of training program allows for fluctuations in intensity, volume and technique to maximize the effects of your training. Progression defines how rapidly you adjust your workout programs to maintain the proper amount of stress in your workouts. Always start at a level you can easily handle. This will enable you to develop confidence and success as you begin to build your fitness and athletic skill levels. Adjust gradually to avoid risking injury and disappointment. Finally, you must rest. Fanatical training will not allow your body to recover between training sessions. You can tell if you are overworking if you experience muscle soreness that remains 48 hours after a workout, you have chronic pain in your joints, or you have broken sleep cycles or fatigue following sleep. This is a sure fire sign you are over-training and not allowing enough rest for your body to recover. The results of over-training will be performance plateau's and commonly a decline in your conditioning level. A well balanced and progressively challenging training program in the summer will allow you to build a baseline of energy resources and skill level to let you perform at the highest level even late into a long season. Failure to address year-long periodization may not show up at the start of a season but you see it year after year in teams and players that ignore it, when they fade down the championship stretch.



4. Pick One Skill Per Summer and Perfect It. Often players attempt to try to learn too many skills in too short a period of time. It normally takes 1-2 years to perfect a basketball skill (about 200,000 perfect repetitions). This is about 3-5 hours of very specific practice every other day for 1-2 years. If you as a player pick one skill (normally the one which keeps you from getting more playing time) and focus on that skill one year at a time, after 4-5 years you will become a multiple-skilled player. Spending 1 hour per day twice a week won't do it. In your summer program, take a skill such as left handed-dribble penetration and spend 30-50 minutes per day on it. Then work on pulling up for the jumper off the left hand dribble penetration. Then work on a dribble penetration step-back shot, and so forth. By building 4-5 skills in a sequence beginning with the skill you most wish to improve you will have variation in your practice, have a substantial amount of repetitions required to automate that skill, and almost assuredly find yourself a better player at the end of the summer. Next summer pick a different skill, such as defensive footwork, or rebounding position and putbacks, etc. I think you get the idea. Magic Johnson did it, Michael Jordan did it, and Shaquille O'Neill is doing it. It works, to pick one and perfect it.



5. Make Sure You Get Court Time on the Playgrounds. While telling young players to work on their individual skills I have seen way too many players spend 5 hours a day by themselves on a blacktop perfecting a skill only to find their game come season isn't improving. Just having skills doesn't make you a player. The reason so many inner-city players are great players is because they learn by doing, by the experience of having to defend creativity, and by losing and sitting. Every single player should spend individual workout time all summer long, but don't make the mistake of avoiding the playgrounds and losing the opportunity to gain "court experience in decision making" where all the great players learn it, on the court. If you your individual workouts are 2-3 days a week, make sure you are getting scrimmage time as well. The playground is a place you can experiment without getting yanked from a game, and there is no better place to learn what practiced moves work or don't work than the streets.



6. Play-Up! Challenge Yourself By Constantly Playing Better Players. If you are 15 or 16 years old, or even younger and are playing against less talented players who do not challenge you, play up! Just like Wolf's Law, if you are stressed you can't progress. Don't be afraid to jump in and play against older high school, college and even pro players who give you a frame of reference to know what kind of skills, athletic ability, and conditioning you will need to compete up at the next level. During the season you must compete at your level, so summer is the perfect time to challenge yourself by playing-up! Find the older kids games and dig in.



7. Put In Your Time! There is no substitute for work to become a great player. That of course means intelligent and focused work. However, if you are putting in 2 hours a day, and your neighbor is practicing 4 hours who is most likely to achieve a higher skill level faster. If you desire to be a great player, or for that matter excel at any thing you choose to do, success doesn't appear by the wave of a magic wand. There are no fairy tale stories for basketball players who will not put in their time. Summer may be a time for periodization of your training, but it certainly isn't a time to quit playing, or flop on the couch and play video games when you can be out improving all aspects of your game, from skills, to strength, improving your athleticism, to increasing your conditioning and endurance.

Just remember when it's all said and done...if you are whining due to bad performances during the next season, there ain't no cure for the lack of summertime moves. Assess yourself honestly, pick a program that meets your specific needs, condition all your energy systems with periods of rest, pick a skill and perfect it, hit the playgrounds for game experience, play-up to grow up, and put in your time. If you seriously work at these seven areas, you are well on your way to becoming A PLAYER!