



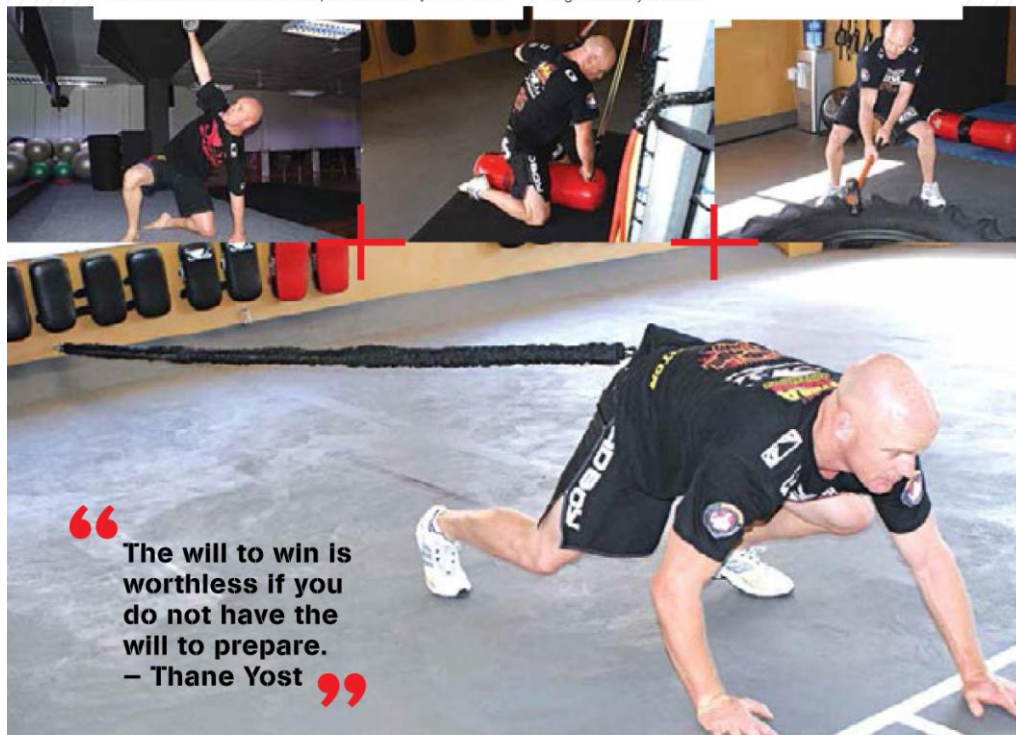
Gas in the Tank

for the High Performance MMA Athlete

Many Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) 'champions' walk into the Octagon tough, but when they lose they blame conditioning for their poor performances. Sadly, this one factor has cost many good fighters their titles and status.

MMA conditioning is very different to any other sport. The majority of competitive sports have many time-outs, rest periods or breaks when a foul or rule violation is committed and the action stops momentarily. In a MMA

fight, although it is very short with each round only lasting five minutes, there are no stops or breaks until the end of each round and the fighter gets just one minute to rest. On the odd occasion there might be a break if a fighter is hit in the groin or receives an eye gouge, but mostly an entire round goes uninterrupted, and there are no substitutions. Most fights are scheduled for three rounds, with championship matches normally being five rounds. The entire length of a fight, including breaks between rounds, may only last for 20-30 minutes. Due to the intensity of this sport, it's essential for any MMA fighter to follow a scientifically-developed training programme that aids in developing explosive muscle tissue which endures under extreme stress situations and performs at high-intensity levels. ▶



“ The will to win is worthless if you do not have the will to prepare.
– Thane Yost **”**

As the rules and time limits of MMA fighting have changed over time, the physical training, preparation and conditioning of MMA athletes has had to adapt to these changes. When the UFC and Pride first started, fights had no time limits and could last for 30 minutes with no rounds, or a mere 20 seconds. As a fighter you had to be prepared for a fight that could last any length of time. Furthermore, most fighting events were tournament based and athletes had to fight several times in one night. So with the changes in the current MMA format, conditioning for the MMA athlete is still evolving today. What's important here is to plan your MMA conditioning routine around the event you are fighting in. If your fight is based on five-minute rounds, your conditioning should be geared to this. Similarly, if you only get one minute of rest between rounds, then your conditioning routine needs to reflect that too. In a brutal sport like MMA, even if you're not training or competing professionally, conditioning is the most important aspect of your training so that you can out-last your opponent as the rounds lag on. Fatigue is a major factor in all sports, so you need an edge in cardio to push it to the limit whenever you need to.

Training programme

When engaging in any workout programme, a good question to ask yourself is: "What is my goal?" Is it to finish all my opponents within 20 seconds so that I don't need to worry about going the full length in fights, or is it knowing that I am able to fight the full three or five rounds at a high level and with enough gas in the tank? This is especially important in terms of sport-specific conditioning and will help you identify if your current training routine is the right one.

Here's some helpful hints: The exercises and workouts you choose must reflect the kind of conditioning you need in a fight where you are constantly moving, changing positions, engaging in explosive movements, breaking your breathing pattern, performing many different movements and using your entire body at full intensity for a given time period. Although exercise selection is important, the first issue you need to address is how to organise your workouts. If you don't combine them in a way that makes sense as a mixed martial artist, your conditioning will never get to that higher level.

The simplest thing to do is organise your workout in several circuits, where each circuit represents the round of a fight. During each circuit use a variety of exercises, but keep in mind that each circuit must last for at least five minutes without stopping. Then progress to doing three to five of these circuits without a break.

Endurance

Strength is great and all mixed martial artists need strength. Having more strength than your opponent is always going to be an advantage. However, problems will arise if your focus on strength is to the

detriment of your conditioning. A hardcore power lifting routine is not the answer to achieve ultimate MMA conditioning. If you look at the best MMA fighters in the world, they have MMA specific training routines that ensure they perform as a complete athlete.

Have a solid MMA conditioning routine that you perform regularly. This routine doesn't have to last a long time and you only need to perform it two to three times per week, but you will see a marked improvement in performance in the gym and cage. Some of the strongest and most physically gifted MMA athletes have struggled needlessly throughout their careers simply because they don't understand that strength and power does not equal conditioning in a fight. The conditioning required for MMA, grappling or whatever combat sport you are involved in, will only be achieved through condition training.

Variation

Exposing your body to as much variation and environments as possible will give you an edge when performing under extreme conditions. Environments to expose yourself to include sea level, the Highveld, mountains, heat/humidity and cold.

The most important adaptation for an MMA athlete is an increase in the number of red blood cells, which carry oxygen from your lungs to your muscles. The extra blood cells supercharge your muscles with oxygen and push you along with greater endurance. If you're going to compete in a MMA event, you should live and train in oxygen-deprived environments for several weeks prior to it.

In a recent discussion between experts on altitude training for athletics, the average best altitude and best duration at altitude was 2,200m for four weeks. It was also agreed that the effects of altitude training were optimal two to three weeks after returning from altitude.

Exercises

Full body exercises are a must for MMA conditioning as they closely simulate the strength and conditioning you need as a fighter. The more variety the better and yes, it has to be intense! Perform lots of explosive drills such as plyometric push-ups, body weight squats and lunges, squat jumps, medicine ball squats and resistance bands. All of these exercises are necessary to build fitness, stamina, explosive strength and conditioning in your entire body. Even basic exercises like push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups and squats are perfect, and you don't need a gym or any expensive equipment to perform them.



Many fighters use a wide variety of running workouts to train for MMA to help build conditioning. To accommodate the short time limits and intense nature of MMA fights, it is better to run for a shorter period of time at a higher intensity level. Running up hills, in sand or up the stairs of a stadium will improve your cardio and endurance. You can also run medium distances of two to four kilometres at a moderate intensity. As most MMA fights only last 15-20 minutes, running for an hour at a slow pace is not necessary. Instead of running 10km every day, rather run 3km and include sprints on two of the training days. However, long distance runs are not a complete waste of time, as some trainers would have you believe, as there are still many benefits, especially mentally; you just don't need to do them every day. As the intensity of your running workouts increases, the rest time between workouts needs to increase as well.

In the four weeks leading up to the fight do more specific workouts such as jumps, sprawls, quick feet drills, core stabilisation exercises, explosive push-ups, reaction drills and MMA-specific performance games - all movements that are used in a fight and performed as quickly and explosively as possible.

Diet

Eating correctly has got as much to do with your health and performance as the type of fuel you put into your motor vehicle. You are what you eat! Make small changes to your diet every week until you have lost all the bad habits. The type of things you can do to improve your diet are as follows:

- >> **Week one** - no more soft drinks, only drink water, non-sweetened teas and 100% fruit juices
- >> **Week two** - triple your fresh vegetable intake
- >> **Week three** - ensure an adequate daily protein intake
- >> **Week four** - eat five small meals a day instead of two or three monster meals
- >> **Week five** - eliminate all artificial sweeteners from your diet

In conclusion

Train the way you want to perform. You only have so much time to train and so many physical resources available, so make the most of them. Compare your body and mind to that of a F1 racing car. Your vehicle is not going to perform to its fullest potential if you don't fill it with high-performance fuel. Likewise, you need to continually expose yourself to high-performance conditioning, a healthy nutritional diet and sufficient rest. •

DInfo box

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