

Physical Training for Racquetball -Common Terms Explained – by Eric Evans

Agility—The ability to brake (stop), change direction, and accelerate again. It couples deceleration along with acceleration regarding a specific task. Any drill in which an athlete has to stop, change directions, then accelerate again works well. The T-drill is a good example that has a carry-over for many sports and positions. The athlete sprints forward, touching a cone with the right hand. The athlete then shuffles to the right 5 yards touching another cone. Then the athlete shuffles to the left 10 yards touching a cone with the left hand. The athlete then shuffles back to the right 5 yards, touching the cone with the right hand, finishing up with a back pedal 10 yards through the start / finish line. This drill is done as fast as possible. Agility training is beneficial for sports such as football, basketball, lacrosse, soccer, and hockey to name a few.

Plyometric training—A technique used to create and then redistribute what's known as elastic energy to create force at a rapid rate. Elastic energy is created by a rapid eccentric contraction and is used by a subsequent concentric contraction. Think about a basketball player going up to get a rebound. Elastic energy is created when the athlete dips down into a quarter squat, then released as the player forcefully extends the lower body to elevate off of the ground to get the ball. Very little (if any) elastic energy is created with a sprinter in the starting blocks waiting for the starter to signal the start of a 40-yard dash. The end result of plyometric training is improved quickness, speed, and explosiveness. An example of a plyometric drill is lateral cone hops. Plyometric training would help a baseball player's first few steps when stealing from first to second base – and a volleyball player reacting to a ball at the net quicker. Plyometric training is beneficial for sports that involve explosive, quick movements like racquetball.

Most agility, and plyometric training involves footwork drills using something such as a speed ladder, cones, hurdles, and plyometric boxes. Any athlete who does sport specific training has a decided advantage in the sense that they will be trained to move with more speed and endure more physical demands – regardless of the sport or position. Sport specific training should help an athlete to perform at a much higher intensity over more repeated intervals, and for a longer period of time during a single explosive bout.

Athletes should begin their off-season training 8 – 10 weeks prior to the start of preseason. This is important because athletes don't generally improve their level of fitness during the competitive season. As a matter of fact, during the competitive season an athlete's general level of fitness may even decrease. Gains / improvements should therefore occur during the off-season. During the competitive season the goal of training should be to optimize sport-specific performance and minimize any decrease in general fitness levels.

Eric Evans taught footwork seminars in the 06, 07 and 08 USRA's High Performance Camp held at the US Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. CO