

Off-Season Training Develops Speed & Strength In Athletes

By Charlie Newton

My son Chaz recently worked out at a new place located just up the street from the Fishercats stadium called the NLP Performance Training Center. I was looking for a way to help him improve his speed for basketball. At first I was curious as to what the difference was between NLP and the commercial gyms in Manchester. I ended up talking with the owner, Joil Bergeron, about what the facility was and soon found it to be a pretty unique concept for the area. This article presents that interview. More information about the facility and Elite Athletic Development Program can be found by visiting their website at <http://nlpspeed.com>, calling 603-627-7500, or visiting them at 31 S. Commercial St in Manchester.

CN: Joil, why did you open the NLP Performance Training Center?

JB: Well Charlie this has been a dream of mine for some time now. Being a native of the state I was fortunate to spend some time in other areas of the country and see some pretty amazing things in sports. I moved back here to be closer to family and couldn't believe that there weren't any dedicated strength and conditioning facilities in our state yet! My hopes with the NLP PTC, and this may sound a little funny, is to create a reputation of a cool place to workout and get results.

CN: And it seems like you have a pretty unique environment. Why is that?

JB: I modeled our training facility after a NCAA or professional strength & conditioning facility. I want people to feel inspired to work hard and push themselves when they come in. I think it's pretty evident when people show up that we are not a commercial gym, and we're not trying to compete with commercial gyms either. That is a whole different crowd. We want people to get results and work hard every time they are here, and we create a positive atmosphere through education and positive support. It's hard work but its fun play too.

CN: Speaking of unique, can you explain your name?

JB: (Laughing) Yeah I get that a lot. It's still pronounced "Joel." It's an Asian variety of the name, even though I have a French last name.

CN: Where did you get the idea for Elite Athletic Development Program?

JB: Over the years working as a strength and conditioning coach at the professional, NCAA, and k-12 levels.

CN: What is the Elite Athletic Development Program about?

JB:

Whew. Well, there's a lot to it. First off is that it's for all athletes in any sport. In it's most basic sense the program is meant to enhance performance and decrease risk for injuries through the principles of strength and conditioning, but it's really more than that. We aim at developing athletes both physically and mentally by promoting good habits, responsibility, enthusiasm, teamwork, and much more. The biggest thing I see as helping athletes is by teaching them life-lessons through hard work that lead to improved confidence. There is no question in my mind that the most rewarding part of this job is when an athlete has success in life, not

just sports. I've had athletes struggling in school earn better grades, develop great friendships with other participants, and lead successful lives and careers.

CN: That sounds great, but what about the training?

JB: Ah, yes. What I'd like to point out is that every professional, NCAA, and national caliber high school team has a strength and conditioning coach working with their athletic department. The training is where the rubber hits the road of course. We have a very structured program that progressively builds each week. We work on both linear and lateral speed and the mechanics behind those moves because every sport out there contains these basic movement patterns. What we do is break the patterns down into their component parts and re-educate the athletes on how to use their bodies more efficiently.

CN: When is the program most valuable for athletes?

JB: It really just comes down to what an athlete wants out of their performance. In this day and age you need to train year round if you want to be competitive. The days of relying on natural ability are just about behind us. There is a reason why kids in states just south us are putting together better performances – it's because they are using sport science in the form of strength and conditioning programs to gain a competitive edge. New Hampshire is behind the times when it comes to this. When you travel outside of the state, there are places such as velocity sports performance where athletes can go to learn how to use proper athletic mechanics. People don't realize how important strength and conditioning is, you can't maximize your performance if you have bad movement patterns, or if you've never learned how to do things properly in the first place.

Basically our Performance Training Center provides the opportunity to receive professional training that is in line with what NCAA and Professional athletes receive. We put together both off-season and in-season workouts for our athletes based on their game and life schedules. It really just comes down to the level of commitment an athlete has towards success.

CN: OK, but is there a particular time of year?

JB: Clearly the off-season is the most important time to be training in a program like ours. It is a great time to break down an athlete's form, fix mechanical errors, and increase their strength and conditioning levels so that their next season is even more successful, and safer from and injury-resistance standpoint.

CN: So you work on speed a lot?

JB: Everyday we spend about 60% of our time working on speed, with the other 40% devoted to core strength, medicine ball work, explosive speed development through plyometrics, and strength training. The speed component is the most underemphasized thing I see in most sports programs. Some of that has to do with the fact that we are in New Hampshire, and some of it has to do with that people just haven't worked enough in this area to gain the knowledge to improve this skill. What gets me is that there is a perception that athletes are born with speed. This is only partially true. Although genetics does play a role with speed, a genetically gifted athlete who has not trained properly will never reach their full potential. Conversely, the average athlete can gain a competitive advantage by maximizing whatever they have through sound training.

CN: And what does the program's strength training entail?

JB: A lot. But anyone can do it. We have 9-year olds all the way up to collegiate athletes working out together. The reason why we can do this is we break our groups up into different skill levels. Essentially we just scale the workout to

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fit whoever it is that we're working with. We focus on total body development and balanced strength training.

CN: What are the benefits of combining speed and strength training together in your program?

JB: Well you really can't have one without the other. I have been lucky to work with some high level coaches in the past at the NCAA & Professional level, but recently I've been working at the k-12 levels. What I see more and more is that people don't understand that you have to train year-round and work on all the components of fitness in order to maximize your performance. Most people do not understand the mechanics behind speed development, let alone all the other things that need to be train in order to perform high level skills in the first place. Our program progressively and systematically targets these different areas. It's just a matter of where an athlete is going to start and how much time they want to devote to improving before they eventually reach their goals.

CN: And how do you determine that starting point?

JB: A big part of it is the testing we do. We put all our athletes through a comprehensive battery of tests to help us assess and evaluate where they could improve. We do this every 8 weeks or so to track the progress of our participants. The other part is the experience and professional backgrounds we have. I was lucky to work with the 2nd fastest woman in the world a few years ago, and it is pretty amazing to see what goes into producing a performance like that.

CN: What do you find most rewarding about the Elite Athlete Program?

JB: Hands down it's the success stories we hear. But even more so it's the relationships you build that go beyond the workouts. There is a lot to be said in the bonds you forge when you are working hard on a common goal together. I have athletes I've stayed in touch with from many years ago who are now married and have their careers. Those are the special things. Athletics is of course just a part of life – we try to convey that message to all our athletes so they maintain perspective and develop in a positive way as people.