



United States Professional Diving Coaches Association, Inc.

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## THE VALUE OF REST

By Hobie Billingsley  
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Two years ago I happened to attend an educational clinic sponsored by United States Diving that was for the American elite divers who were thought to have a chance to make the 1996 Olympic Team. As one of the expert clinicians, I observed two divers who seemed to stick out over the rest of the divers in their training efforts, which obviously indicated that they were totally dedicated to the sport. These two divers worked harder than anyone and used every movement possible in the training period to reach their primary goal, which was to make the Olympic team. Their desire was also shown when they continued to train on their own after the scheduled workouts for the clinic were completed. Besides practicing dives from various heights, they performed exercises by the hour on the trampoline, the port-o-pit, the mats, plus doing line-ups and lead-ups from the different platforms while seemingly never to stop in their relentless desire to improve.

After observing them for a few days, I approached them and mentioned that I believed they were over doing it in their training workouts. Reminding them that they weren't Chinese and that it was highly unlikely that they could train at the pace of the Chinese, they should reduce the intensity of their training to avoid what could be serious consequences. I suggested that they seriously consider taking short and long rest periods from time to time to allow their bodies to rest and rejuvenate. I also reminded them that it was not possible to put that kind of continual stress on the body without it in some way rebelling and breaking down. Unfortunately my warning was either not taken seriously or it came too late for both divers soon after suffered serious physical and psychological problems that kept them from diving and training for a very long time. It was later discovered that the diver who suffered the physical injury had not been treating his body properly for he had poor eating habits and was not getting the proper rest,

To me, these two experiences are examples of the need for the body to obtain proper rest when it is placed under great physical and/or mental stress. Divers should be aware that when engaging in a training program that requires short and long periods of intense physical training, they should include short and long periods of rest. Such rest allows the body to recharge the physiological and psychological elements of the body which makes for better performance. This can be more easily understood when we see boxers take a minute rest between rounds in a bout. So, if divers find themselves often tired when practicing and training, they should take a couple of days off to allow the body to rest, relax, and revitalize itself.

It is suggested that divers should train by engaging in high-pressure workouts, where the body experiences fierce physical and mental activity, followed by low pressure training periods which permit the body to recover from stress and fatigue. I believe this approach to training by the divers is important for it has been successful in other sporting activities such as swimming. In observing "Doc" Counsilman's great swimming teams over the years, I found that the swimmers would taper for the important meets. The taper consisted of long rest periods while swimming with little intensity. It was noted that when the swimmers trained real hard, the taper was more effective in their performances than when the swimmers had trained with moderate effort. Thus, it was apparent that the effectiveness of the taper in offering a successful

performance depended greatly on the intensity of the training by the athlete over a period of time.

The length of the rest period may be determined by how hard the diver has trained. A diver who puts little effort into training will likely benefit little from resting regardless of the length of the resting period. But a diver who trains hard can adjust the length of the rest period in accord to the state of his or her physical and/or mental condition. Physical tension subsequently impairs performance and mental tension, through excessive thinking, worrying, experiencing fear, etc. affects concentration which also can cause poor performance. Most often the athlete knows when it is the proper time to stop resting and get back to training hard for he or she starts to feel strong, relaxed and anxious to get going.

In conclusion, I would like to state that I have always wanted to rest my divers for four or five days by doing no diving before an important contest, then have them warm up before the meet and see how well they would perform. Unfortunately, I never gathered the courage to try it. A final note, three of our top divers returned to diving this year after long layoffs from diving and all had brilliant performances in top competitions after a moderate time of training.

About the author: **Hobie Billingsley** is regarded by many as one of the greatest coaches in the history of the sport of diving. He is retired from coaching but still travels around the globe giving clinics and seminars on the sport he loves. When not teaching, Hobie writes articles and books about his diving experiences and adventures.