



RUSSIAN (WITH AN AMERICAN ACCENT) SPORTS MASSAGE

By Oleg Bouimer.

Warm-up

What has compelled me to write this article is my love of both doing and teaching massage. I LOVE IT! The whole world seems to be a brighter and happier place when I wake up knowing that there are people out there ready to give me a chance to put my hands on them. (On the rare days when my calendar is free, I'm forced to give a shoulder rub to my wife, a tickle-hands massage to my hyperactive son, or a full-body massage to my slightly overweight, yet very athletic dog. Needless to say, my position in my house is secure.)

My success as a massage practitioner, I contribute to three main factors:

1) I am a proud product of the Soviet educational system, in which every aspect of my training was well structured and scientifically developed. I have been blessed with amazing teachers who have passed on to me an incredible wealth of groundbreaking techniques and knowledge. One of my teachers, Vladimir Dubrovsky, MD, PhD, has written 11 textbooks on massage and rehabilitation techniques. He is an author of over 350 scientific articles. He is a recipient of an award by the New York Academy of Sciences for his life achievements in the arena of sports medicine and rehabilitation.

2) I have been exposed to (and appreciate) the values and freedoms of the life in the US. I find a definite comfort in a feeling of limitless possibilities here. I feel FREE to let my body dance around my massage table as I wish. This experience - of being allowed to tap into my inner source of joy and creativity - inspires me and rewards me in ways I could never before imagine.

3) I have the full support and love of my family and friends. Sometimes, it's true, this support pushes my buttons, challenging me in every way possible. Other times, it simply gives me a friendly kick in the place I usually sit on. Still, I love it!

Now, going forward...

We all could use some support, love and encouragement on our path to fulfillment (including, but not limited to our massage business).

We should not take for granted what is available to us at this time and place in life. The main thing is always to find a balance between giving and receiving. While you help others, remember: your own health comes first! The more vibrant energy your own health generates, the more clients you will attract; while your ability to handle them will expand exponentially. This is a basic truism of life.

In my opinion, there are two ways to gain full access to the vast database of scientific research done in the area of massage. You can learn to read and speak Russian, fly over there, and track down the "old school" massage therapists and teachers. But I'll warn you: if you choose to go that route, HURRY! They are getting really old. (And bring a heavy coat.)

The other way to obtain this knowledge is the very point of this article: allow me to share the benefits of my training.

My goal is- to create a community where massage therapists, athletic trainers, sports medicine doctors and athletes are united by their commitment to an integrative approach to physical activities and sports training. It is my hope that sports massage would become one of the key elements in achieving maximum outcome with minimum damage for athletes.

How will we do that? (And I do mean "we"— you and me. I will need your help turning this concept into a reality.)

Simply, step by step.

Race

Forgive my bluntness, but I have heard many statements over the last 15 years of traveling across this country that I have a hard time agreeing with. Here are some:

"Sports massage does not contribute to athletes' recovery." (*American Journal of Sport Medicine*, 2004)

"You have to use elbows to give a really deep massage."

"You should use more effleurage and/or compression (It feels good to a client while easy on you) instead of kneading (It will hurt your thumbs)."

"Your years in the massage profession are limited to just a few unless you'll find ways to preserve yourself."

"There is very little true research being done in the massage field, and very little way to accomplish research in such a subjective profession."

"You do not really need to know the science of massage as long as you are happy with what you do."

All of the above are simply not true. Additionally, they do



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a disservice to our massage community by sending the wrong message to both practitioners and clients.

Allow me to zoom in on what is important: understanding some of the main attributes of modern Sports Massage (SM). In order to avoid any confusion, I will focus on the basic application of SM first; the one you would use on your fitness-oriented clients on any given day. (Pre- Event, Post- Event and Rehabilitative SM will be addressed in a future article.)

Keep in mind the major concepts of SM: One of the main goals of SM is to decrease peripheral vascular resistance; the speed of massage strokes during SM application is significantly greater; a wide range of kneading techniques is an important characteristic of SM; and knowledge of scientifically developed protocols of SM assures a predictable outcome of each session.

Let's look at them one at a time to learn how to apply and have fun in your work:

1) Physical overload often leads to accumulative muscular tension. This, in turn, contributes to an increase in the peripheral vascular resistance, which is the main opposition mechanism for left cardiac work. In such cases, the cardiovascular system is not only overloaded during vigorous exercise, but also has to work harder even at night, especially between 1 and 4 am. This leads to the development of hypertension with a one-way ticket to a heart attack. Thus, your hands should be working in the inhibitory regime (a monotonous prolonged application of the same stroke, with a moderate pressure, with the same speed and direction, on the same area). All this, while your mental focus and intent is - to reduce peripheral vascular resistance. You will be surprised how your massage will change, as soon as you will envision (and communicate with) the cardio-vascular system's response to your work.

2) Developing a much faster speed of strokes (of course, only in the direction of lymph and venous blood flow) is necessary. In order to master it and to make it effortless, you have to focus on relaxation in between and during strokes. Development of that skill will lead to efficiency in movements. It will teach you to stay loose yourself, and to find a proper rhythm for your massage application, while having fun playing with different speeds of your strokes. The proper rhythm is a key to your efficient and effective work as a massage therapist.

3) Kneading is the main massage stroke when it comes down to skeletal muscles. In general, you should spend at least 50% of your massage session on kneading. Many MTs avoid it because they believe it puts too much stress on their fingers, especially their thumbs.

Here is the secret to saving your thumbs – learn MORE kneading techniques, and their correct application.

I absolutely agree with Dr. Kramarenko, who wrote in 1953: "One can estimate the level of a massage therapist's expertise by testing the kneading technique only."

Kneading should be approached as "passive exercises for the skeletal muscles" since it has both stimulating and relaxing

effect on them. Do not apply any excessive pressure during your kneading. Use as little lubricant as possible. As a rule, you should know 10-12 different kneading techniques, with 5-6 of them being mastered by you.

4) Without knowledge based on the vast body of scientific research, a therapist is merely a mechanical worker, potentially doing more harm than good. This understanding will allow you to better assess the effectiveness of your massage as well, and to better adjust for future sessions with your client. It is amazing, how by using some kneading techniques, with the same pressure and duration, but just changing the order in which origin, belly and insertion of a muscle massaged, - you get an absolutely opposite outcome. Thus, to inhibit a muscle/ to reduce muscle tone:

First-apply kneading to the insertion part of the muscle (activating Golgi tendon organ receptors).

Second-apply kneading to the belly of that muscle (activating muscle spindle receptors).

Third-apply kneading to the origin part of that muscle (activating Golgi tendon organ receptors).

In cases, when you need to stimulate a muscle / to increase muscle tone:

First-apply kneading to its insertion.

Second-apply kneading to its origin.

Third-apply kneading to its belly.

In addition, it is important to understand the concept of lifting a muscle while working on its insertion and origin; and the concept of stretching (without lifting) a muscle while working on its belly. This will allow you to target specifically either Golgi tendon organ receptors or muscle spindles.

Finish Line

It is my sincere hope that you, my respected colleagues, would add to your already strong belief in power of massage with a solid knowledge of its undeniable benefits for athletes (as well as fitness enthusiasts). Sports Massage has both a great history and an impressive body of scientific research behind it.

It works beautifully! Know it! Use it! Enjoy it!

This is the first in the series of articles, offering an insight on the past, present and future of Sports Massage as a scientifically developed method of massage.

Oleg Bouimer, former professional athlete is a founder of OMassage®, Inc. in Los Angeles, providing wellness services to a "who's who" client base. Oleg has gained extensive experience working with the NBA, NHL and NFL. He has numerous kudos from Vogue and other publications, including being voted by Allure as "The Best In LA."

Oleg Bouimer is the Founder and Executive Director of The Global Wellness Institute, a non-for-profit organization with a focus on clinical research of the effectiveness of massage therapy in pain management and sports rehabilitation. Oleg is currently writing a book on Sports Massage (with a DVD) to be released in the fall 2008.