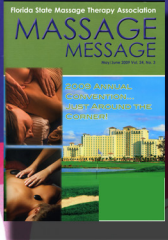


2009 Annual Convention Speaker Previews

Russian (with an American Accent)

Sports Massage II



By Oleg Bouimer

After many years of both teaching and performing sports massage across our nation, which still remains “the land of opportunities” in my opinion, I am yet to see enough massage therapists working with athletes and actually applying “sports massage”.

My point is, it is not enough to simply show up at a race place (or any other sports event) with a massage table, to become a sports massage therapist. No, it does not happen automatically. There is a need for a very specific training, based on scientifically developed concepts and protocols of sports massage.

It makes me smile (I simply choose smiling over crying) when I see, left and right, massage therapists applying their regular massage routine to athletes, with the only difference being a more aggressive approach in their work. I guess it makes some sense to growl and to warm up your elbows before attacking a stronger and more muscular body. Does it? In reality, you should always make sure you spend enough time to address skin and to improve blood and lymph circulation in the massaged area first, before you would go deeper. Too many times I see massage therapists going “*too deep, too fast*”; especially, if they had been asked for a D-E-E-E-P tissue massage.

By the way, my teachers back in Russia would have a hard time understanding the concept of Deep Tissue Massage as a stand-alone modality of massage. In my opinion, it simply creates an extra opportunity to charge massage students for “the next level in learning” in schools and customers for “the next level in experiencing” their massage.

I believe every massage therapist should

be trained to *gradually, safely and efficiently* take care of — layer by layer — skin, connective tissue and both superficially and deeply located skeletal muscles. This should be as basic training as it gets.

Therefore, the purpose of this article (same as the previous one, in July-August '08 issue) is to make you aware of some specific attributes of sports massage and their application in your practice. So, let's get right to it and build upon what we had covered in the first article.

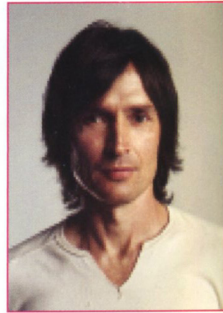
To start with, let me share with you a couple of my personal and painful experiences. The first one was a painful one based on me losing a race for no other reason, but getting a massage done right beforehand. Second one was an actually physically painful one, as a result of me getting a post-event massage received right after winning a race.

Both of them, to make a long story short, were performed by therapists with a good intention, but without a specific knowledge of how to handle an athlete right before and right after a competition. Therefore, in the first case, a massage application was overdone, which had interfered with a fine tune I had developed with my legs work. As a result, I had lost a precision in the control of my legs' response to a tempo of my race. So, all I could do was to watch, helplessly, other runners passing by me.

In the second case, after crossing a finish line first, I was so happy and exhausted at the same time that it seemed to me like a great idea to relax on a massage table for a few minutes. Since I was the first one to show up for a massage, a senior instructor himself had stepped up to the table, with other therapists watching. After a few general strokes on my back, he had put my leg in a “frog” position and pushed down on my hip...Snap!...I could barely walk for a month after.

Here are some specific applications of the basic massage strokes during pre- and post- sports massage:

1) Friction with a moderate pressure should be



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used in a pre-event sports massage application.

2) Beware of its stimulating effect. You should not be tempted to use it during your post-event session.

3) Always finish working on each segment with a passive stretching of that segment (Avoid overstretching.).

4) No percussions and milking right before (and right after) a race.

5) No pre-event massage (especially, vibration) when dealing with high level (elite) athletes. (Unless you are their personal therapist and it is a part of their training process.)

6) Use a gentle and nurturing approach to a post-event session when it is done right after an event. (Nothing fancy!)

In my opinion, one of the biggest challenges massage therapists are facing, when there is a need to switch to a sports massage, when dealing with someone before, after or in between one's exposure to the maximal or sub-maximal physical load, is switching from longer and slower types of strokes to shorter and faster types (friction-kneading, as an example). So, essentially, it is about having comfort and skills in replacing most of effleurage and milking with a variety of light-to-medium kneading, friction-kneading and shaking techniques. Talking about the variety, once again, it would be advisable for every massage therapist (sports or not) to learn 10-12 different kneading techniques, with 5-6 being completely mastered. Besides other things, like serving as a good set of tools to be used in, at least, 50% of each of your massage protocols (when working with muscles), while saving your hands, it would eliminate an effect of the *Phenomenon of Adaptation*: It is when even the best technique would lose its effect on a client, if or when used over and over again. In other words, even though we all deal with some real nutcrackers from time to time that do flake out, a very common reason why a practitioner fails to retain one's clients is because he or she is not fully mindful of that phenomenon.

The same goes for my clients: I can never expect or take for granted their experience of my massage as "the best ever"! I must always be fully aware of the *Phenomenon of Adaptation*. And so should you

be. It is like in a relationship, you need to "keep it fresh" by coming up with some new tricks and/or alternating some old ones, in order to keep it alive.

It is advisable to use the Segment Massage as a main approach to outlining a protocol for every sports massage session. What it means is that you should know well: the anatomy of the most important peripheral nerves; the places where those nerves come to the surface; segmental innervations of skin (dermatomes), muscles (myotomes), bones (sclerotomes).

It helps to know that innervations of upper extremities come from C1-C8 spinal nerves, and lower extremities – from T11-T12, L1-L5 and S1-S5.

As an example, based on this concept, if you work with a runner, you should follow this sequence: lumbar area of the spine (with a focus on the paravertebral area), glutes, hamstrings, quadriceps, knee joints, calves, ankle joints, and feet.

In a case when you need to work on upper extremity (baseball player as an example), you should start with cervical and upper thoracic area of the spine, then shoulder joint, shoulder, elbow joint, forearm, wrist joint, hand and fingers.

Also, as a personal observation, the best sports massage therapists are not as good as the best medical (as a concept) massage therapists, when it comes down to working with a wide range of medical pathologies, and vice versa. Therefore, even though you might be successful in both fields, it is advisable to pick your battlefield to master and enjoy.

Now, by following a general idea of "without action there is no reaction," please take it as your homework assignment: learn to move your fingers faster, while both hands working independently, with a customized rhythm leading you through each session, while you move effortlessly, from your core and getting re-charged with every massage you give, while having a time of your life doing it.