

High-Performance Training Coaching Guide: Integrated Tapering & Psychological Readiness

By Coach Shan AI

1. Strategic Foundation & Objectives

This directive establishes the protocol for synchronizing physiological peaking with psychological skills training (PST) to ensure our squads—both men & women—hits the mat at the Olympic Games in a state of "Absolute Readiness." Physical tapering alone is a failed strategy; if the mind is not periodized alongside the body, the athlete will fail to execute under the lights. Our objective is to eliminate accumulated fatigue while sharpening the technical "feel" & mental resilience required to win in the final 30 seconds of a gold-medal match.

2. The Elite Taper: Optimizing Physical Performance

Drawing from USOTC best practices & the research of Inigo Mujika, Ph.D., the taper is not a rest period—it is a systematic phase of "functional dis-accumulation." We are shedding the fatigue of the quadrennial while keeping the central nervous system (CNS) redlined for competition.

Tapering Variables: The 2–3 Week Protocol

Variable	Adjustment Strategy	Goal
Volume	40–60% Linear or Exponential Reduction	Clear metabolic waste & restore glycogen stores.
Intensity	Maintenance (100% Competition Effort)	Preserve hand-fighting sensitivity & neuromuscular snap.

Frequency	Maintenance ($\geq 80\%$ of session count)	Keep the "rhythm" of the training week intact.
Work-to-Rest	Increased Rest Intervals (1:4 or higher)	Maximize ATP-PC recovery between explosive bursts.
Duration	Reduced Session Length (30–45 mins)	Minimize sweat loss & unnecessary caloric burn.

Actionable Implementation: The Non-Linear Taper

To prevent detraining & maintain "hand-fighting sensitivity," coaches must implement the following:

1. **High-Intensity Maintenance:** On the whistle, the pace must be 100%. We do not "slow down" during a taper; we simply stop sooner.
2. **Wrestling-Specific Sharpness:** Replace grinding aerobic work with high-pace technical clears. Focus on:
 - **Short-time situational starts (30s):** Scrambling from a front headlock or defending a single-leg.
 - **Par terre defensive escapes:** Explosive 15-second bursts to counter the gut-wrench or lace.
 - **Hand-fighting:** Rapid-fire 20-second drills focusing on attaching ties & re-attacking.
3. **Energy Pathway Specificity:** Per Krista Austin, Ph.D., sessions must reflect the 6-minute anaerobic-aerobic hybrid nature of wrestling. Keep work intervals short & explosive to prime the glycolytic system without inducing deep systemic fatigue.

3. Periodization of Psychological Skills Training (PST)

Mental preparation must be as structured as a lifting program. Following Gloria Balague, Ph.D.'s framework, PST moves from broad foundation to narrow, lethal focus.

Phase-Specific Mental Skills

General Prep Phase: The Foundation

- **Process-Goal Integration:** Moving beyond "I want to win" to "I will maintain a 3-point lead by controlling the center."
- **Refining Big Point Scenarios:** Mental rehearsal of high-pressure moments—down by 1 with 15 seconds remaining.

Pre-Competition Phase: The Anchor

- **Tactical Imagery:** Visualizing specific opponents, their go-to attacks, & your successful counters.
- **"Competition-Mode" Routines:** Establishing a bulletproof warm-up that signals the brain it is time to hunt.

Competition/Taper Phase: The Narrowing

- **Energy Management:** Preserving mental "match-energy" by avoiding external stressors & media.
- **Focus Narrowing:** Utilizing cues that trigger immediate physical responses, ignoring the crowd & the scoreboard.

Diversity & Inclusivity Integration

A Lead Strategist knows that a squad is only as strong as its individual components.

- **Individualized Stress Drivers:** Recognize that motivational drivers may differ; while some athletes thrive on "the kill," others perform better through "technical flow."
- **Biomechanical Language:** Use inclusive, structural cues like **"Find Your Position."** This focuses on the athlete's skeletal alignment & center of gravity rather than gendered assumptions of raw strength or "powering through."

4. Synchronized Peak Protocol: The 14-Day Countdown

This timeline integrates Mujika's physical tapering with Balague's mental periodization and critical weight management.

Days 14–10: The Transition Below ↓

- **Days 14–10: The Transition**

- *Physical:* Initiate 40% volume reduction. High-intensity live wrestling at 100% effort but with 50% fewer rounds.
- *Mental:* Finalize the "Big Point" mental map. Focus on the feeling of scoring from a defensive position.

- **Days 9–5: The Sharpener**

- *Physical:* 60% volume reduction. Short, "pop" sessions. Focused hand-fighting and 30-second "on-the-whistle" bursts.
- *Mental:* Execute post-session imagery. Visualize the tournament arena, the smell of the mats, & the feeling of the referee raising your hand.

- **Days 4–1: The Final Polish & Weight Cut**

- *Physical:* Minimal duration (20–30 mins). Maintain intensity while minimizing sweat loss to prevent dehydration-induced CNS fatigue.
- *Mental:* **Cognitive Performance under Restriction.** Practice focus drills while hungry/thirsty to ensure the mind remains sharp during the final weight descent. Transition to "one-match-at-a-time" tunnel vision.

5. Monitoring & Recovery Indicators

Based on Michael Kellman & Randy Wilbur, coaches must monitor the "Ready-to-Play" state daily. A failed taper is usually visible in the data before it is visible on the mat.

Red-Flag Checklist

- [] **Resting Heart Rate (RHR):** An elevation of >5-8 BPM over baseline indicates systemic stress.
- [] **Sleep Quality:** Inability to reach REM despite the lower training volume.
- [] **Menstrual Cycle Disruptions:** For female athletes, any uncharacteristic irregularity or sudden onset of RED-S symptoms is a major recovery red flag.
- [] **Loss of Confidence:** Verbalizing doubt or "flatness" in situational live wrestling.
- [] **Reaction Time:** Slower "whistle response" during hand-fighting drills.

Recovery Optimization

1. **Nutritional Periodization (Seebohar):** Adjust caloric intake to match the volume drop. Ensure high-quality carbohydrate loading happens *after* weigh-ins to replenish glycogen stores for the energy pathways identified by Krista Austin.
2. **Sleep Hygiene:** 9+ hours in a blacked-out, 65-degree room. No screens 60 minutes before bed during the 14-day countdown.
3. **Active Recovery:** Low-impact mobility or pool work to flush the system without taxing the joints or CNS.

6. Coaching Communication for the Competition Floor

On the mats, the "Lead Strategist" voice must be surgical. Use these cues to bridge the gap between mental intent & physical execution:

1. **"Heads/Hands/Hips"** – The foundational defensive wall. A reminder to stay structurally sound & keep the opponent away from the legs.
2. **"Score on the Restart"** – A tactical command to stay offensive the second the whistle blows, catching the opponent in a mental lapse.
3. **"Find Your Position"** – An inclusive cue for structural/technical discipline under fatigue, reminding the athlete to return to their optimal biomechanical stance.

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