

Watsu® for Athletes.

By Tomasz Zagorski.

Benefits of Watsu® has been known and applied in SPAs and clinics for many years. In the last few years Watsu has received a new field of application - Watsu for Athletes.

The diversity of athletes needs are matched by the diversity of Watsu's benefits. Among others these are: relaxation, increasing of one's body regeneration process, and increasing joints range of motion. To fully understand the range of this application we have to understand the physical and mental states of the single athlete facing different situations such as a hard training period, competition, and injury. In addition different kinds of sport have different systems of preparation determined by physiological factors needed for success in each sport.

We can group all athletes into team players and individual athletes, but athletes in a team sports need to be treated as a group of individuals. From a physiological point of view we can divide sports into main groups based on: endurance, speed and strength. In the training process all of these qualities are included in the athlete's preparation for competition. Of course endurance athletes train mostly for endurance so speed or strength are additional. Each type of training results in different kind of body reactions which an athlete describes as fatigue. Recovery from fatigue differs depending on kind of training or time and intensity of the training load. Recovery is as important as training. Some say that it is more important than training for achieving success in a sport. Sometimes there is not enough time for recovery and specialists are looking for new ways to speed up and improve natural recovery processes in an athlete's body.



Kamila Skolimowska (POL), Olympic Champion in Hammer Throwing, Sydney 2000.

Watsu gives a hand here. Warm water, relaxation, and Watsu's stretching are an athlete's best friends. Warm water releases muscle tension and activates the parasympathetic part of our Autonomic Nervous System which is responsible for regeneration processes in our body. Warm water is the ideal environment for relaxation. In Watsu relaxation comes from

combination of all stimuli: water, Shiatsu, moves and stretches. In addition we have the receiver's permission for being held and the level of this permission influences the final level of relaxation. Athletes often feel loneliness, being away from home and family, as well as the stress that accompanies fatigue and injury. Closeness to other person, feeling of being held and cradled are very valuable for athletes who are in difficult situations.

Warm water prepares muscles and joints for stretches and it gives an opportunity for stretching muscles in combinations of directions and planes unworkable on land. We can work on bigger or smaller joints using mobilisations, roll and glide moves, tractions, compressions. We can apply both stretches and mobilisations to specific conditions and needs of individual athlete in different training periods or any single sport discipline. It is especially important during recovery from the injury and rehabilitation.



Ilya Markow (RUS), World Champion in Race Walking, Edmonton 2001.

An athlete's year contains periods for preparation, competition and regeneration.

The goal of the first period is to get into the best shape possible for the main competition. It is a time of hard training, first with high volume and small intensity, than with changing proportion in increasing intensity. Training sessions are very long and tiring. This kind of training results in general fatigue and local muscle fatigue which increases muscle tension. Lack of enough recovery and multiple repetitions of the same movements can lead to shortened muscles. Here, there is a place for Watsu stretchings, which we can adjust to specific needs of each sports discipline or individual athlete. Also general relaxation in warm water is very useful as a tool for recovery and prevention from being overtired or overtrained. In this training period Watsu® session should be applied 2-3 times per week.

The aim of competition period is to transform all workload done during preparatory period and using it by several testing competitions to achieve a peak performance during the main competition of the year. The intensity of training is submaximal or maximal (competitions) and it alternates the low intensity training with rest. This is very stressful and exhausting time for each athlete, connected with often long distance travels. Application of Watsu can help in recovery after competitions and it also helps to reduce stress. Number of sessions per week

depends of frequency of competition, usually it is one session per week, but we have to remember not to do sessions 2-3 days before competitions.

The regeneration period lasts 2 or 3 weeks, closes a year of training and is designed to repair all bad things that happened to an athlete's body during whole year. Often there is a special regeneration camp where athletes do activities different than their main discipline and use physiotherapy and thalassotherapy treatments. It is also time for mental rest and entertainment, time for vacation spent with family and friends. Watsu can be applied every day during this period. We can use general relaxation for mental regeneration, stretches and mobilisations of joints for working with selected parts of body.



Piotr Malachowski (POL), Olympic Silver Medalist in Discus Throwing, Beijing 2008.

Precautions are general and specific for sport. General are commonly known: acute illness, uncontrolled heart problems, skin problems, ear infections, motion sickness, orthopedic problems. Specific for sports there are main two: time directly before competitions and time just after acute soft tissue injury. During the competition every athlete has to have optimal muscle tension, in most cases it is little higher than normal. Even a single session can decrease this tension what means we have to avoid giving sessions for athletes for 2 or 3 days before competition. When any kind of soft tissue injury occurs we have to cool down injured area eliminate any movements in injury planes and control any other movements in two next joints. All these things have to be done during minimum 3 days form the injury. Watsu can warm up a bit the superficial tissue, which means it is absolute contraindication during 3 days after injury. In addition, there is a risk of making a movement in similar to injury direction during the session, what we have to have on mind doing sessions for recovering athletes.

Watsu® has been used by Kamila Skolimowska, Olympic Champion in Hammer Throwing, Sydney 2000, by Sylwia Korzeniowska, Polish national record holder in woman's 20km race walking, by Piotr Malachowski, Olympic Silver Medalist in Discus Throwing, Beijing 2008, by Ilya Markow, World Champion in Race Walking, Edmonton 2001. It is also used in preparation in Polish Olympic Teams of: Athletics, Woman Alpine Skiing and White Water Kayakers.

Athletes are very good population of Watsu® receivers because benefits of Watsu® hits exactly their needs and expectations. Future scientific researches can help introduce Watsu to sport more. There is also a necessary to teach sports physiotherapists at least entry level Watsu they could share its benefits with more and more athletes.

Tomasz Zagorski, Watsu Practitioner, therapist of top level athletes, pioneer of applying Watsu among Olympic level athletes and scientific researching in this field, former distance runner. He can be reached at: info@watsu.pl