

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPECIALIST TACTICAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS DURING LONG-TERM SPECIAL EVENTS

The security situation in the world today has a direct impact on specialist human resources (i.e., tactical law enforcement teams, military special forces, and other security agencies), especially during major planned events. These major events include large public gatherings, such as rock concerts, sporting festivals, economic forums, or dignitary and political visits. Risk management policies include the maintenance of public protection and multilayered security measures, which require specialist tactical response members to support these events with essential critical incident response capabilities.

These events are often staged over long periods; for instance, the Olympic Games last three weeks. The length of the event, combined with extensive lead-up training, briefings, planning, and preparation means that a tactical team may be engaged in a given task for a significant amount of time. During this pre-event period, these specialists may not be able to conduct adequate physical conditioning due to competing priorities, which may result in a drop in human performance, known as deconditioning (5).

Several papers have examined the needs of the tactical athlete to stimulate key physical fitness attributes regularly. These studies have demonstrated that a consistent and well-balanced strength and conditioning program augmented with specific and necessary load carriage activities every 7 – 14 days may enhance performance in relative strength, power, and aerobic/anaerobic capacity; all fundamental to a tactical athlete's occupational role (3,5).

The lack of specific conditioning time for these tactical athletes during long deployments poses a significant risk to their overall operational performance at large scale events. This potential reduction in performance can be attributed to the large time gaps between consistent physical training sessions. These gaps are often due to logistical constraints (i.e., shift work, long working hours, and residing in temporary accommodation, motels, or military barracks with limited access to adequate conditioning facilities).

The specialist tactical law enforcement team's charter in any jurisdiction is "response." In this case, response can be defined as rapid activation of highly trained and highly skilled use of force exponents utilizing specialist tactics, equipment, and methodologies to cordon, contain, and resolve high-risk situations outside the capability of first responders. Police tactical groups exercise these skills and tactics by regularly testing methodologies

via "stimulus response training," such as rigorous scenario training in selected training venues that elicit the appropriate use of force responses required to deal with the presented threat (i.e., active shooters, hostage situations, etc.).

This stimulus response training mimics the actions that would be expected in a real-life, real-time critical event. The training should be conducted wearing full operational load, including ballistic personal protective equipment (PPE), respirator (gas mask), ammunition, water, specialist equipment, and weapons. Sustaining this essential operational load (up to 25 kg) means that this training can be extremely physically demanding, and it requires regular resilience conditioning otherwise performance may be directly affected by the load (5). Considering this, while functional training may require the tactical athlete to be able to carry the load and maintain good postural core strength, while also having high levels of relative strength, anaerobic conditioning, and aerobic conditioning, the stimulus response training may not only be time consuming but also mentally fatiguing thereby decreasing the desire of the tactical athlete to perform any maintenance training (1,3).

Take the Group of 20 (G20) economic forum, which recently concluded in Australia, as an example. The G20 security operation ran for approximately six weeks with the focus on two key days of meetings. This operation involved 6,000 law enforcement and military officers, including Special Forces and Australian Police Tactical Groups. These special tactical law enforcement groups exercised via scenario-based training in the venue areas of the event providing essential operating environment familiarization and specific on-the-job skills enhancement.

It is the responsibility of the special law enforcement officers to maintain the skills and tactics, command and control, and operational factors necessary to ensure safety at these major events. The aforementioned primary risks are the deleterious effects that long-term deployment has on the individual's physical conditioning; therefore, it is essential to maximize finite training time and minimize the impacts of the environment.

A description of factors, variables, and challenges that negatively affect the tactical athlete's ability to maintain peak condition during major events is presented in Table 1. It is worth noting that the list is not exhaustive.

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Tactical athletes will often come up with their own unique and interesting ways to maintain their conditioning. To assist the tactical athletes in maintaining a baseline of conditioning during major events and to combat the negative outcomes in Table 1, Table 2 provides some strategies that can be adopted to mitigate these effects.

Specialist tactical law enforcement officers and Special Forces teams are often required to perform duties at a high level of alertness while at major long-term special events. By the very nature of the operational task, tactical athletes that ordinarily maintain a very high level of strength and conditioning may sustain the effects of deconditioning during a prolonged period without the ability to train. It is vitally important for tactical athletes in these situations to be mindful of the possibility of detraining and try to prevent it when possible; mitigation strategies can help to assist tactical athletes to perform at their best and to reduce the risk of occupational injury (4).

## REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shane Irving is currently serving as a tactical law enforcement officer in Australia. He has over 20 years of experience working domestically and internationally as a member of the Australian Police Tactical Groups and Special Operations community. Irving has an undergraduate degree in Exercise Science and supervises the physical conditioning of tactical officers in his current occupational role. He has also represented Australia as an elite athlete in track and field and triathlon. Irving is commencing his post graduate studies at Bond University as part of the Health Sciences and Medicine Faculty.

**TABLE 1. FACTORS, VARIABLES, AND CHALLENGES THAT AFFECT CONDITIONING**

FACTORS/VARIABLES/CHALLENGES	RESULTS
<b>Long working hours</b>	Fatigue; simply no time to train.
<b>Travel</b>	Often tactical athletes have to drive operational response vehicles with essential equipment long distances to attend the events. In addition, travel includes the daily commute between accommodation and venue locations, if not based at critical infrastructure sites.
<b>Nutrition</b>	Often operators have to perform long shifts in static locations where options may not exist for healthy food choices. In addition, meals may have to be replaced with Meals Ready-to-Eat (MREs) or fast food.
<b>Accommodation</b>	Housing large numbers of tactical athletes and supporting staff can be difficult. This means teams may not be accommodated in an area that has access to appropriate strength and conditioning facilities.
<b>Fatigue management</b>	Shift work, long shifts, and poor sleeping conditions (i.e., barracks, ground sheet, or tent line accommodations) directly impact energy levels and performance.
<b>Situational awareness and security environment</b>	Due to the high threat environment and nature of operations, opportunities may not exist for members to exercise in venue precincts. During the course of major events, tactical athletes may be dressed in PPE and maintained at a “high level” of alertness for days on end. They may also be confined to specific holding areas with limited options for physical activity.

**TABLE 2. STRATEGIES TO MAINTAIN CONDITIONING DURING MAJOR EVENTS**

Factors/Variables/Challenges	Mitigation Strategy
<b>Long work hours</b>	Managers and supervisors need to ensure that tactical athletes do not forgo sleep in order to train, as fatigue will be cumulative over the course of the event. An individual balance needs to be obtained between training stimulus and conditioning maintenance, and the tactical athlete's overall fatigue.
<b>Accommodation</b>	These days, most elite tactical units have full-time tactical facilitators at their service; therefore, tactical athletes know how to train with less. "Flyaway kits" are travel boxes/trunks that contain training aids, which can be transported with the team equipment. These kits contain aids such as sand bags and water bags, which can be transported while compressed and then filled on location. Kettlebells (if travelling via road) can add enough weight and variation to allow for strength, endurance, or high-intensity training options. Jump ropes, medicine balls, abdominal wheels, foam rollers, and TRX™ systems can all be packed into trunks for transportation. The Beep Test App on an iPhone can also be a useful tool. Imagination and motivation will result in operators often completing enough activity to reduce the effects of detraining.
<b>Travel</b>	There is a substantial difference in terms of equipment that can be packed depending on whether the travel is by road or air. Road travel allows for transportation of flyaway kits and more training aids.
<b>Nutrition</b>	In preparation for the event, nutritional considerations must be addressed. Sports nutritional supplements can be easily packed and transported, such as sports bars, protein replacements, shakes mixed with water, high protein and energy foods that are prepared in advance, and dehydrated foods such as beef jerky, nuts, dried fruits, muesli, etc. Foods that can be stored with limited space at room temperature can be useful between meals or when healthy options are not available.
<b>Fatigue management</b>	Ensuring proper sleeping patterns is critically important, and should be managed on a daily basis. Sometimes resting and achieving adequate sleep may be the best physical maintenance tool.
<b>Situational awareness and security environment</b>	The operational environment sometimes mandates that the only physical conditioning or training that can be squeezed into a schedule are basic push-ups, sit-ups, burpees, static holds, or some basic mobility, while dressed in full PPE in a holding area. Due to the nature of operations, it may not be appropriate for members to have breaks or time to devote to physical conditioning. Basic movement, mobility, and some activity is better than nothing, and can reduce the risk of injury (4).