

## **DOES SEX AFFECT PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE?**

Across most professional sports, the topic of sex and physical performance is discussed and theories flourish. Conflicting theories are only slightly clarified by recent medical evidence.

A recent literature review of sex before competition was summarised in an editorial of the *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine*. One view expressed is that athletes should abstain from sex for important competitions because the act of ejaculation may draw testosterone from the body and weaken the athlete. Conversely, other views suggest that the relaxation factor following sex is beneficial to the athlete and may enhance performance.

One study from the 1960s measured maximum effort grip strength the morning after sex in 14 married male athletes, and again measured grip strength following at least six days of abstinence. There was no difference. Other unpublished data from researchers at Colorado State University in 1990 measured grip strength, balance, reaction time, aerobic power and lateral movements. Sex did not affect any of these parameters. A 1995 study suggested that sex 12 hours prior to testing had no effect on aerobic power and recovery from exercise.

Therefore, one might conclude that sex prior to competition is unlikely to affect performance in a negative way. It has been shown that 'normal' sexual activity between married partners expends only 25-50 calories (similar to walking up two flights of stairs). The lack of negative physiological effect is understandable.

All authors concluded that more research is required and agree that the psychological factors are the most important to measure – aggression, motivation, alertness, anxiety and attitude towards competition.

A common, practical view is that maintaining your normal routine before significant sporting events is important and a good night's sleep, with or without sex, is critical.