High-intensity interval training recommendations for combat sports athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tomás HERRERA-VALENZUELA1,2, Pablo Valdés-Badilla3, & Emerson Franchini*4

1 Escuela de Ciencias de la Actividad Física, el Deporte y la Salud. Universidad de Santiago de Chile (USACH) (Chile)
2 Escuela de Ciencias del Deporte, Facultad de Salud. Universidad Santo Tomás (UST) (Chile)
3 Physical Education Pedagogy, Faculty of Education. Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Temuco (Chile)
4 Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisas em Lutas, Artes Marciais e Modalidades de Combate, Departamento de Esporte, Escola de Educação Física e Esporte, Universidade de São Paulo (Brasil)

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic has caused governments to establish quarantine and social distancing for the population in order to decrease the contamination peak, factors that have affected the athletes’ preparation. In this context, we developed some high-intensity interval training (HIIT) recommendations for Olympic combat sports athletes that can be performed at home. The HIIT protocols should be added by body mass-based muscle strengthening exercises (similar to technical exercises), with the goal to preserve athletes’ muscle mass and physical fitness. Finally, emergency situations require contingency plans for sport.

Keywords: Combat sports; martial arts; boxing; judo; karate; taekwondo; wrestling; home workout.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor-in-Chief, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted, up to March 30th, in more than 766,000 infected patients and more than 36,000 deceased. This situation has generated a deep impact on people’s lives, and governments have implemented different measures to cope with it, including the quarantine and social distancing to decrease the peak of contamination. The sport has also been affected by these pandemic effects, including the postponement of sports events.
events, professional tournaments, events with a mass live audience, and classificatory events for the Olympic Games. This has resulted in the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics to 2021, as announced by the Japan Prime-Minister last March 24th. It is essential to consider that combat sports represent approximately 25% of all medals disputed during the Olympic Games and, as such, these sports are quite relevant for the countries' performance in this competition.

Athletes from countries that have declared quarantine, including Italy, Spain, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, among others, are confined at home trying to keep their Athletic preparation. Many of these athletes are showing their training routines on social media, performing their training exercises using a minimum of equipment, executing their training in small spaces such as their bedrooms, living rooms, and backyards.

Recently, a systematic review about the effects of high-intensity interval training (HIIT) on combat sports athletes' performance was published (Franchini, Cormack, & Takito, 2019). Considering this scenario, we selected training methods that are feasible to be implemented during the quarantine period, which can be executed at home. Therefore, coaches and strength and conditioning professionals could prescribe HIIT protocols to maintain combat sports athletes' physical fitness (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Original protocols</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boxing</td>
<td>Punching bag, 3 rounds (1 min between rounds), composed by 14 x 3 s of punching executions interspersed by 10 s intervals, 3 times per week.</td>
<td>Shadow, punching bag or punching pads technique executions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judo</td>
<td>2 blocks 10 x 20 s all-out uchi-komi using arm or hip techniques (throwing the partner at the end of each set) with 10 s passive recovery intervals between sets and 5 min between blocks, twice per week.</td>
<td>Use elastic bands that allow a proper uchi-komi execution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karate</td>
<td>7–9 20 s sets, running at 140% of the Maximal Aerobic Speed, with 15 s passive recovery intervals, twice per week.</td>
<td>Change the 20 s sprint by technical exercises to be executed all-out. Shadow, kicking or punching bag or pads.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taekwondo</td>
<td>Three times per week, running at 85–100% HR (10 to 60 s sets with 40 to 120 s intervals, distributed along the 4 weeks).</td>
<td>Change the 10 to 60s sprints by technical exercises to be executed all-out. Shadow, kicking or punching bag or pads.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>6 x 35 m sprints interspersed by 10 s passive recovery intervals, twice per week (week: 3 sets interspersed by 3 min; 1 additional set per week).</td>
<td>Change the 35 m sprints by the time to finish this distance (5-6 s). Change the sprint by technical exercises to be executed all-out.</td>
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</table>

HRmax: maximal heart rate; uchi-komi: throwing technique repetition.

The immune metabolic responses vary according to the HIIT protocol, training status and energy stores availability. Typically, highly-trained individuals present a reduced interleukin 6 (IL-6) response when compared to sedentary counterparts when executing HIIT protocols (Panissa et al., 2015). Moreover, there is a positive immune metabolic adaptation, after only three HIIT sessions when 48 h rest intervals are adopted between sessions (Fisher et al., 2011). Thus, for athletes, the HIIT protocols presented in this letter are unlikely to result in relevant immune suppression. Even though we recommend that the professionals responsible for the preparation individually analyze the prescription of the training programs.

The HIIT protocol must be complemented by body mass-based muscle strengthening exercises (similar to the technical exercises), using the effort and pause characteristics of each specific combat sport, with the main goal to preserve the athletes’ muscle mass and physical fitness. Finally, in face of emergency situations, coaches and athletes should search and follow contingency plans because the physical inactivity may reduce the athletic performance. Additionally, staying physically active may contribute to keep the immune system defenses, and to increase the time in...
different activities during the quarantine may help to maintain a proper mental health. These actions may help to face the pandemic with a more positive attitude.

References


