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The Tactical Touchpoint Model: Readiness on Demand

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Disclaimer: The views in this article represent Mark Christiani's perspectives and do not reflect those of O2X.

Abstract

Traditional periodization models are often designed around predictable competition schedules and planned for and around performance peaks. Tactical athletes, however, must maintain readiness for demands that may occur with little warning and under unpredictable operational conditions. This article introduces the Tactical Touchpoint Model, a residual-based approach to year-round physical preparation and readiness for military personnel, firefighters, law enforcement officers, federal agents, and other tactical professionals. The model is organized around three layers: always-on touchpoints, rotating training emphasis, and environmental adjustment. Short, frequent exposures are used to preserve essential or quickly declining qualities such as speed, power, strength, aerobic capacity, strength endurance, and load tolerance. Training emphasis can then shift toward specific goals without allowing other mission-critical qualities to disappear entirely. Finally, training volume and intensity are adjusted according to occupational demands, sleep, stress, injury status, equipment access, and operational tempo. Rather than treating a written program as a fixed prediction of adaptation, the Tactical Touchpoint Model views the plan as a hypothesis that must be continually evaluated against the athlete's response and current environment. This article will provide practical templates that demonstrate how coaches can apply the model during normal training periods and high-stress operational weeks while avoiding unnecessary fatigue. This approach provides tactical strength and conditioning professionals with a flexible framework for balancing long-term development with immediate operational readiness. The central principle is straightforward: touch what fades, maintain what matters, and build what the mission allows.

Introduction

Coming from sport, I was always taught periodization (the "logical method of planning training interventions in a sequential and integrative fashion in order to maximize training-induced physiological and performance outcomes"[1]) is built around the idea of peaking. An athlete has a competition date, the coach works backward from that date, and training is organized into phases that build toward optimal performance to peak to facilitate winning. When the calendar is predictable, the performance target is clear, and recovery can be planned around competition, that model makes sense. Tactical athletes do not live in that world.

A soldier, firefighter, police officer, federal agent, or industrial operator may need to perform with little warning. The hardest day of the year may not be identified ahead of

time. It may arrive as a call, a pursuit, a fire, a field problem, a deployment tasking, a casualty drag, a long shift, or a sudden operational requirement. That creates a different training problem. The tactical athlete does not need to be the best version of themselves on one known date. They need to always be a reliable version of themselves; on demand.

Because of that, tactical periodization should not be built primarily around peaking. It should be built around sustained readiness. More specifically, it should be organized around the physical qualities that must be maintained, the qualities that decay fastest, and the realities of the operational environment. A useful way to summarize this approach is simple: touch what fades, maintain what matters, and build what the mission allows.

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The Problem with Traditional Blocks

Coaches traditionally organize periodization into blocks. A program might move from hypertrophy to strength, from strength to power, from power to competition, or from general preparation to specific preparation. That approach works well in sport settings, but it becomes confusing in tactical settings because tactical athletes cannot afford to let essential qualities disappear while waiting for the next block.

A Service member who spends eight weeks focused only on aerobic development may lose speed, power, and maximal strength qualities that still matter for sprinting, climbing, fighting, dragging, and moving under load. A firefighter who focuses only on maximal strength may lose aerobic efficiency and repeat-effort capacity that matters on the fireground. A police officer who trains only anaerobic conditioning (i.e., training intensity that focuses on one to three minutes of maximal sustained output) may lose capacity needed to sustain a prolonged foot pursuit, search a large building or area, recover between repeated high-intensity efforts, or maintain performance throughout an extended critical incident.

The issue is not that blocks are useless. The issue is that tactical athletes require too many physical qualities to allow any essential quality to vanish completely. Traditional periodization often asks, "What phase are we in?" Tactical periodization should ask, "What quality cannot be allowed to decay?" That question changes the entire planning process.

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The Plan Is a Hypothesis

John Kiely's work on periodization is useful because it challenges coaches to stop treating training plans like prediction machines.[2,3,4] His critique is not that planning is useless. It is that human adaptation is too complex to be controlled perfectly by a prewritten calendar. That matters even more in tactical settings because the tactical athlete's response to training is influenced by more than the workout.

Sleep, stress, nutrition, injury history, shift work, field training, call volume, equipment access, family demands, and operational tempo all affect adaptation. The same workout can be productive on one day and excessive on another depending on what the athlete brings into the session. For tactical coaches, the written plan should be viewed as a hypothesis, and the athlete's response should be viewed as the evidence.[5]

This does not mean coaches should stop planning. It means the plan must be flexible enough to respond to reality. For tactical athletes, the model must adapt to the

environment rather than pretending the environment will cooperate with the model. That is where training residuals become critical. Or as stated by Five-Star General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in World War II, "in preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."[6]

"Touch what fades, maintain what matters, and build what the mission allows."

Residuals Mean Reduced Emphasis, Not Removal

Training residuals are often misunderstood. Coaches sometimes interpret Issurin's residual charts as if it describes how long a quality lasts after it is no longer trained.[7,8] For example, they may say that maximal strength can "last" for about thirty days or that speed fades in a few days and assume this gives them permission to ignore a quality until the chart says it is time to revisit it. That is the wrong lesson.

A better interpretation is that residuals describe how long a quality can be maintained under reduced emphasis, provided some level of direct or indirect exposure remains. A residual is not a grace period for doing nothing. It is a planning tool that helps the coach decide how often each physical quality needs to be touched to prevent meaningful decay. This distinction is critical for tactical training.

The goal is not to train everything maximally all the time. That is impossible and usually counterproductive. Everything (e.g., power, speed, change of direction, muscular strength, muscular endurance, cardiovascular endurance) cannot concurrently be the priority. The goal is to rotate emphasis while keeping essential qualities alive. Rotate emphasis, but do not remove it.

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The Tactical Touchpoint Model

The Tactical Touchpoint Model is a residual-based approach to periodization for tactical athletes and has been used by the author across the spectrum for the tactical populations with optimal effect. It is built on three layers: always-on touchpoints, rotating emphasis, and environmental adjustment. Together, these layers create a model that is structured enough to guide training but flexible enough to survive reality.



On the left, Coach Christiani is demonstrating the first rule of the Tactical Touchpoint Model, "Never Let Speed Disappear." This rule can be applied by touching speed one to two times per week with short accelerations, shuttles, and change of direction tasks.

The picture on the right demonstrates the second rule of the Tactical Touchpoint Model, "Microdose Power." This rule can be applied through one to two touchpoints on power per week by incorporating jumps, throws, Olympic lifts, or sled pushes.

Physical Quality	Practical Coaching Implication
Maximal speed / anaerobic power	Touch 1–2 times per week with short accelerations, shuttles, or change-of-direction work.
Power / explosive strength	Touch 1–2 times per week with jumps, throws, Olympic lift variations, or sled push sprints.
Strength endurance	Touch weekly with carries, circuits, stairs, calisthenics, or loaded task work.
Hypertrophy / tissue capacity	Maintain through moderate-load accessories, unilateral work, trunk training, and posterior chain work.
Anaerobic endurance	Touch every 7–10 days with intervals, hills, sled work, or tactical circuits.
Load tolerance / ruck capacity	Touch every 1–3 weeks depending on job demands and operational load.
Aerobic endurance	Maintain with 2–3 moderate exposures per week or one longer effort plus daily activity.
Maximal strength	Maintain with 1–2 heavy exposures per week, often with only a few hard sets.

Table 1. Decay Rate by Qualities

Always-on Touchpoints

Always-on touchpoints are short, frequent exposures to qualities that either decay quickly or remain essential to tactical readiness. These are not always full training sessions. In many cases, they are small doses placed at the beginning, middle, or end of a session. Examples include short accelerations, jumps, medicine ball throws, heavy carries, heavy hinge or squat exposures, zone 2 aerobic work (sixty to seventy percent heart rate max), trunk stiffness work, grip work, loaded movement, and mobility or tissue preparation.

The purpose of a touchpoint is not always to create a major adaptation. Often, the purpose is simply to prevent decay, preserve coordination, maintain tissue tolerance, or remind the nervous system how to express force quickly. This is especially important for speed and power, as these qualities tend to fade faster than maximal strength or aerobic endurance. They also require freshness, intent, and quality. If they are ignored for too long, the athlete may still feel "fit" but lose the ability to move explosively, which can falsely inflate one's perceived readiness.

In tactical settings, that matters. Speed and power are not just for sport. They show up in short pursuits, rapid direction changes, breaching tasks, climbing, jumping, reacting, fighting for position, and producing force quickly under fatigue or load. Because these qualities fade quickly, they need frequent exposure. Touch explosive qualities first and often.

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It is built on three layers: always-on touchpoints, rotating emphasis, and environmental adjustment."

Rotating Emphasis Without Becoming One-Dimensional

The second layer is where traditional periodization still has value. A tactical athlete can still emphasize a specific quality for a period of time. There may be blocks focused on maximal strength, aerobic development, ruck capacity, hypertrophy, work capacity, return-to-duty preparation, special schools preparation, selection preparation, or a fitness test. The difference is that an emphasis block does not remove all other qualities. It simply turns the dial up on one or two priorities while maintaining the rest through touchpoints.

For example, during an aerobic emphasis block, the athlete may increase zone 2 aerobic volume, tempo work, or ruck progression. But speed, power, and strength stimulus do not disappear. They are touched with small doses. During a maximal strength block, the athlete may prioritize heavy lifting. But aerobic capacity, tissue tolerance, and movement quality do not disappear. They are maintained through low-dose aerobic work, loaded carries, mobility, and conditioning exposures.

This is a better fit for tactical populations because they cannot afford to become one-dimensional. They may temporarily emphasize a quality, but they must remain broadly capable. It is okay to emphasize one or two qualities but everything mission-critical must still be maintained.

The Environment Decides the Dose

The third layer is the most important tactical layer. The plan must adjust to the environment. If the plan is a hypothesis, then the coach must constantly compare the written plan against the athlete's current reality.[9]



The coach should be asking practical questions every week and sometimes every session. How much sleep did the athlete get? What did they do at work yesterday? What are they expected to do tomorrow? Are they sore, injured, or under-recovered? Is this a high-operational-stress week? Is equipment available? Is the athlete in a field environment, academy, station, unit, or gym? Does today's training improve readiness, or does it simply add fatigue? This may seem like a lot but in time it becomes second nature to get a pulse check before training.

Furthermore, the ones you are training will note your commitment to their progress through your genuine questions; increasing buy-in and program feedback. Tactical populations are not known to "bring up problems." Through repeated, meaningful, and genuine questions, meaningful relationships can be developed; thus, truly enabling readiness on demand.

This layer prevents the Tactical Touchpoint Model from becoming just another rigid template. Without this layer, one cannot apply the Tactical Touchpoint Model. Thus, this framework enables the flexibility to execute different sessions depending on the environment. In a low-stress week, the coach may push. In a high-stress week, the coach may maintain qualities with minimal effective dose. In

a recovery week, the coach may focus on movement, aerobic restoration, tissue quality, and low-stress touchpoints. Simply put, build when the environment allows, maintain when the environment demands, and restore when the athlete needs it.

"The difference is that an emphasis block does not remove all other qualities. It simply turns the dial up on one or two priorities while maintaining the rest through touchpoints."

Ranking Qualities by Decay

Training residuals help coaches prioritize what must be touched most often. Fast-decaying qualities need frequent exposure (maximal speed, anaerobic power, strength endurance, aerobic endurance, and maximal strength).[10,11] Longer-lasting qualities can often be maintained with lower doses (hypertrophy / tissue capacity, load tolerance / ruck capacity).[12,13] A tactical residual model might rank qualities in the following way.

This should not be read as a countdown to decay. It should be read as a priority map. The faster a quality fades, the more often it needs to be touched. The longer a quality holds, the more flexibility the coach must reduce volume during high-stress periods.

A Three-Day Tactical Touchpoint Template

A tactical athlete training three days per week can still touch multiple qualities without turning every session into a maximal effort. Additionally, the Tactical Touchpoint Model is intentional about not creating the "blender effect," which is the negative consequences that occur when there is a lack of sequencing and integration in training programs that train numerous attributes simultaneously without considering how these factors interrelate.[14] The template below is not meant to be a perfect program. It is a way to organize the week, so speed, power, strength, aerobic capacity, strength endurance, load tolerance, and durability all remain present.

This template keeps the athlete exposed to multiple qualities without pretending each quality needs equal volume. If the athlete only has two days, the coach can combine the highest-priority touchpoints. If the athlete has four or five days, the coach can spread the qualities out and increase the dose. If the athlete is in a high-stress cycle, volume can come down while exposure remains.

Day	Primary Theme	Touchpoint	Main Work	Secondary Work	Finish
Day 1	Speed, strength, aerobic maintenance	Short accelerations, jumps, or change-of-direction drills	Heavy lower-body strength	Upper-body push and pull	Easy zone 2 bike, row, incline walk, or loaded walk (i.e., 60 to 70 percent heart rate max)
Day 2	Power, strength endurance, trunk	Med ball throws, jumps, Olympic lift variation, or sled acceleration	Carries, sleds, stairs, circuits, or repetitive task-based work	Shoulders, hips, trunk, posterior chain, and grip	Mobility, breathing, or easy aerobic cooldown
Day 3	Aerobic capacity, load tolerance, total-body strength	Short hill sprint, shuttle, jump series, or explosive throw	Run, ruck, bike, row, swim, or mixed aerobic work	Two to three heavy sets of a hinge, squat, press, pull, or carry	Feet, calves, hips, trunk, posterior chain, neck, or shoulder durability work

Table 2. Three-Day Tactical Touchpoint Model Template for a Service Member

Training Piece	Example
Warm-up	Movement prep, mobility, breathing, and easy cyclical work
Speed / power touch	3 x 3 jumps and 3 x 5 medicine ball throws
Strength touch	2 x 3 trap bar deadlift, squat, press, pull, or heavy sandbag lift
Strength endurance touch	3–4 moderate rounds of carries, push-ups, rows, and step-ups
Aerobic / recovery finish	8–10 minutes easy bike, walking, rowing, or nasal-breathing cardio

Table 3. Three-Day Tactical Touchpoint Model Template for a Service Member.

What This Looks Like During a High-Stress Week

During a field week, deployment workup, academy stress week, high-call-volume cycle, or heavy mandatory training period, the goal may shift from adaptation to maintenance. In that case, a thirty-minute session might be enough. The incorrect response is to avoid training, as "fitness characteristics decay during periods of inactivity," and the stimulus needed to maintain fitness is less than the stimulus needed to increase fitness.[15]

That session does not chase a personal record. It does not bury the athlete. It touches what matters and protects readiness. That is not a compromise; it is coaching.

Coaching Rules for the Tactical Touchpoint Model

The first rule is to never let speed disappear. Max speed decays quickly. Even during endurance or strength-focused periods, short speed exposures should remain in the week. The second rule is to micro-dose power. Power does not require massive volume. It requires intent, freshness, and consistency. A few high-quality jumps, throws, or explosive lifts can preserve the quality without creating unnecessary fatigue.

The third rule is train strength one to twice per week. Strength can often be maintained with less volume than coaches think. During high-stress periods, one or two heavy exposures per week may be enough to maintain maximal strength. The athlete does not always need a full-strength session to preserve strength qualities. The fourth rule is that aerobic capacity is the readiness engine. Aerobic fitness supports recovery, repeatability, health, and sustained work. It should remain present year-round, even if the dose changes.

The fifth rule is that load tolerance is not optional. For military and many tactical populations, moving under load is not a special event. It is part of the job. Ruck, carry, stair, grip, trunk, and tissue tolerance need periodic exposure. The sixth rule is that the job counts as load. A training plan that ignores field time, call volume, shift work, sleep loss, kit, heat, stairs, travel, and occupational stress is not a tactical plan. It is a gym plan.



Shown is United States Marines rucking up a hill and down the stairs in repetition, as load tolerance is not optional (Tactical Touchpoint Model's Fifth Rule).



Rule Number Six of the Tactical Touchpoint Model, "The Job Counts as Load." Shown are United States Marines conducting casualty evacuation in training.

The final rule is that the plan is a hypothesis. The written plan guides the coach, but the athlete's response determines the next decision.

Practical Applications for Coaches and Leaders

The Tactical Touchpoint Model gives coaches a way to think beyond fixed phases. Instead of asking whether the athlete is in a strength block or an endurance block, the coach can ask better questions.

This is especially useful when training time is inconsistent. If an athlete only has twenty minutes, the coach can still touch speed, strength, and aerobic recovery. If a unit misses two sessions because of operational requirements, the coach can preserve the week's intent by identifying the highest-priority touchpoints.

For leaders, the model provides a better way to think about readiness. A common mistake in tactical environments is treating hard training as proof of readiness. But readiness is not the same as fatigue. A tired athlete may have trained hard, but that does not mean they are prepared to perform. The Tactical Touchpoint Model can help leaders understand why not every session needs to be long or punishing. A short session that maintains speed, power, strength, and aerobic recovery may be exactly what the athlete needs during a high-stress week. That is not weakness. It is precision.

"The final rule is that the plan is a hypothesis. The written plan guides the coach, but the athlete's response determines the next decision."

Conclusion

Tactical athletes do not need a copy-and-paste version of sport periodization. They need a model that respects the reality of their work. They need structure, but not rigidity. They need progression, but not

prediction. They need hard training, but not constant fatigue. They need broad capability. Touch what fades, maintain what matters, and build what the mission allows.

"Touch what fades, maintain what matters, and build what the mission allows."



Rule 1: Never Let Speed Disappear.
Rule 2: Micro-Dose Power.
Rule 3: Train Strength One to Twice Per Week.
Rule 4: Aerobic Capacity is the Readiness Engine.
Rule 5: Load Tolerance is Not Optional.
Rule 6: The Job Counts as Load.
Rule 7: The Plan is a Hypothesis.

Figure 1. The Seven Rules of the Tactical Touchpoint Model.

Author Biography

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