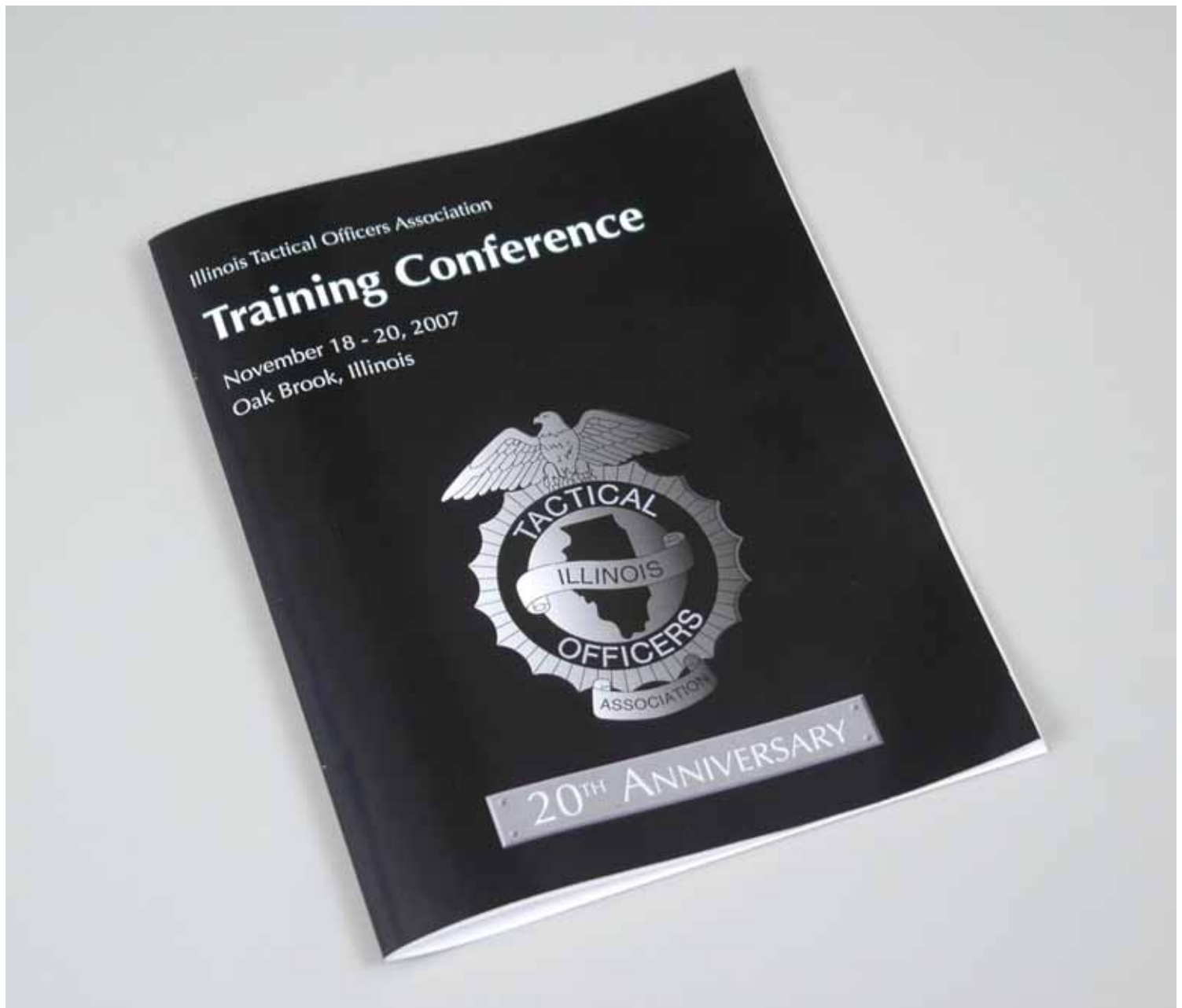


# ITOA News



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## 20th Annual Training Conference



# Retraining The Tactical Athlete

By TJ Cooper

**T**actical athletes must be prepared to face the unknown. Operators will suffer unless training workouts involve a series of techniques that can address values within a wide range. Specifically, a program must be flexible enough to be used for general assessment exams, rehabilitation for injuries, event preparations (team competition), and personal growth. “Functional Fitness” models such as CrossFit employ a cycle of training that can bring a team and its members to these levels without separating them from their teams.

One of the current faults of fitness training within tactical units is the “do your own thing” training that often accompanies team placement. This happens because most team selections involve officers with above-average fitness levels. Because of this, proper programming of fitness is often excluded in the training regimens beyond allotting a block of time for the members to train as they see fit. Even when this is guided by the standards of a team exam (Pass-Fails), many members do not train for these events until a month or so before the time arrives. This does not mean that these standards are not difficult or that the athlete is a fast study or better prepared or more physically capable. Further, it does not mean the selected program they are using is best.

At its core, operational fitness must involve mixed

modalities. We must stop separating body functions and parts in order to have the tactical athlete ready for the unknown.

## Program Development

When developing a tactical athlete program using functional fitness, we must:

1. Conduct an assessment to identify user oversights.
  2. Evaluate for potential injuries/repair current injuries
  3. Prepare for events, competitions.
  4. Gain a sense of the operator’s development purpose.
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1. Conduct an assessment to locate user oversights. Because operators generally have a higher assessment value, we typically do not think to look at the physical ability of each member. When we do, we find that one member can do more pull-ups while another is good at distance work. Each one excels in the actions they like best. Conducting a workout based on a set of exercises everyone can do, while simultaneously pushing the phases of physical adaptation, we can determine the physical ability of the operator as well as encourage growth. Once this is done, we can observe the participant and determine whether the user is a



Photo courtesy of TJ Cooper



- competitor, a general athlete, injury prone, etc.
2. Evaluate for potential injuries/repair current injuries. While identifying oversights, we also determine potential weakness and the reasons behind injuries. Many people who exercise are often guided by weight loss or beautification concerns vs. health and improvement. One is not the result of the other. By developing programs of exercise that encompass interconnectivity, we also speed up recovery and prevent potential problems. Simply put, if a user has back problems and continues to train his abdominals improperly, does he increase the potential for further injury? Has he lessened gains in the area he is working on?
  3. Prepare for events, competitions. Within every team, there exists a need for combat. While we don't actively seek out combat, we must prepare for its eventuality. Because combat cannot be regularly predicted, we often substitute competition and peer events based on strength, power, endurance or tactics. This is as close to combat as we can come and are necessary to fulfill combat readiness by developing the competitive edge within us. The man-on-man push to find the better plan or purpose is essential to team building. A trainer's dream would be a minimally pre-planned program that allows for competition while simultaneously engaging in fitness and full team involvement.
  4. Gain a sense of the operator's development purpose. There is no doubt that competition prepares us for action, but what will ultimately carry the battle is the operator that sharpens his personal skills. Programs like Crossfit identify the abilities we need as operators and develop them at every level to produce optimal performance. This is not periodization; body parts worked independently can often produce structural weakness. This is not the state of readiness we seek. We need a "State of Art" that will excite the user and alert him to action.

Let's take a look at one such series of exercises that make these points come alive.

#### Benchmark Exercise

##### *Chelsea*

- 5 pull-ups
- 10 pushups
- 15 open air squats

In CrossFit routines, we develop the above-described stages by using a series of workouts designed to emphasize a phase, take advantage of a weakness or push to better development. By doing these workouts or equivalent benchmarks we can express the value of our events and set goals as needed. In the example benchmark called Chelsea, we conduct 5 pull-ups, 10 straight leg pushups and 15 open air squats. This would be performed every minute on the minute for 30 minutes, or attempted as a benchmark within the exercise series undertaken. In the simplest sense, these three exercises move the midline, large leg muscles and upper body muscle engagements in a unified manner. Seeing where the breakdown occurs allows us to develop a frequency scale for improvement.

Optimally, by combining exercises based on modalities and classification stages, we elicit active responses. One could simply use a benchmark event to continue improvement, but constant change is powerful. Chelsea can be structured to achieve performance needs that range from rehab to combat by understanding how to use time and effort to match the operator level. Solo, team or trainer workouts are all complemented by the methods described here.

In checking the operator oversights, Chelsea identifies the weakest link in the athlete. The goal is to work harder to improve that area. Other areas are not neglected because they are part of the workout. This forces the user to become anaerobic, structurally sound, and more physically prepared. Weakness in the operator is also quickly identified and can be prepared by slowing down the workout pace to a count to completion method and elimination of the "on the minute" area, replacing it with a simple "sets and reps" process.

Conversely, when preparing for competition and personal performance, we run the benchmark as described





and unbroken. We push for the highest total we can get. When we can conquer the completion, we turn to conquering ourselves. Human performance, like combat, demands this to survive. Our fitness needs must be properly assessed. By working smarter (and sometimes harder), we save training time, enhance our preparedness and make training more enjoyable. These skills are useful in our daily life and, in turn, enhance our longevity on our tactical teams.

There are several benchmarks that emphasize and encourage this range of performance. Some emphasize aerobic growth while others highlight power, accuracy or stamina. A steady diet of properly assessed and functional fitness will prove to be the answer for tactical fitness. Fitness is the one stage that all other levels of preparation build on, and the most overlooked. I believe this program is one is the best available. 🌟

#### **About the author**

TJ Cooper is a LEO Officer, currently at the rank of Sergeant. Employed since 1986, he joined the agency SWAT Team in 1990 and is currently a Team Leader and Lead trainer. Comments can be sent to [tj@CCIjax.com](mailto:tj@CCIjax.com).

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