

# A CHAT WITH YANN LE MEUR



If you have any presence on Twitter and are interested in sports science then you would have heard of Yann Le Meur. Yann is well known for his eye catching infographics which cover the latest sports science research and has over 56,000 Twitter followers.

We were lucky enough to pin him down to answer a few questions for us! (You can find him on Twitter as @YLMsportScience.)

### Can you tell us a bit about your background?

I was born in France in 1980 and grew up in Paris where I took a very 'untypical' professional trajectory. I studied sports science to become a physical education teacher in 2003 and taught PE for two years before getting a job in a university to teach physical education pedagogy. At the same time, I continued my course at the university as a student to learn exercise physiology. I completed my PhD in 2010 on the performance factors in Olympic-distance triathlon, while working with the French Triathlon team for Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Olympic Games. In 2010, I took on a full-time position at the French Institute of Sport as a sports scientist. It gave me the opportunity to work with different Olympic teams for six years (triathlon, mountain bike cycling, swimming, synchronized swimming, open water swimming, modern pentathlon and rugby sevens). My research interests focussed on performance analysis, training methodology and the understanding of overreaching in highly-trained athletes. It gave me the opportunity to develop multidisciplinary collaborations with psychologists, neurophysiologists and medical doctors. In 2014, I was offered the opportunity to coordinate the scientific support for the French Federations, identified with a high potential for Rio 2016. My job was to identify the particular needs of the coaches and to coordinate the actions of sports scientists in order to provide practical solutions aiming at improving performance. A few months ago, I left the French Institute of Sport for a new job at AS Monaco Football Club where I'm now working as a scientific advisor.

### Can you tell us a bit about your current job and what you do day to day?

In Monaco, my job is different than the previous one at the French Institute of Sport. That position helped me to learn about different areas related to performance. It gave me the chance to discover different cultures of performance, but I always had the ongoing feeling of a lack of time. At Monaco FC, I can focus on the same team every day. My role is to provide support to the squad by proposing practical, evidence-based solutions

to satisfy their particular needs (monitoring, recovery, rehabilitation, strength training, etc.). It is a very challenging and creative job, especially because I'm the first sports scientist employed by the club, but I love it. Every day is different but the basics remain the same. My role is to help the staff make its decisions day-by-day to improve the performance of the team. For that reason, creating a good relationship with my colleagues and the players, and developing communication skills, remain the key.

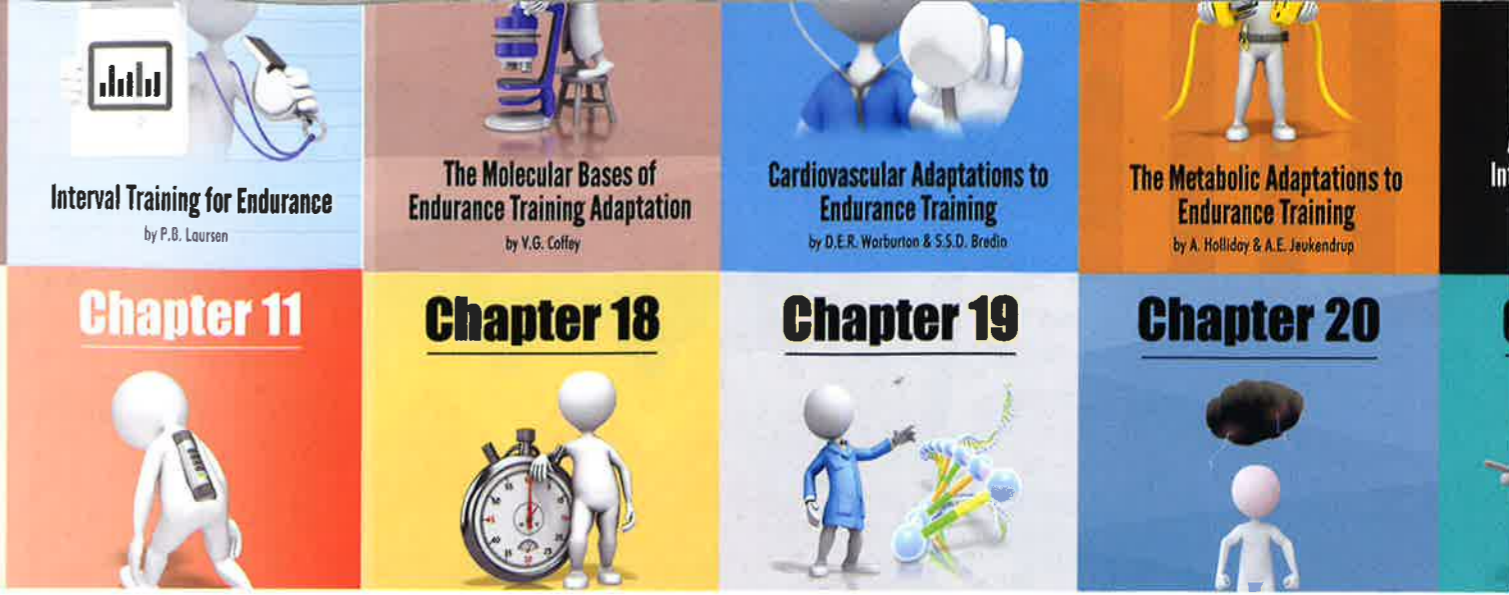
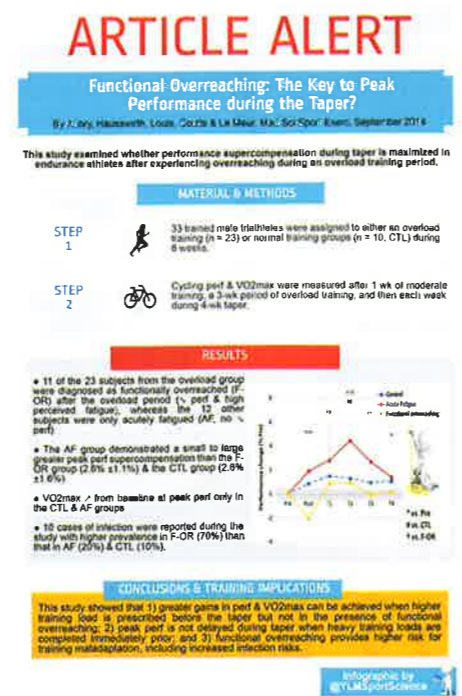
### What drew you to exercise and sports science? Was it something you were always interested in?

I have always been interested by sports science. I played tennis very intensively from the age of 5 to 23 before taking on triathlons for 7 years until I was 30 years old. I'm now mainly focussing on running. I am lucky I live in the Cote d'Azur which is just perfect for that! I have always been very interested by training methodology and strength and conditioning, I remembered that the Wilmore and Costill's book on Endurance Physiology remained my bible for a long time, and I also enjoyed reading Lore of Running by Tim Noakes. At the beginning, I was mainly using sports science to design my training program, especially for triathlons, but I was also interested in understanding the underlying mechanisms of performance. When I entered the French Institute of Sport in 2006 for my master's degree, I progressively started working with elite athletes. Since I was lucky enough to be paid a salary by working at the university as a lecturer, it gave me the time to carefully select my research laboratory, which was the reason why I chose to work with Christoph Hausswirth and the French triathlon team for 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games. The topic of my PhD was applicable since my job was to characterise the particular demands of Olympic distance triathlon and to identify how to optimise the performance level of the squad. It was the perfect link between my practice and the 'research world'. It gave me the opportunity to work on different topics: pacing strategy, training periodisation, training monitoring, resistance training, altitude & heat training, evaluation, etc. Progressively, this experience gave me the

opportunity to work with other great staffs in swimming, modern pentathlon, rugby sevens and XCO-MTB cycling.

### When did you start blogging and creating your famous infographics?

My colleagues and I published an applied research in Medicine & Science in Sport & Exercise in 2014, looking at how to optimise the performance super-compensation by manipulating the training load during the pre-taper phase. The protocol of this research had been very demanding to produce with several months of intensive work but I was disappointed in the end result when I observed the stats on my ResearchGate page. Almost nobody read the paper! I was pretty confident with the fact that the study was interesting for coaches but it was clear that we missed something regarding the way we shared the message. This is how I started thinking about a complementary way to make my research more accessible for coaches and athletes. I designed my first infographic in August 2014 (see below).



The response on Twitter was immediately positive and I decided to continue without restricting my own papers. A few months later, I created a Facebook page and my blog <http://YLMsportScience.blogspot.com> to centralise all my infographics. The infographics are now part of my daily routine, even if it remains sometimes difficult to balance their design with my work at the club, my own research activity and my private life; I like the concept – it's fun because it remains creative.

### What drives you to create more of these infographics?

There are different motivations behind the infographics. Firstly, and this is clearly the main motivation, I take pleasure in designing them. Breaking down complex information into easily digestible bits is actually a funny game for me. Summarising a scientific article into one image is challenging and I find it stimulating. You have to ask yourself: "What is the key message behind this research?", "Why is it likely to catch people's attention?" and "What are the practicable implications behind this research?" Once you think that you have answered these questions, you need to find a good template to present these ideas while respecting the original message provided by the authors. All details are likely to influence the clarity of your message. Then, it is key to create something exciting if you want to catch people's attention.

Secondly, I think that the infographics represent a valuable way in promoting the new research in sports science. An infographic will never be a substitute of any scientific paper but it represents a good way to stimulate people thinking in a 'pre-digested' format, especially for those who do not usually read scientific journals.

Thirdly, designing the infographics is the perfect way for me to get new ideas and to progress in my work on the field. By designing them, I keep in touch with the most recent research as I need to identify which are the practical implications behind these studies. When you are working as a member of staff, you have to learn in many different areas: training load monitoring, resistance training, injury prevention and rehabilitation, nutrition, recovery, psychology, management, etc. Designing the infographics is a fun solution to increase my knowledge in these different areas.

Lastly, the infographics helped me to increase my

network both with scientists, doctors, trainers and athletes, and to diversify my activities. Recently, I published my first book 'Endurance Training – Infographic edition' with Inigo Mujika and the infographics are now issued in the British Journal of Sports Medicine and the International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism.

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### What are the biggest changes you have seen in the industry?

I observe more and more that there is a place for sports scientists to work with elite athletes in Olympic sports and professional clubs, both for students and experienced scientists. Many clubs created Performance Departments, and PhD positions shared between academic research groups and elite clubs are more and more common, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries. In my opinion, these positions represent an optimal option for a new generation of sports scientists to emerge. Especially because they offer perfect opportunities to develop the competencies required to work in a staff with high-level athletes. In such an environment, sports science is likely to provide solutions for the staff and to represent a good basis to educate the athletes. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the key decisions are made by the coach and the medical doctor and to keep in mind that the performance is achieved by the athletes. For that reason, the starting point is to identify their specific needs and to communicate in a manner which is likely to be understood from people who don't have your academic background. As described by Martin Buchheit (read 'Chasing the 0.2, International Journal of Sport Physiology and Performance, 2016), "having a strong character is often compulsory to survive in most places, but open-mindedness, humility, and a form of kindness are probably some of the most important personality traits to develop." In this regard, people like Martin, Aaron Coutts, David Martin and Steve Ingham are very inspirational for me.

### What are your plans for the next part of your career?

No idea! It would have been impossible for me to predict my trajectory when I took on my PhD six years ago, so I have no idea at the present time where I will be in 5 or 10 years. The project in Monaco is ambitious but we never know how things will evolve. The key will be to keep learning and to face exciting challenges whilst ensuring a good life for my family. Maybe it will be also good to try a new experience in a foreign country. I have also some projects in mind for the infographics but it remains too soon to talk about them now.

### Do you have any advice to Australian students who want to get into the sports science industry?

Sports science is a very competitive environment. If you are motivated – push yourself as much as you can. Work hard, build a strong science background, observe and listen a lot, see athletes as people and not as neuromuscular-cardiovascular-ATP resynthesis systems, ask the right questions, demonstrate empathy and always be fair. If things do not take the direction you expect – reconsider your strategy and push harder. Having good opportunities requires time and effort.

### Quick questions:

- Favourite sport?** Tennis, when it is played by Roger Federer.
- Favourite sports team?** AS Monaco FC for sure!
- Subject you hated at university?** The first lesson on Monday morning.
- Subject you loved at university?** Exercise physiology.
- If you were on a desert island what three things would you take with you?** My running shoes, my laptop and a USB key containing my 'LWM (Little White Men)' library.

