



# YAMAHA

## Educator Series

WIND INSTRUMENTS



*Scott Wright*

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## Endurance Tips for the Brass Player

*By Scott Wright*

One of the biggest challenges we as brass players encounter is the issue of endurance. This is something we have to deal with all the time – from the very beginning of our playing experience all the way to the final concert of the most seasoned professionals. We have to be aware of it almost more than any other instrumentalist in the orchestra.

Pacing is one of the first things you should consider. As a long distance runner is not going to sprint out the first couple of miles, neither should you. A proper light warm up should be done to prepare for the performance, but don't overdo it. Remember to think of how much playing you have to do. If it is a performance of a wedding fanfare it won't be nearly as much as a consideration as if you're going to play two Las Vegas production shows in a night, six nights a week. Even if you have to play loud and strong, you need to always be aware in the back of your head that you need to get the "finish line." Remember to blow and support, but when you over blow, you distort your sound and tire faster. Make sure you are breathing correctly filling your lungs with air and supporting always with a good, centered sound. That will help tremendously with endurance.

Rest periods are very important in practicing to gain endurance. A good rule of thumb is to rest as much as you practice. Some very well known teachers encourage their students to practice with a fellow student sometimes for a variety of reasons, but one is to make sure that proper rest periods are taken. This is very important to any type of muscle development. Any physical trainer knows that to gain muscle mass, one of the things you must do is work the muscles, but also rest them.

Resting is also very important to do on performances, although you obviously don't have as much control as to when you can rest. When you do have a break take advantage of it, especially if you're playing a particularly difficult show or concert. If you need to, you can also try to do some easy pedal notes (in some out of the way place) or try to get some circulation back into your lip tissues by "blowing out" your chops loosely as to make a "horse-like" sound to get them going again. You may want to be careful that you don't do this when the trombone section is in front of you as most don't like the overspray, but this can buy a lot more endurance on the gig when you're running out of gas.

I learned a very helpful hint for helping me to last longer on gigs at a clinic put on by the trumpet section of the Woody Herman band. I was in high school at the time and someone asked how to help them not get tired so fast when they were playing. One of the things that they said was to make sure when you are playing, that you take the horn off your lips for almost every rest in order to get blood to circulate there. It makes so much sense but it was a real light bulb going off for me, and something I really stress to my private students. Sometimes we can tend to hold the mouthpiece to our lips constantly when concentrating on what we're doing, but if we're not playing, we should make sure to allow them to recover for as long as you can. Obviously, you have to prepare



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to make the next entrance of music, but remember to try to not hold the horn up there constantly. This little hint has sometimes bought me just a few extra measures to get through a phrase to make it through the gig.

Another little thing you can do in the short term is to make sure you have a little cup of ice water nearby. It's amazing how a little sip sometimes can help the swelling go down when the muscles are getting abused. Remember, it's the same as an athlete does with ice on overworked muscles.

If you play in a section and are doubling parts, try to arrange a way to spell each other. It makes more sense for one person to lay out and the other four to play and take turns resting in order to get through a piece, rather than everyone fading at the same time on the big ending. Your director may say that he wants all your volume at once, but if four out of five are playing strong and in tune it will sound much stronger than if all five are folding on the big high note at the same time.

When you are finished playing, a good thing to do to help you bounce back the next day is a gentle cool down. There are many things you can do, but I like to do a nice, gentle, quiet pedal tone routine. It is very helpful to help the lips respond better the next time you have to play.

If you are a band director, it's important to take into account the level of your players when picking out music for them to perform. I've seen some versions of Pomp and Circumstance for junior high kids that would have wiped out a lot of pros. I've played professional arrangements of that piece that may be technically more difficult, but easier because of endurance than the junior high versions my students bring in. Make sure you let them spell each other on some of these pieces. What looks easy on the clarinet can wipe out your brass section.

Remember that building endurance takes time and effort. It is also something that we have to be aware of all the time. There is no end point where you've "got it." However, if you observe some of these hints, you should experience some real improvements over the long run.