

# GET UP!

Volume 1, Issue 17

11 March 2003

## Great Time in Springfield

Thanks to all my friends in Illinois for hosting the Shamrock Games and providing great competition, great camaraderie, and lots of laughs.

I still have yet to meet a “jerk” in Highland Games competition.

### **Our mission? To teach everyone:**

1. The Body is One Piece
2. There are three kinds of strength training:
  - Putting weight overhead
  - Picking it off the ground
  - Carrying it for time or distance
3. All training is *complementary*.

## Life Lessons I've Learned

### Throwing the Discus



David Witt  
*As a high school thrower, David ended up third in Kentucky's State Meet under the coaching of Marty Mayer and Pep Stidham (God rest his soul, he died young in his 40's of heart problems). Going to college that **didn't** have a track program, David has*

*competed as an open and unattached thrower for years in and around the Kentucky area. Married to Pam with two children, David teaches high school math. This is his first “Get UP!” article.*

In an attempt to give back for all the wonderful and useful information I've received from Dan and others in his “GET UP!” articles, I decided to try to write an article myself. But what would



I write about? As a high school math teacher, I very often use my experiences in track to make class more relevant for my students. Here are two examples I give them for their math studies that could be applied to other things. These lessons would certainly help college students as well since I didn't figure these out until I was well into college myself.

**Lesson #1:** You can't solve/do anything by just looking at it. In college my method for studying for a math exam was to open my book or notes and look at the problems. Follow them in my head while I was looking at them. Then I would take the quiz or test and not do very well on them. Then I made a connection. When I lifted weights, I didn't go into the weight room and look at the weights for an hour, I picked them up and lifted them. You don't get stronger looking at the weights, you have to move them. When I decided to start doing the problems in my math book before the test, rather than just when I had homework, I started doing better in math. The best score I got on a test in Calculus I was on the section of applications of derivatives. *The dreaded word problems.* The library on campus had an answer book with solutions worked out that we could use in the library. The two weeks before the test on applications I got that book and did all the problems in the chapter, then checked my work. I worked through the solutions to the ones I didn't get, and the next night did it again. I did great on the test, so what did I do for the next test? I went back to looking at the problems again. I didn't realize what I was doing and why it worked until I was in graduate school 10 years later.

**Lesson #2:** To be good at something, you don't need to do a lot of different things. Ok, once I knew I needed to work out the problems to study for math, I thought I needed 500 gazillion problems to do. Then I started getting tired of trying to find all those problems and started thinking about track again. When I threw discus, I realized that I tried to throw the discus the same way each time. This was in order to set a groove that I could fall into so that I could throw to the best of my potential every time. I wasn't going out in a 60 throw workout and throwing the discus 60 different ways. I was going out and throwing the same throw 60 different times. At least that was the plan. It may not have been the same throw 60 times, I may have only hit that throw a fraction of 60, but I was trying. So I realized I didn't need 50 gazillion problems, I only needed a few problems that would represent what I would see on the test, maybe 5 or 10. Then I would go back to lesson 1 and do the 5 or

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10 problems until I could do all 5 or 10 right without looking at the solutions. In golf, I find if I can drive straight, chip, and put, I do pretty well. For a guy that only plays once every couple of years.

So my lessons come down to, take a few things, and do them. Deck not getting stained? Stop looking at it and grab a brush. Forgot how to throw shot? Pick two drills and do them over and over. Both of which are things I need to work on. So tomorrow I'm going to do some South Africans on the deck and roller the shot. No, wait, something wrong with that. But maybe if I put the rollers on my shoes I could do both at once. This could be another lesson. **Great advice, David. Welcome to the Editorial Staff...you have to buy lunch.**

## Saturday at Mike's Gym



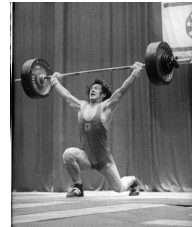
Lincoln Brigham

*Lincoln is a good friend of this Newsletter. Not only has does Lincoln Olympic Lift, he is also a ready source of advice and support to anyone interested in the sport. He also introduced Dan to Mike Burgener...one of America's best lifting coaches. (Lincoln is between Vasili Zhureleav and the Editor in the picture.)*

There's something special about Saturday morning at Mike's Gym. Mike Burgener's gym, a simple two-car garage tucked away in the hills of San Diego County farming country, attracts some of the best lifters in Southern California. This Saturday was no different despite the impending rainstorm. When my girlfriend Adrienne and I showed up at 9:30 a.m., Mike was busy training a teenage volleyball player with high step-ups, kettlebell swings, walking lunges with a medicine ball, and snatches. Eventually more than a dozen athletes from several other sports and weightlifters of all ages showed up to train. Casey Burgener was home, back home from the Olympic Training Center for a friend's wedding, but unfortunately

for us he did not lift. By 10:30 if you weren't lifting you were getting rained on.

Josh Everett, Strength and Conditioning Coach at U.C. Riverside, was there, fresh from his victory at the Tactical Strength Challenge, run by Pavel Tsatsouline and hosted by Mike. Josh managed 10 chin-ups with a 32-kilo weight, and 32 one-arm snatches (each arm) with the 32kg kettlebell, defeating last year's champ in the process. Josh is one of the few lifters at Mike's who does split snatches, due to some shoulder and arm flexibility problems that refuse to go away. Coach Burgener was a splitter himself, but he strongly believes in the value of the squat snatch for most of his trainees. Mike had Josh doing squat snatches for a long time, but when he switched to the split snatch a few weeks ago, Mike found Josh could split snatch more from blocks than his best squat snatch from the floor. Josh has blazing speed that's something to see. The other split snatcher at Mike's Gym is masters' champion and record holder Bob Strange who, like Josh, can't fully straighten his elbows at lockout.



Mike was on his perch today in the power rack, simultaneously coaching four lifting platforms. I had a good day, setting one personal record in the snatch and nearly setting another. Adrienne lifted on the platform closest to Mike and got some excellent coaching. One of Mike's tips to Adrienne was to keep her torso vertical, hips forward, in the landing position of the jerk, rather than allowing a forward lean. This makes it easier to keep the bar in the center of gravity and helps prevent the bar from running forward.

Mike also worked on her footwork in the snatch and the jerk, which will help her to get under the bar quicker and deeper. Like many lifters, she tends to power snatch with a wide landing stance instead of squat snatching with a narrow stance. This bad habit works with lighter weights, but prevents the lifter from succeeding with heavier weights.

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I worked a little with Ron, a 56-kilo lifter who was there with his dad. Ron is an ex-wrestler with very good speed and a lot of potential as a weightlifter. He's the perfect size for the 56-kilo class. Both Ron and his dad are short, so it's clear Ron's not going to have a sudden growth spurt.

Guys like him have a better chance of success and satisfaction in a sport like weightlifting than in any sport that has a premium on size. Anyway, Ron has this bad habit of starting the jerk with the bar starting below his clavicle. Most of the weight of the barbell rests on his hands. As he begins the leg drive phase of the jerk, his arms act as shock absorbers and as a result the bar gets very little elevation. Instead, if Ron can learn to shift the bar up into a proper rack position, with the bar resting up and back further on the front of the shoulders, his leg drive will be transmitted directly into the bar. The bar will start higher, it will be an inch or so closer to his center of gravity, and the bar elevation resulting from his leg drive will be higher. Right now Ron racks the bar correctly in the clean for the briefest instant, but then he immediately drops his elbows and lets the bar come down to his chest. Not only

does this reduce the efficiency of his jerk, but today he also lost a couple of cleans out front when he unracked the bar from his shoulders this way.

Adrienne and I left just as the storm front started to whip in. Tina, from Mike's high school, was finishing up snatches while Yanos, originally from Communist Hungary, was just getting started. Mike had already left to drop his son Cody off somewhere; the rest of the lifters looked they were winding up their workouts, too. On the drive back we were very pleased with the way the workout went. Adrienne made good progress on her technique thanks to Mike's coaching (she listens to Mike the Ex-Marine better than me, for some reason!) and I got a new personal record. The most dangerous part of the workout was still head of us in the thirty-five mile drive back home. Already traffic was backed up for miles behind a couple of overturned cars in the Number Four lane as numerous paramedics raced past us on the highway's shoulder.

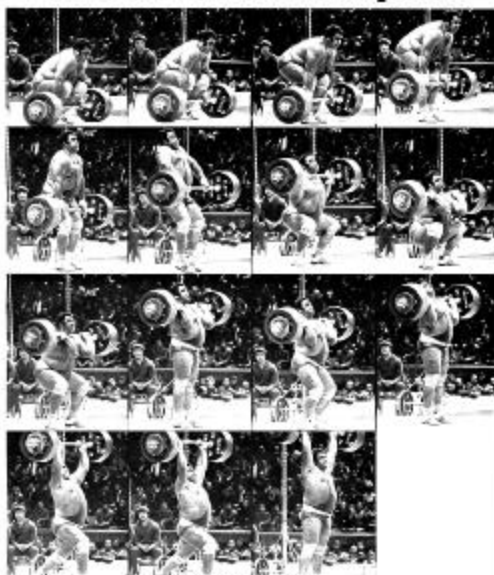
*Nice report, Lincoln, we look forward to more.*

## A Few Gems from Mike

A couple of little points from Mike Burgener that I have stolen from our telephone calls:

1. Go heavy only if you feel you can make the lift...but you **HAVE TO GO HEAVY!**
2. Stay current...keep your ears and eyes open.
3. Kettlebells are great, so are Farmer Walks and Wheelbarrow work.
4. Go really heavy in Snatch Balance work...if you can get to 105% of your snatch...you can snatch it!

### The Clean & Jerk in Sequence



Vasily Alexeev (U.S.S.R.)  
World Olympic Superheavyweight Champion  
1970-71-72-73-74-75-76-77



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## Football Time, Baseball Time and Highland Games Time

A few years ago, at a workshop on “Death and Dying,” the speaker told us that to “survive” a doctor’s prognosis of a terminal disease, one should adopt a “baseball mentality.” The concept was simple: baseball has no time limit. Even with two outs, no matter the score, the team at bat always has a chance to win. The speaker basically told us, a group of local ministers and teachers, that the dying need to be told that they can still be in the game.

Of course, one of the things that I repeat to myself on a daily basis is that we are all literally dying. As I look back over my teaching career, I am always a little amazed at the number of students, parents, and fellow teachers who have died too soon, if you will. Unlike the game of baseball, we never know what inning we are in.

I guess we need to contrast the baseball mentality with the football mentality. As a former football coach, I can tell you that there is nothing like a bad fourth quarter when you stand on either side of a blow out. Whether ahead or behind by a lot of points, the fourth quarter seems to drag on forever as both coaches empty the benches and wait for time to run out.

But, there are times when life is like a football game. My senior year in college, I missed graduation to compete at the Nationals at



the University of Illinois. While my class got their diplomas, I threw the discus. The following week, I arrived back at school to an empty, deserted campus.

There were no hugs, no toasts, no “let’s get together” when I packed my suitcase and headed for home. The clock ticked down to zero for me. For athletes preparing for the Olympics, life is a football mentality. I would even say that expectant parents also experience this feeling in the last few days and weeks of a pregnancy. I know that

I have heard at least one woman say: “let’s just get this over with!”

And, there are times when life is like a baseball game. In the education business, we always hope that young man or young woman who keeps finding new ways to get into trouble will finally “turn it around” and succeed in...something. As a parent, we might keep exposing our children to various careers and life decisions as we keep hoping our kids will hit that home run and find success. But, to be honest, I always struggled with the baseball mentality.

The baseball mentality assumes that we have a chance to “win.” That is just not the way life works for most of us. I refuse to say that death is a “win-lose” proposition, but I also know that life often gives us a whole new set of challenges where it is nearly impossible to call something a win or loss.

I realized this the other day during the Shamrock Highland Games in Springfield, Illinois. In the artic conditions of morning (okay, it was just cold), I couldn’t get “going.” Some people will recognize the term “going.” It’s that feeling when you get into the flow of things. If you have ever tried to get the kids, the car, the luggage and the refreshments all ready for a multi-day trip, you know how hard it is to get “going.” That’s how I felt: I was trying to compete with the kids tied down to the roof, the drinks in the back seat, and the dog and cat in the trunk.



Every event seemed to just go wrong. Yet, I would tell myself after each to have to be positive because I have another event. Like a bad golfer hoping to shine on the next hole, I kept my head up and walked to the next event. A golfer who triple bogies the whole day, yet finishes with a hole in one will provide drinks

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for everyone and never remember his final score...only that one great hole.

This image of the Golfer or the Highland Gamer began to carry me from event to event. Finally, on the last event of the day, I knew I was running low on chances. It was my worst event, the Heavy Hammer. Yet, I just reminded myself of the rhythm of the hammer head and stayed in there mentally. It was my only win of the day and helped propel Clint Garda to win the overall by changing the point scheme.



After helping Mike Rosenberg drink his scotch, I thought about how important a “bad memory” can be for an athlete. As my memory became foggier, I realized that the Highland Game mentality might be a better way to approach life. Sure, embrace each new challenge

and do your best...but, when the “dealing is done” walk bravely over to the next great challenge. Try not to judge a competition, a year or even a lifetime on one meet, one series, or one throw.

Keep your head up and walk to the next event!

One thing I have noticed for years is that I tend to soar and fall in my training. I think I discovered recently that a lot of people do the same. The key is to plan for it. Bishop Dolegowicz is the track coach at Juan Diego Catholic High School here in Salt Lake City. He was a 70 foot shot putter and a big-time discus thrower. He was also one of the first “World Strongest Men” contestants. We talk quite a bit and one gem that he really hits on is that you need to keep a lot in reserve. He claims that his training friends would marvel at the difference between his month to month training lifts and his all out maxs. He really snuck up on big weights.

I find the same is true for me. Unlike a Bulgarian, I can't go max-max-max. I train better in exercises like power snatches, power cleans, push jerks, and front squats in the 60-80 percent range. In college, I used to do lots of sets with 225 in the power clean. When I pulled the trigger on a big lift day, I staggered the football players (back when Utah State had REALLY good football players) by out-cleaning their best by fifty pounds (365 squat clean). The moral of all this:

If you have a broad base, you don't have to keep beating yourself up workout after workout.

*From my old “Strong As Steel” Journal*

Published by Daniel John

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