

GET UP!

Volume 1, Issue 21

I June 2003

Summertime and the living is easy...

Fish are jumping and the cotton is high. Utah's annual spring lasted two days this year. I lost my tomatoes in a frost and two days later my lawn burned. We went from snow to 101 degrees in a week.

This is the time of year when some of our readers start gearing up for football while others are in the midst of Highland Games, track meets and whatever else keeps our readers busy.

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*.

The "Gary Column"

My brother, Gary, lives in San Mateo, California and is a big fan of the newsletter. He often comments on different writers, then asks those "Million Dollar Questions." The same questions many of you may have...but are afraid to ask!

Dan,

What was I thinking? Further thoughts on taking up the discus at 54.

This whole thing started out as a method of training my twelve-year old on throwing the discus. As you vaguely remember, I helped start you on all this craziness back when you were thirteen or so. Now, I've been in training to throw the damn thing.

You and I have now talked for endless hours on the telephone. I've watched John Powell's videos and read numerous articles. But, one thing, it is extremely difficult to coach yourself. I'm helping a local middle school and run through about twenty kids a day. That is easy. I can see where they are screwing up. Then, when I'm all alone and doing drills or in the ring, it falls apart.

I realize that I never really threw before. I could pop an occasional 100 foot throw while in college. Considering I was a 150 pound middle distance runner, that wasn't too bad. I threw only when the other team had only a couple of throwers. I also snuck in a few thirds in the high jump and triple jump.

Now, my goal is to throw the 1.5 kilo old man's discus 120 feet. I'm in the high 90's on most days. Technically, I guess I should be happy. I just started in January.

What I'm really training for now, is the old fart pentathlon. You do the discus, long jump, and javelin for the field events. The 200 meter and 1500 meter are the running events. Other than the javelin, these are my strongest events.

However, through all of this, there is this cycle. When I throw well, I want to throw further. When the throwing sucks, I'm asking myself "what's it all about, Alfie?"

My body is responding to all the lifting. My standing long jumps are getting way out there. I'm even getting buff. Still, somehow at 54, I can't stand the fact that someone, somewhere is going to beat me in a competition. That fire in the belly still rages. And those highs and lows still linger. What was I thinking?

Gary

The readers of Get Up! know what you are thinking. Maybe we/I can't put it into words, but I like what the actor, Edward James Olmos, said:

"Chase your passion, not your pension."

While some guys dance with middle age with fast cars and face lifts, some of us bang plates, race sleds, and chase records. Death will have to line up to beat us!

"To leave the world a little bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition;

To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived:

This is to have succeeded."

Thomas Stanley

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Highland Games Diary

A nice piece of work here by Dave Witt...I kept it unedited because the raw format seems to better illuminate the struggles of an athlete...and I'm lazy.

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.

On **April 25th, 2003**, I was invited to compete in my first Highland Games in Carrolton, Ky. I immediately ordered a kilt and started thinking "what the heck have I gotten myself into?" I'm already lifting weights and throwing the shot, hammer and my favorite event, the discus, so I already had a good base of strength and knowledge of the principals of throwing heavy objects. I quickly reread, for the hundredth time, anything that Dan had on his site about Highland Games, including Mike Rosenberg's article about turning the caber the first time he competed in a Highland Event. I'm not expecting to do that, my friend D.R. has a caber-like object at his hammer ring at his home, and I never could get that thing balanced enough to throw it. So, with some trepidation I decided to share the next two weeks of my journey toward Highland Game mastery, I hope. Probably be more like buffoonery.

April 25th. Went to the shot ring and did some standing throws and South Africans before heading to the gym. About 20 minutes of throw, get shot, throw, get shot. I'm a rotational thrower, so the South African is not an issue for me. Then the gym, did some light front squats, 3 sets of 6, then some close grip snatches, 3 sets of 3. Haven't done those in a while, so it will take some time to get the rhythm back on those.

April 26th. Went out to the track with the family, threw more shot. Since I will be putting the stone on May 8th, and throwing the shot at the Columbus Track Classic May 18th, I'm going to emphasize the shot more for the next two weeks in practice.

April 28th. Bookmarked <http://www.vp-prod.com/aanc02.asp> on my computer. They have some videos of the weight throw, stone put, and super caber. Also, on Coach Mac's site, I found a link to a video of a sheaf toss using a South African type approach. Uh, yeah. Ok, looks interesting. Threw shot from grass to get used to throwing from grass. Had a great workout, hang snatched the most I ever have. Good front squat workout too. Talked to Dan on the phone, gosh he's helpful. I didn't have enough questions for him, forgot a couple I should have asked. He gave me some good sites to download sequence pictures, www.highlandgames.net.

April 29th. Printed out the sequences off the net. School responsibilities will curtail any training today. Good enough, I need a rest after yesterday's workouts anyway.

April 29th part two. Got home, went out back to practice some overhead tosses with my jury-rigged 35 pound plate on a chain with a piece of pipe for a handle. The chain runs through the pipe. Then took said plate out front on the driveway, marked off 9 feet, and practiced some weight for distance run-throughs. Things to remember: keep head up, don't look down at your feet, keep arms out during turn, helps with balance. My first step is way too long, I end up taking the second turn and ending up too far forward, foul. I think I need to essentially spin in place on the first turn, and then go into a south african type movement. This event is going to be tough, maybe I need to just do one south african.

April 30th. Deadlifts and overhead squats and presses. Also did some swing snatches with one hand. Take a dumbbell, swing it down between your legs like in the weight for height toss, and swing/snatch it overhead. My right side is really much stronger in this lift.

May 1st. Tried Dan's advice about waiting for the weight after the first turn in the weight for

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distance toss. Actually tossed a 25# weight a few times before throwing shot. Felt great! I'm finally understanding this event. Man, can Dan coach! Shot was going nice too. Did some sprints on the track. Went home and did some winds with my hammer-type object, a 25# weight on the end of a 4 foot bar. Very strenuous.

May 2nd. Gym day again. This workout was not a gem. I think I'm exhausted from the previous 4 days in which I had two days of new max workouts in the gym. This highland game thing is sort of a lark for me, so I'm going to train straight through it, not try to peak or anything.

May 5th. Did some sprints on the local track, and some 25# weight for height.

May 6th. Weight room. Had my best front squat workout yet, and almost hang snatched the same weight that 6 months ago I power snatched from the floor. It was too close, I wish I had some technique in the snatch. More hammer winds at home.

May 7th. Went to the track. It's been raining here for the past couple of days, so the only thing safe to throw was the discus. Man, I haven't thrown this in a while, Dan's right, you can't do everything at once and be good at it all. Guess I should cancel that marathon while I'm at it.

May 8th. Weight room again. Last time before the games. Deadlifted a best-to-date workout. Note to self: Don't ever again do Military Presses before Over-head squats. My shoulder girdle was shot, and I was too weak to support the weight over my head. I thought I was giving my back and legs a chance to rest before the Over-head, but the upper body is more important for support work.

May 9th. Rest.

May 10th. The Big Day!!!

It stormed all night. Bad storms. But, I live an hour to the east of Carrolton, so maybe the rain missed them. Up at 6:00am, load up the car, and promptly forgot to pack the umbrella. A quick

stop at Wally World in Carrolton, and I had a new golf umbrella, in my college colors no less. Overcast skies all the way to Carrolton. Not raining when I arrived, but it was obvious it had been.

Found my way to the arena and met some of the people there. Everyone was very nice. Found a dry/wet spot to put my bag and cooler and chair down at, and waited. I was to be in the B flight, the amateur class I was told. This was fine with me, I'm a grunt rookie.

First event, 56 WFD. The conditions were awful. I was very low in the rotation, so by the time I was to throw, the ring was mostly mud. Of course, after the first couple of throwers, the ring was mud. After the first round, they threw down some hay. Didn't help a lot, but it didn't hurt either. I decided given the conditions to just do a simple one turn south-african throw. I only threw a little over 14 feet. I think I'm trying to discuss this thing too much. Everyone was glad it was over when we were done. I didn't fall down. Mission accomplished.

Second Event, Open Stone. I found out something during the weight. You can start with one foot outside the box, but it must be in front of the back line. Very unlike a south-african drill. This kinda caused me some consternation and I tried to south-african the stone. With the sloppy conditions, and a very stunted starting position I threw pitifully. 27, then 26 feet. One my last throw, I decided to just power-position that thing and winded up winning my flight with a 32'9" toss. My first highland games, and I won an event. Ok, not fair, I've been throwing shot for 20 years. I have a killer power-position technique. Now if I could only find my full technique again. Can I go home now?

Third Event, 22 Hammer. I really expected to throw farther in this, but I only got 50 feet. I need lots more practice on this technique. Doing winds is fine, but I think I need to practice the actual throw to get feed-back on what I'm doing.

Fouth Event, 28 WFD. This was better, I started not noticing the mud anymore. I did a south-african for the first throw, just to be safe and get a mark. Then on my second, I tried my technique. It felt good and went a little farther. One my third throw, my first step was too big, and then I didn't know what to do, so I just kept

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turning and let it go. It was my farthest toss, but being my first highland games, that isn't saying much. 36 feet.

Fifth Event, Caber. After a lovely lunch provided by the lovely people, it was time for the caber. We were informed that a storm warning was in effect, and that we may have to evacuate the park if ordered. The cabers looked freshly cut, nice and sappy. It rained on use, making the caber slimy, it would be a feat just to pick the thing up. I had no expectations, it just became a chore to give it a try three times. I couldn't pick the thing up. I couldn't get my hands around it, they kept slipping on the wood as if it was oiled. The weight of the caber sunk the end into the ground and the mud created a suction effect. Only about 4 guys in our flight and the master's flight even picked the caber. Nobody turned it, though one guy named Chris did get it to 90 degrees. Good job dude. I'm just happy I tried all three times.

Sixth Event, Sheaf. The Sheaf started, this is the first time I have held a pitchfork for years, and back then I never tried to flip a bag over a bar. The bag was supposed to be 16 pounds, but soon it was getting closer to 20 with the addition of water and mud. I missed my first two attempts at 14 feet, and grunted it over on my third to stay alive. But the fact that I had to take all three to make 14 and then the increasing weight of the bag kept me from making 16 feet. I think I need more work on this event. This was the first event that I had never even tried to simulate at home before. I was happy to make a height, any height.

Seventh, and last, Event, 56 WFH. Before the sheaf, I had run my stuff out to my car, just in case of an evacuation. Then, I had to run back to my car to retrieve my baseball glove for the WFH event. I came back and as I came on the scene, they called out "David Witt". "Huh? What?" "You're up" I came back just as it was my turn to try the WFH. The bar was at 8'7" and I cleared it on my first attempt. This made me very happy as I expected to do better with this event. Then the bar moved up to 9'10" and I missed all three times. My back and hamstrings were starting to get tired.

Overall I was very happy. I completed all my attempts in all events. I won one event. I placed 4th overall in the B flight out of about 10 or 12 athletes. I was fun, but I don't think I want to dump track and field as one fellow said I should do. I just love the discus too much. Maybe I'll go back next year. I think I'll throw in some highland games training throughout the year.

May 11th, the next day.

Sunday found me feeling good. A little worn down, a little tired overall in the body, but not sore or anything. I wasn't expecting that...

May 12th, first weight workout after the highland experience

...on Monday, the soreness would show up. In my right trap. Due mostly to the 56 WFH I think.

May 21st, two weeks after.

Two weeks later finds me putting together a homemade 56 weight with hardware store supplies and weights from Walmart. Also, a better setup for my 22 pound hammer, actually a 22.5 pound hammer. I'm going to start practicing some of these events and I want to do better next time. I think it's getting in my blood. Maybe it's time to give some blood to cut down on it.

I want to thank some people for their help in this journey: Dan John, for his website and example and just being a great person. Dan, you have a lot of fans of the site here in Kentucky, I found out that day. Mike Rosenburg, for his leading by example and jumping into this later in life. I'm younger than you Mike, so I should be able to do this too, right? But by my caber experience, I'm no Mike Rosenburg. Jim Birchfield, for his kind words about my WFH experience. Chris Snider for his company on that wet day and his great competitiveness. Dave Mackenzie for his complimenting me on my stone technique, too bad it wasn't working. And all the others whose names I didn't remember. I'm not good with names, I remember faces. But you were all very nice and I recommend the Kentucky Scottish Weekend to anyone, especially grunt rookies like myself.

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Addendum

Dave also wrote this...which I think is brilliant!
Tips for Coaches

Lately a post on THE RING got me thinking about visual/verbal clues I use when I work with young throwers and myself. So I thought I would submit them for your perusal.

1. **Too many swings.** We've all seen this before, a young thrower gets in the ring and before they start their throw they wind the discus 25 times before throwing it. I tell them to imagine Tiger Woods. Does Tiger swing that golf club back more than once before driving the ball 300 yards? Nope, one swing back, and then he hits it. Learn to do this with the discus too. Teach them this in the discus ring, and it would probably help them in the shot ring with that leg pump before the glide.
2. **Swings are faster than the throw.** Again, use Tiger. Tiger draws back that club slow, then hits the ball fast. The club accelerates from slow to fast. I see this with girls especially. They swing the discus back at 3 times the speed that they throw it. I physically demonstrate the golfer doing that also, how out of control Tiger would be if he brought the club back too fast. Like a golfer, we are setting a groove to accelerate through.
3. **Front foot blocks the throw.** Many times in standing throws youngsters place the front foot in front of or to the right of the back foot, blocking the hips from coming through properly. I've used the image of a pitcher on the mound, where does he place his feet to allow the hips to rotate through his pitch? Most kids have thrown a baseball and understand this. Also, for right-handed people, I have them stand with their feet together. Then, slide the left foot back till the ball of the left foot is even with the heel of the right. Now, keeping that orientation, move the feet a little wider than shoulder width apart, and you have your foot placement.

4. **Trying to Throw Far and Not Enough Technique Practice.** Ok, this one is for me. When I start throwing the discus, I want to see that thing go far. Sometimes to the detriment of technique work I should be working on. So I start throwing my wedge. A wood splitting wedge. It has no aerodynamic properties, the one I use weighs 5 pounds, and flies like a brick. A heavy brick. I have no expectations of it going very far, so I find it is much easier for me to work on my technique when I throw it. Plus, when it does start going far, I know the lighter, aerodynamic discus will go farther. I've had whole workouts where I've thrown nothing but the wedge, and loved it. I've thrown weight plates also, but they are too discus-like to totally make me forget about distance for the majority of the workout.

I hope these will give you some ideas for your throwers. Go ahead and steal these clues, they may even help you think of some others.

Matt Spiller's "What I Learned..." Article



Matt Spiller has been a registered physical therapist in California for eight years. He is credentialed in Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy a.k.a. The

McKenzie Method for neck and back pain. Having weight trained on and off for 14 years, he is currently training for the discus throw. He also plans to compete in powerlifting, weightlifting, highland games heavy athletics, strongman, other track & field events and the Inman mile. He has a webpage available at www.TreatYourOwnPain.com/athlete.html. He can be reached for questions regarding this article at: Lifter_rehab@aol.com.

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I didn't start throwing the discus until after college. Without a coach, I threw only sporadically, not wanting to ingrain bad habits. I planned to work with a coach someday and didn't want to have to "unlearn" years of incorrect technique.

However, when I found Dan's discus book, I knew I could learn to throw well on my own, even better than under the guidance of most throwing coaches.

After trying out the system for a few months, I called Dan to ask a few questions about some details. Dan revealed to me his three rules of coaching:

- Simplicity
- Repetition
- Oomph

(Editor...stolen from John T. Reed)

Although my questions were specifically directed at the discus throw, these rules apply to any athletic activity.

SIMPLICITY

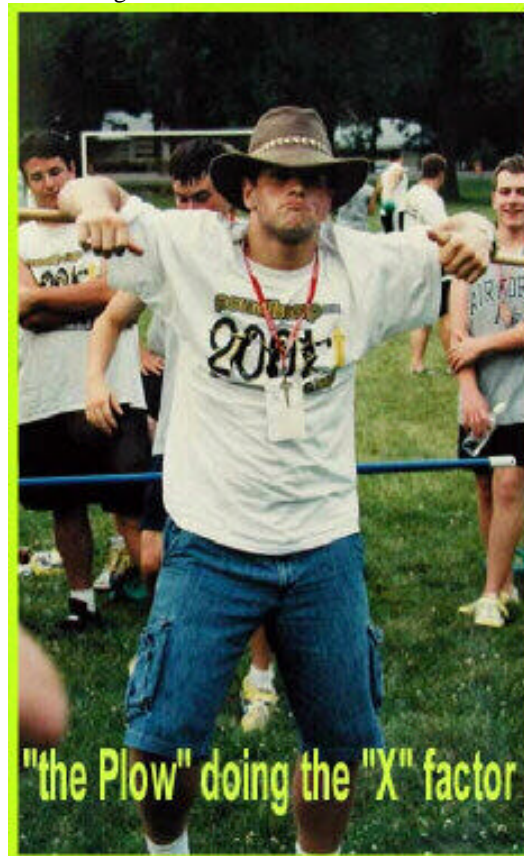
Any fool can make learning a new skill more difficult. The true skill comes in stripping off the excess, focusing on the basics. This concept reminds me of an ancient Chinese proverb that escapes my mind right now.

For example, one of my questions for Dan was regarding head placement during the throw. I wanted to know when facing 6 o'clock and turning my body toward 12 o'clock what position should my head be at each phase of the throw and do I look straight ahead or slightly upwards or do I vary at different phases and do I have a focus point like ballet pirouetting and where is it?

His answer? "Tape a piece of duct tape from your chin to your sternum during your drills. Next question?"

Other such similar "simplistic" gems include:

- ✓ At the start of the throw, simply lift your right foot off the back of the circle, don't push off with your foot. Volumes have been written about the start of the throw, but that one sentence sums it all up.
- ✓ To assess any technique modifications, test them with the X-drill. The X-drill is a dowel across your hips and one across your shoulders. You need to see the end of the bar on your hips when your shoulders are twisted. If you lose the "X", your technique is no good.



- ✓ Keep your head over your right foot and keep your right foot down as long as possible.



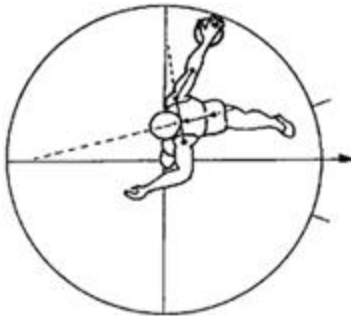
- ✓ Instead of doing drills trying to land feet on a painted line, doing the X-drill backwards would be better.

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- ✓ The 2-3 transition is a little circle. Try to touch your right toe to your left in 2. You can't, but try.
- ✓ Transitioning to 3, try to foul out of the ring by stretching with your left leg. You can't, but try.



- ✓ Training to music is fantastic. 1812 overture recommended. (Editor: Ravel's *Bolero*, Gershwin, *Warsaw Concerto*)
- ✓ No light discus throws
- ✓ Train abs outdoor with ab wheel and a pad.

These are all simple concepts, but very powerful. Often, you will see coaches hopelessly complicating the situation with too much or incorrect direction. You need to find the simplistic cuing or drills for your activity.

REPETITION

When I first started Dan's throwing drills, I worried about doing them correctly. I was afraid of doing them "wrong" and ingraining bad habits. I found solace in Dan's written words, "fix it with repetitions". It works. You can't necessarily do a new skill perfectly the first time. But, if the technique is not too complex (simplicity), repetitions will fix it.

Learning a new drill, you should walk through it slowly first, to make sure you have good technique. Speed will come with repetitions. All the talk about training as fast as the speed of

your sport does not apply to when you are learning technique. If you try something new too fast, you compromise technique for speed.

If you are confused technically, don't go fast. Slow down and think through the technique. Once you understand your technique first, then you can speed up.

Find a drill where you can maximize the repetitions. If you throw a discus out in the field, then go retrieve it and do this over and over again you get about one throw a minute. If you do this with twenty other guys... well, do the math.

Now, if you throw a medicine ball against a wall, you can use the same technique you did throwing the discus out in the field, BUT you have the benefit of not having to go chase the thing. (And a BIG plus is that you can focus on technique, not distance) If you can get twenty throwers to throw med balls against a long wall (safely), they are, of course, going to get in many, many more quality repetitions than the traditional line at the discus cage.

Dan has a routine for his throwers where they do throw imitations over and over. They end up doing a whopping 1000 turns in a 45 minute period. I'm sure the kids are glad Dan only does this once a spring. Compare that with the 5 or 6 throws total other kids may do over a two hour "workout".

You need to get in quality repetitions to learn and become proficient at a skill. Find a drill or exercise that doesn't completely zap your nervous system to repeat over and over.

OOMPH

This took me a minute to grasp, but "oomph" seems to mean playing to your strengths.

If you are in a closely matched competition and you know your technique is better than all the other guys, then you focus on that when you throw. If you are a great snatcher, then you focus on explosion when you throw.

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Use your own specific “oomph” to maximize your competition performance.

Another key point Dan brought up is CYCLING of your training

A year round training cycle for a thrower would be:

- Heavy lift
- Heavy throw
- Competition.

The idea of IF I should include throwing drills left handed is not as important as WHEN in the yearly cycle to throw left handed. Left handed throws should be include when you are training heavy throws. That is January to March for High School kids and November to January/February for college guys. 20 minutes a day of left handed throwing is recommended. Left handed drills are also good to do using the tire drill. Same with eyes closed drill, use the tire.

As a side note, there are a few throwing sessions devoted to left handed throwing at John Powell’s Discus camp. When kids become proficient at throwing left handed (and backwards), it makes regular right handed throwing seem all the more simple. An example of making training drills more complex than the event.

Regarding the heavy lifting phase, it’s interesting to note that shot put Silver Medalist in the 2000 Olympics, Adam Nelson, trains one-lift-a-day, Squat, Push, Pull and abs. Sound familiar?

Regarding the heavy throwing phase, Dan suggests Highland Games/Heavy Athletics training. Appropriate for a thrower, because you are throwing! You build up systems you don’t touch with the discus throw. It’s fantastic for core strength.

Regarding the competition phase, it’s important to back off on lifting too heavy and too much. Training just abs and overhead squat can be adequate. This may be disheartening to young

high school guys worried about their bench, but they shouldn’t lose too much ground and the improved discus distances will be worth the “sacrifice”.

Using this cycling logic, it makes sense to maybe not train high school men to throw the shot rotational style like the discus. These kids are spending less than half the year training Track and Field.

Email Conversation about “Flat Footed Pulling”

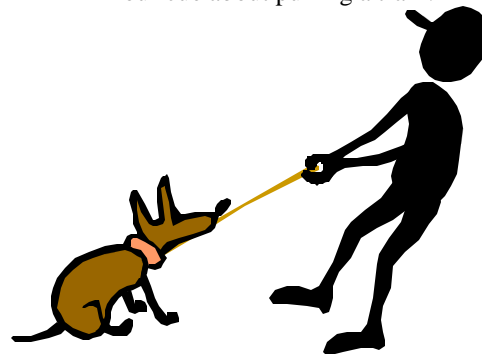
I had a nice talk with Mike Rosenberg last night about my “expertise” in teaching the Modern Snatch and Clean pulling technique that emphasizes keeping your heels down for as long as possible...to the point of focusing EVERYthing on your heels. I told him that I felt like I was just one hour ahead of people on this...a teaching term for an educator who is barely ahead of the class. Mike told me: “it’s an hour people want, though.”

This is an email conversation with Jason Keen, an experienced lifter and very bright guy!

Dan-

Just wanted to fire off a message thanking you again for the help with the ideas on flat-footed stuff. Now that I have been at it for a little over a week, I have found that two things really have made a HUGE difference for me:

- The way to learn to do the scoop + extension on the WCC videos, and
- Your cue about pulling a train.



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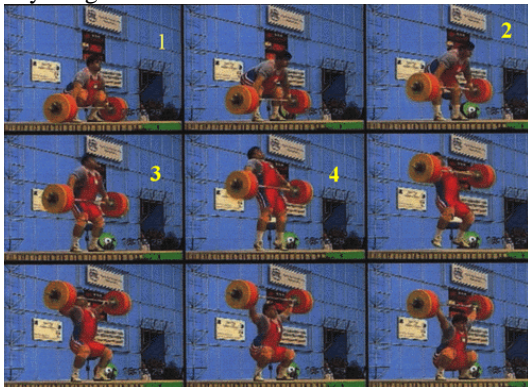
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I watched some tape and figured out that when I was getting the bar forward was during the second pull. I had bought into the old 'the re-bend is natural and can't be taught' thing, and realized that like you said on the phone you used to do, I was staying back through the first pull, but in order to scoop to the bar I would just shift all my bodyweight forward and actually be up on my toes *before* I would shoot for that triple extension.



I then tried to 'scoop the hips to the bar' like they said on that video, but even that didn't quite do it for me. It was the quote from your GetUp! article about pulling a train or whatever. It cued me to think of doing the hand-over-hand from strongman stuff, so now instead of thinking about 'jumping up', I am trying to scoop and then extend in the hips and shrug up, all while 'digging my heels in' as I would if I were pulling anything else.



It has made a world of difference, so now all I have to do is try to get my knee healthy. It's basically too late for me now, but maybe I can put something solid together for next season. Thanks a million again,
Jason

The East German "Throws" Strength Standards

14 year old male

88 (all in pounds) Snatch

135 Clean

135 Bench

155 Squat

15 year old male

135 Snatch

175 Clean

175 Bench

200 Squat

16 year old male

155 Snatch

220 Clean

220 Bench

265 Squat

17 year old male

198 Snatch

265 Clean

265 Bench

352 Squat

18 year old male

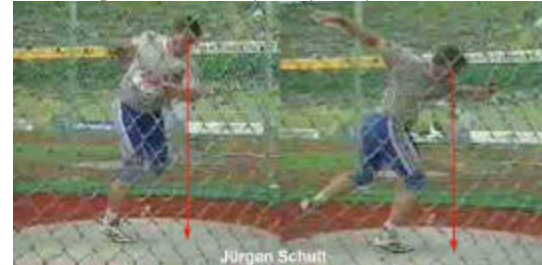
220 Snatch

319 Clean

319 Bench

418 Squat

These, of course, are marks that Elite Throwers should try to lift...but, the challenge should "wake up the echoes" for a few of us!!!



Published by Daniel John

Daniel John, Editor

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