

GET UP!

Special Edition

Coaching Beginners

A Special Edition...

Anyone who has coached over a decade will probably agree with most of the stuff you find in this edition. It all comes down to K.I.S.S., Keep It Simple, Stupid...but, we rarely follow that sound advice!

This edition was prompted by a series of dads and coaches who have provided me with pure entertainment without knowing it. Watching a coach try to teach eight year olds to run pass patterns that will require a thirty yard toss by a kid who can't throw twenty yards is nothing but funny...or sad.

If you are bored, here is the short course: *Teach the basics and slowly, s-l-o-w-l-y, add more complex strategies, training concepts and recovery ideas.*

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 Madman in the Marketplace

...with apologies to Nietzsche

I love gimmicks. I honestly love them. Invent a new drill or a new piece of equipment or a new implement or a new system and I will spend a lot of money and research the web and telephone everybody I can get to pick up the receiver. I'm completely positive that I can add two percent to my throw by spending \$300 on a set of chains for squatting in my home gym.

Yet, when I coach others, I am perhaps the most boring coach the world has ever seen. I talk about two things: technique and, well, technique...but I toss in pure, good old fashioned "get stronger" strength training, too. That's it for most people. Do your sport right and get stronger.

Until you have about ten years under your belt in your chosen sport, that is actually pretty good advice! Recently, it occurred to me that one of the biggest problems with the vast amount of information on the internet and the sheer volume of books relating to strength and bodybuilding is simply a beginner leaps beyond

the basics and...well, let's get to that in this article.

A couple of things I read recently sparked the generation of this article. First, I was asked by a large website to contribute some articles on Olympic Lifting, so I dropped by and read some of the other stuff they offer. I found myself reading a review of 18 year old boy's experiences using a "super supplement," "Superbol" or something, and his "incredible" improvements in two months. The more I read of this guy's experiences, the more I laughed. Basically, an untrained teen started training hard and thought the miracle supplement was the key to his honestly lackluster results.

Second, I was asked to help a high school program turn-around their throwers. As I talked with the head coach, it became very apparent the problems they had faced: they were using a program designed for an elite thrower for kids who didn't know how to hold the shot.

In a nutshell, there is the problem: beginners will improve by simply doing the sport. Nothing else is needed. *In fact, if you jump up the ladder of intensity too soon, you can't really take advantage of these "tricks" later!*

Before we get into the answer, let's look at the stuff that literally drives me to drink (do I sound a little too thankful?), or, at least, to shake my head quite often.

My list of things that drive me crazy in training beginners:

Programs with Percentages: This is the biggest offender. I have worked with freshman boys who can bench 95 pounds with a barbell for five to eight reps, yet fail over and over again with 100 pounds. On the Universal Bench Press, sophomores can quickly get up to 180 for sets of 8, 190 for fives and fail over and over at 200. By the way, I was describing myself, too! Yet, all too often, we take a high school athlete and stick them into a percentage program...without looking at the reality of what they are doing. The classic tables from the Soviet Union do not reflect the reality of the learner. There are coaches, yes, I am thinking of Bish, who have the ability to utilize percentage programs in a high school setting. Usually, however, you see athletes doing rep after rep with weights that

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have absolutely no relative meaning to their actual strength. What, honestly, is your max squat the first six months you are learning the lift? It is usually much, much more than one thinks.



Magic: This can be anything from pills, potions and lotions to chains, bands, boards, bumpers, shoes, belts...anything, really. Most of the readers know what I am talking about...you go into a forum, or a new site, and they are offering a “revolutionary” new idea to melt fat and increase your strength. For the beginner, magic can be anything that is beyond the learning of the basic techniques of the sport and the slow progress towards increasing power and strength. Magic can be plyometrics, isometrics, supplements, or whatever... The key is this: later, this stuff might shoot this athlete through the roof, but in the beginning it simply clouds the water of athletic improvement. In fact, let me toss out this to ponder: if you bring magic in too early for an athlete, you might find that it won't work as well later when the appropriate time comes along!

Ignoring Tactics: Tactics are the battlefield plans and changes of plans. One of the things that I have never fully understood is when I ask a guy what sport he does and he says “I'm a bodybuilder.” “Have you ever competed?” “No, I'm not into competing.”

Well, then, your “sport” isn't bodybuilding. Beginners need to compete early and often. I always push people who want to learn the O lifts into competitions as soon as possible. When I first met Dick Notmeyer, he told me that I would compete in three weeks. I had never seen a “live” snatch until that day...I had only seen photographs. With the pressure of time and the experience of competition, I learned an enormous amount in those three weeks and even more the day of the meet. Mentally, I learned the controlled fire that one has to have to O lift...I could have read volumes about it or

stepped on the platform in front of a crowd with just me and the bar.

I have mentioned numerous times the story of my college buddy who decided to enter a bodybuilding meet. He dieted down for six weeks, training twice a day, tanning at every opportunity and practice his full posing routine twice a day...in front of his friends and the guys in the gym. Don't laugh, I learned more about sports from watching him than I had in years. He was famished all the time and would lay on the floor a lot while training. After he competed, his body exploded in a number of positive ways as he thickened up and learned from his ordeal.

Contrast him with all those “bodybuilders” who trained the whole six weeks with him. None of them showed any improvement...ever. If you want to improve, you have to compete!

Shoe don't fit: I had a dad call me a number of times with questions about the “Big 21” program...a great program which assumes a number of things:

1. You are well grounded in the Olympic Lifts.
2. You are someone who can snatch, press and clean in the mid-100's, at least
3. You have off days to recover

The dad wanted his daughter to do the Big 21 and I told him several times that it was an advanced program. He ignored that advice, of course, and would call several times getting the details. Finally, he forced/made his daughter start the program. The next day, I get the call: “Dan, this won't work because she can do the presses with 45, but can't do the jumps up to 100 and the program is supposed to have her do 135 in three weeks but she can't do 100.” “I know...I kept telling you it wouldn't work.” The conversation continued for a long time, but it never got better.

You can't force an athlete to perform a program that they are not suited for either in terms of experience or athletic maturation. Yet, we often see coaches using concepts from professional sports to teach third graders.

It is a formula that only drives the kids/the athletes into hating sports.

So, what do we do?

Focus on Repetitions!

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Training beginners must focus on the correct repetitions of the competitive sport. In addition to the technically perfect (well...close as we can get) we slowly build up the physical components. Let's look at a few examples...

Note: I apologize to our non-USA readers for a discussion of American football...as well as readers who don't understand the game well. The point is the only thing that is important: focus on the basics and ruthlessly toss out anything that needlessly complicates the learning process. BUILD from this base...but be ruthless in carving out the key elements of success...and rep those to death!

I coached Sophomore and Varsity football for, what seems, a million years. Each season, we would sit down as a staff and review what we learned. One year, Joe Colosimo and I discussed the key to winning at the sophomore level. Are you ready? Here it is: **Catch the punt.** Week in and week out, that one little thing made a huge difference in our won-loss record. At that level, field position is so important...you rarely drive the ball 80 yards in ten or twelve plays. Somebody holds, goes off-sides, forgets a block or drops the ball on nearly every drive. So, you either score fast with great athletes (ha ha ha...that was a nice one!) or you slowly creep forward winning the punting game.

After "catch the punt," we decided that "making the tackle" was probably the only other thing that separated winning from losing. Sure, it was nice to do all the other stuff, but the games were won or lost by field position and stopping the ballcarrier the first contact. The scheme, the "X's" and "O's" didn't really matter; it was simply tackling the guy when you got the chance.

I was the offensive genius and I soon discovered that success on offense came down to a few choices:

1. We need a running game
2. We need a passing game
3. We need special offense

Now, let's break down each:

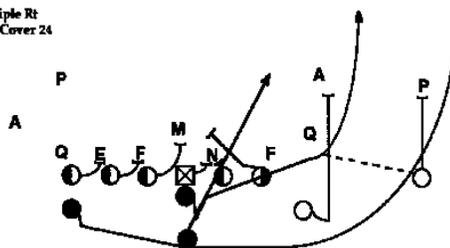
1. We need a running game
 - a. An inside run
 - b. An outside run

- c. A run that looked like a pass
- d. Something that starts one way and goes another

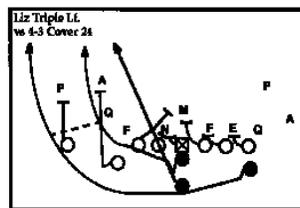
If you run the wishbone, the veer, the ace option or another other kind of option, you can combine "a" and "b" together. If you are a lousy passing team and scare no one with the pass, scratch out "c," too.

To be successful at the sophomore level then, you could simply run an option with some kind of reverse: two running plays.

Rip Triple Rt vs 4-3 Cover 24



Split End: Stalk block defender over you.
PBT: Block first man to your inside On or Off the line of scrimmage. Listen for Guard's call.
PSC: Block man On--no one ON block first defender to your inside. Call to Center & Tackle to let them know where defender is aligned.
Center: Block playside gap to Mike.
BSC: Seal A Gap
BST: Seal B Gap
BSB: Seal C Gap
PS Slot: Block Alley player
FB: Track to crack of the Guard. Get on your track and CO! Expect the football & be a runner. NO Ball find someone to run over!
BS Slot: One step motion and get in pitch relationship. Expect pitch, catch the ball and get to the Highway. Run the ladder & never dip.
QB: Drop & drag--find F--Ride & think "Give unless F tackles the Pb. Then run until some one makes you pitch" Pitch heart to heart.



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Don't you need to run them both right and left? Well, at the beginning level, you often find that your Quarterback can't pitch in one direction...or, more commonly, you would be scared to death to allow some of your athletes to catch a pitch...or even run with the ball. Usually, we just ran one play right and another one left. Yes, simple. That's the point.



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2. We need a passing game
- A long pass
 - A short pass
 - A pass that looks like a run
- Stop watching the NFL...in high school, you can have a great passing offense, but it still rests upon the “catching” offense. In fact, the more wide open a kid is, the more likely he is to drop the ball. Our “long pass” was always a pitch to running back that had the best arm and he would lug it downfield and we would hope for the best. Add a nice little “pick” play short pass and you are basically set.



3. We need special offense
- A Quarterback sneak
 - A “take the knee” play to end a game
 - A special “win the game” play

That’s it. What kills freshman and sophomore football teams is that they have dozens of formations and plays...then lose a drive because they only have six men on the line of scrimmage because of all the fancy formations and plays.

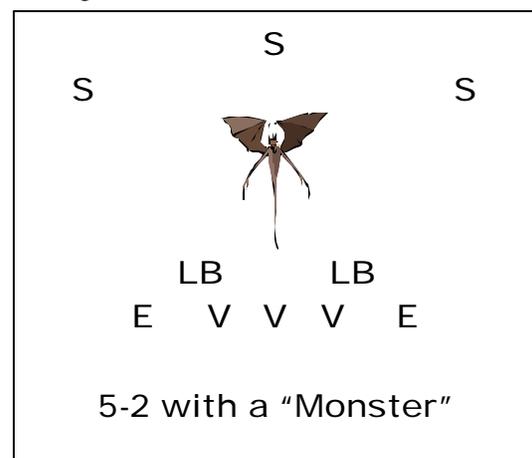
So, the play sheet:

- Option play in one direction
- Counter or reverse in the other
- Running back deep pass
- A pick play
- Sneak
- Take a Knee
- Win the Game
- An inside running play in the opposite direction of the option play...just to keep people honest.

What happens when you do this? Well, Joe and I turned a team that lost by an average of forty points to a team that won the last three games by tossing out EVERYTHING else and focusing on those things that **we** did well.

I could tell you about a high school coach, also a buddy of mine, who runs a defense that nobody can figure out...he lines up with five defenders on the line of scrimmage (two stand up

defensive ends and three down lineman in gaps set by the linebackers) who focus on the quarterback, two linebackers who focus on the fullback first then clean up anything else, three deep safeties who strive to not let the offense get more than two first downs on any play (no gain more than twenty yards) and one “monster” who covers the offense’s best player man to man the entire game.



The theory is simple: he takes away the two best high school players, the quarterback and the “star.” Generally, those two account for 80-90% of the typical high school offense. The challenge to the opposition: beat us with your worst athletes. Week to week, the only difference is who the monster goes man to man with on the offense. It is absolutely simple...and it works. And, no, it wouldn’t work in the National Football League. But, guys in the NFL don’t have math homework, mow the lawn because mom said so, and worry about zits the night of homecoming. Usually.

Summary:

1. As a coach, with beginners, we need to be ruthless in cutting to the core of what works and spend all of our time repping those things that work. A freshman team is not like the NFL, your local church basketball team is not the same as coaching the Lakers, and you shouldn’t train a beginner like a member of the Bulgarian National Weightlifting Team!

2. Our job as coach is to think tactically. Part of preparation for competition is to put the athlete

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in a setting that reflects competition. An endless variation of “if-then” does not prepare the beginning athlete for competition. The novice needs to do “this.” One thing. If you follow this advice, you will soon find that your athletes make very few mistakes in competition. Recently, Jimmy Johnson said on Fox Sports that “you always play the guy who makes the fewest mistakes, not the guy with all the talent.” There’s a gem right there.

My good friend, Dave Turner, from the Hercules Barbell Club, has put together a beginning Olympic Weightlifting Program that I have turned to for inspiration for years. You can read everything on my site at http://danjohn.org/lifting101_files/frame.html but, there are two points I would like to emphasize. First, is Dave’s warm ups:

“Dave Turner’s Hercules Barbell Club beginners use a simple program for learning and developing the rudiments of strength. Three days a week, the team members go through a ten minute warm up of shoulder “dislocates” with broomsticks, overhead squats with broomsticks, followed by front squats, then a “cardio-like” few minutes of snatches and clean and jerks with the broomsticks. Dave reinforces the terms used in lifting: “Get set,” “Push the floor,” “Jump,” “Dip,” and “Down.””

Dave is teaching his lifters how to lift during the warm ups! I stole this idea for my discus throwers and our throwers warm up with the basic movements...over and over and over again...of “Stretch-1-2-3.” They hear the terms, do the movements and warm up their bodies and their techniques at the same time.

Next, Dave’s workout is always the same...with one variation. The athletes all do the same program but they start at different lifts. The program:

Snatch : 8 Sets of Doubles
Clean and Jerk :8 Sets of Singles
Front Squat: 5 Sets of 5
Press : 5 Sets of 3

So, one day, an athlete might start at the Clean and Jerk and finish with the Snatch, the next workout Front Squat first, the next Press, and the next week begin with the Snatches and finish

with the Presses. A little variety is nice...that’s all the beginner needs! But, just a little...



The genius of Dave’s system is two fold; first, the athletes are preparing from the moment they enter the gym to lift on the platform at a meet. All their training is focused on the two meet lifts: the Snatch and the Clean and Jerk. The Front Squats and the Presses are the “strength” moves.

“Yes” is the answer to what most people then ask: “this isn’t what the guys in the NFL/Bulgarian Olympic Team/World Championships do, right?” That’s right, they don’t do this stuff *now*. But, you can almost be certain that the great ones had a long period of learning the basics.

The Ladder to Success

My friend, Jim Markosian, always makes fun of me when I talk because I always take so long getting to the point. Okay, the point: the wise coach...and athlete...will slowly march up the ladder of success. Be sure to have fully benefited from each step before going up to the next rung on the ladder. Let me offer some practical ideas concerning issues that seem to come up a lot with beginners: nutrition, rituals, recovery, and weightlifting.

Note: this is going to be basic stuff, but don’t miss the message...*this is what beginners need!*

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Nutrition

1. With the novice, talk about the basics of good nutrition. Eliminate soft drinks (start pushing water as the main beverage from the beginning), candy and crap foods, and really emphasize the importance of breakfast.

2. Although this may sound complicated, I would then move into discussing foods that don't "agree" with the athlete. From an earlier issue of Get UP!, we discussed this in two principles:

- If you ask the Lung Association, who has a long history with battling allergies, they will answer you simply: **"Peanut, fish, egg, milk, wheat and soy cause most food allergies."** Indeed, in the early 1980's, a popular muscle mag published an article that simply stated that 90% of Americans are allergic to wheat or milk.
- "Dr. Elson Haas notes in an interview with "Mind and Muscle Power" that the least allergic foods are: **rice, pears, lamb, kale, salmon (and other deep sea fish, like halibut and sole) trout, turkey, rabbit, sweet potatoes, and honey.** He goes on to recommend **cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, apricots, beets, squashes, olives, olive oil, cranberries, herbal teas and tapioca."**

I have always used acne as an indicator that one of my teenage athletes is struggling with a particular food issue and as a sign of overtraining. This doesn't need to be too difficult, but I constantly meet adults who have great clarity about which foods make them gassy, bloated or actually ill. You don't want to find out you are allergic to shellfish the morning of a competition!



3. You may also want to slowly encourage your athletes to use foods as a supplement. Again, from an earlier issue of Get Up!:

Recently, Men's Journal published a list of foods for muscle building:

The Superfoods

Eggs

Almonds

Salmon

Yogurt

Beef

Olive oil

Water

Coffee

We have had great success increasing the amount my athletes consume these foods. Once I see an athlete carrying a baggie full of almonds and a couple of hard boiled eggs, I know I'm coaching a state champ.

4. Finally, real supplements. I choose a few for my athletes, but I only discuss them long after they swear off soft drinks, candy and all the rest and only after they convince me that they always have two full meals and a snack before an afternoon training session. I like three: **fish oil capsules, a magnesium tablet, and a potassium tablet.**

So, you may ask, when do we start the real stuff? Like what? Creatine? Don't waste a nickel on any supplements until you exhaust the basic steps noted above...cut out the crap, eliminate troublesome foods, and eat the "Superfoods." You may never need anything else!

5. "Organize your eating" would be my next recommendation. I like following diet "outlines," a *suggested* eating list. A few years ago, I had a young female thrower ask me about losing "weight." I tried to convince her that she was fine (I wanted to tell her that statistically you look the best you will ever look before your first diet...its all downhill after that, but I shut up), so I offered her this basic diet:



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The Twelve Day on, Two Day off Diet

This diet has had a few "incarnations" on the internet. I think it is public domain, because of the number of variations. I removed some of the "suspect" points about the diet, especially the points surrounding how much to expect to lose. That just isn't true, nor safe.

BREAKFAST:

1/2 grapefruit or 8 oz. unsweetened grapefruit juice.
2 eggs, any style
2 slices of bacon

LUNCH:

1/2 grapefruit or 8oz. unsweetened grapefruit juice
Salad with any dressing
Meat (including chicken) any style and any amount

DINNER:

1/2 grapefruit or 8oz. unsweetened grapefruit juice
Meat (including chicken), any style and any amount, fish may be used, Vegetables: any green or red (cooked in butter or any seasoning, or salad as above)
Coffee or tea: One cup

BEDTIME SNACK

8oz glass of tomato juice or skim milk

INSTRUCTIONS

1. At any meal you may eat until you are full, until you can't eat any more. You **MUST** eat the minimum at each meal.
2. Don't eliminate anything from the diet, especially **DON'T SKIP** the bacon at breakfast or omit salads.
3. The grapefruit is important because it acts as a catalyst that starts the burning process. Don't add

any additional grapefruit or grapefruit juice.

4. Don't eat between meals. If you eat the combination of foods suggested you will not get hungry.

5. The diet completely eliminates sugars and starches which are lipids and form fat. Fat doesn't form Fat, it helps burn it. You can fry food in butter and use butter generously on vegetables.

6. **DO NOT EAT DESSERTS**, breads, white vegetables or sweet potatoes. You may double or triple helpings of meat, salad and approved vegetables. **EAT UNTIL YOU ARE STUFFED**. The more you eat, the more weight you will lose.

7. Drink eight 8oz glasses of water every day. This diet is given to heart patients needing to lose weight fast for by-pass surgery. All soft drinks need to be sugar and caffeine free.

YOU MAY NOT HAVE

White onions, potatoes, celery, peas, cereal, corn, starchy vegetables, potato chips, peanut butter, pasta, corn chips, jelly jams, sweet pickles, pretzels, fruit, low-fat/fat free or diet dressings

YOU MAY HAVE

Red onions, bell peppers, radishes, broccoli, cucumbers, carrots, green onions, leaf spinach, cabbage, tomatoes, green beans, lettuce, chili (with out the beans) mayo, any cheese, hot dogs, cole slaw, red salad dressings, green vegetables, 1 tsp. of dried nuts, dill pickles, bread and butter pickles.

IMPORTANT:

STAY ON THE DIET FOR 12 DAYS AND STOP FOR 2 DAYS.

So, what happened? The first words out of her mouth were "I could never eat that much in a day...I would become a pig!" The sad thing is this: she went on to some quick fix liquid diet, then went off to college and discovered the "Freshman Fifteen" several times over. I honestly think that planning meals is one of the simplest ways an athlete can maintain decent fat levels and continue to provide the body with the fuels that it needs.

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For those of you who know me...what did you expect but something this boring? I'm the guy that has "Practice Thanksgiving" every two weeks just to get turkey! "Food is the key to proper nutrition"...now that is a quote worth chewing on. (Perhaps the worst pun of my life).

Rituals

I can't honestly think of a more important topic to address to the young athlete. There are "things" in every successful program that are simply rituals and the athlete learns early that to be part of the tradition, the team, they have to learn the talk and walk of the program. Young athletes need to learn EVERYTHING, so we might as well accept it and address it early on.

The beginning athlete needs to learn, from the first day, what to where and what to bring. The "**Equipment Checklist**" should be one of the first steps a good coach makes in a program. Paul Northway, as I have noted many issues, had a laminated check list that he tied to his equipment bag. For the athlete, they need to know that they need to where and bring the right stuff to each workout...each competition. You need an Equipment Checklist. An example for Day Two at my discus camp:

- Throwing Shoes
- Running Shoes
- Power ball
- Tire
- X Sticks
- Farmer Bars (Both Kinds)
- BFR (80 Pound Rock)
- Olympic Bar with two 25 pound Bumper Plates
- Extra Water

This is for a clinic that is held in my backyard and gym. But, they athletes know what to bring. The athlete learns to look at the list without the coach saying "get this, get that, put on your socks..." For a team, couldn't the coach mount the three or four lists prominently on a wall and refer to the "light practice list" or the "game day list" and save hours of valuable time?

After lists, the next ritual I would offer the young athlete is game preparation rituals. In every sport, certain things need to be done before hand to "warm up." It isn't always physical; in fact, I would argue that most of the things done before competition are mental. The athlete can not just run down on the field a few seconds before the game starts and perform at the highest levels.

Let's look at a Get UP! article from just a few weeks ago for more ideas about "rituals."

Rituals and Athletic Success

I heard at a life improvement workshop that 95-98% of one's decisions are simply done out of habit. What did you eat for breakfast? I can almost guarantee that whatever you ate was based on habit. I eat four eggs every day. Maybe you eat cereal...or simply drink a cup of coffee. Whatever. Your habits dictate what breakfast you are going to eat.

Coach Maughan told us at our opening team meeting my junior year to "make ourselves slaves to good habits." Simply, over the course of an athletic career, the decisions you make early in the process will stick with you much longer than all the insights gleaned from camps, coaches and internet newsletters.

My four eggs are a ritual. I don't think about it. Yet, those four eggs are full of protein and hold me over until lunch...sometimes longer.

Most people have a "belief" that they are entirely "self-directed." I believe that this is far from true: to experiment, especially those of you who drive cars with clutches, consciously think about the process of changing gears as you accelerate next time. You might have to visit the transmission shop after this experiment. My point? Well, most of live on automatic.

How do rituals relate to habits? The way I want to explain a ritual is this: a ritual is a conscious decision to put into order a set of rules, habits, behaviors until they turn into a habit.

I recently watched an athlete talk himself out of success. His "ritual" is simple: when he doesn't do well, his self-talk volume goes up so that we can all hear it. "What am I doing? What's wrong with me? This is terrible."

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That, my friends, is a ritual. Let's talk about *positive rituals!*

The Months leading up to the season...

One of the most important parts of long-term athletic success is the "off-season." One of the first things I do after each season (I break down my training into Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer...as my gym is minus degrees in January and 125 in summer) is to simply take out a piece of paper and write down my "weaknesses." My two most common weaknesses are: "I am a fat pig" and "I need to have stronger arms."

This past year, I worked hard on both of these weaknesses. I think the improvement in my javelin throw is partially due to the rehabilitation work that extra biceps/triceps work has done for my elbow.

From this simple writing exercise, I plot out a few changes in my training, eating and recovery ideas. I noticed years ago that one of the signs of overtraining for me was the increase of my waist measurement. It wasn't just fat but also the sway of my lower back from fatigue and the lack (or exhaustion) of my core muscles. So, when I tell myself "I'm a fat pig," one of the things I also do is check to see if I burned the candle at both ends for too long. That is OFTEN the case!

This little exercise provides me the opportunity to then plot out my competitions. This next part is simple, you need the following:

- Envelopes
- Stamps
- Checkbook
- Forms for various organizations
- Applications for events

It is at this time, right after reviewing my weaknesses that I turn in the forms for upcoming competitions. I scratch those dates off of my day planner and send the forms in. Tiffini takes care of travel and tries to figure out how she can find a way to go to Chicago or Seattle, but not go to Podunkville, Nowhere, USA.

To me, this is a ritual. Now, the wheels are turning!



The week before competition:

In my humble opinion, most people spend months prepping for competition then toss it all away the last week. My rituals the week of competition are this:

- Don't get a haircut
- Squat snatch with only 95 pounds three days that week for a nice number of reps and sets
- Three days before I leave or compete, gather up everything I need and double check to make sure I have everything.

"Don't get a haircut?" I learned this trick from a book, "Everybody is an Athlete." Maffetone, the author, noted that he had absolutely no evidence for this, but he found that people didn't do well with new haircuts. As he thought this through, especially with distance runners, he noted that many of his runners competed week in and week out for months. If you can't spare one weekend to get your haircut, you are obviously overtraining or overcompeting.

So, last week, I broke my own ritual. Part of owning a ritual is knowingly breaking the ritual! I got my hair cut, fully aware that this would have galactic repercussions. I broke several of my personal records that weekend and won "athlete of the day."

What is good about the haircut thing is that now I plan a haircut two to three weeks before an event. In other words, long before I step on the ring, platform or field, I am prepping my success. This is a ritual!!!



The light workouts in the weight room and some easy drilling with the particular sport that I will be competing are hard earned lessons. Since turning 30...during the Reagan Administration...I have noticed that I really need to back off going into competition. I fully

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subscribe to the Tommy Kono theory that “**it is better to be undertrained than a little bit overtrained.**” I can pull out a tough lift or throw if I am fresh, but no way if I am beat up!

Save it for the competitions!

Finally, I can't think of a more important ritual than packing and preparing early. As I noted, Paul Northway had a laminated check list that he had hooked to his equipment bag. Before each meet, he would add each item and check them for wear and tear. He also had a spare set of shoelaces...a good idea I must finally adopt!

Rituals when things go bad...

I drove about eight total hours to get to Fort Collins. My right hip hurt. The hotel was...and I am being gracious...a dump. There were no “fast food” places around and I was hungry. The guy who was supposed to measure my implements was angry because I stood on the wrong side of the table. I hadn't seen Tiff in three weeks and she had just got off a plane to go home. I was miserable the night before the Nationals.

The same exact thing happened at the Masters National Olympic Lifting meet a year or so before. I had a long list of problems from long flight delays to a noisy neighbor.

Well, what do you do? In Fort Collins, a funny thing happened. I turned on the television and there was an ad for the new Anthony Robbins program, “Get the Edge.” It made me laugh because that immediately kicked on the associations that I needed. In Robbins' language, I needed leverage to change my neuro-associations!

My rituals when things go bad? First and foremost, I have my mantra from Coach Maughan: “I always throw best on my last throw.” For O lifting, think the last clean and jerk. No matter what happens, until it is over, I never judge an event. In other words, wait until you are in the car driving home before you say this was good or bad. My “overriding” ritual for bad days is to wait a little longer before judging it a bad day!!!

My next ritual is to consciously learn something or meet someone new. I know that I place a high value on learning, so when I get in

trouble I go out of my way to learn something...anything. This little trick pulls me up...and makes the day worth living.

The most important “ritual” may not seem like a ritual but it is simply this: stick to the plan!

Before competition, I write out little reminders in my notebook. For O lifting meets, I write out my warm up “hopes” and my first two lifts:

<u>Snatch</u>	<u>Clean and Jerk</u>
60	60
70	100
80	
90	
Platform:	
100	130
110	140
???	???

These are from my notes from the Nationals.

Well, I was way behind after the snatch because I missed my attempts after the opener. To stay in the comp, I would have to pull a big clean and jerk. My thought process, though, went like this:

“You suck. You choke. You stink. I'll show them. I will take my opener with a million pounds and win...and then...”

Then, the ritual kicked in. Okay, so it will come down to one lift, so? Get two on the platform first, then take what you need to win. Stay with the plan!

I have been at track meets where a thrower will ask me to critique their warm ups then try to change tech during the contest. Stay with the plan!

Rituals when things go right...

- Enjoy it...you earned it.
- Be thankful
- Be very thankful
- Smile
- Stick to the plan...it ain't over until you drive away!

Certainly, this was a long winded way to get to this point for the beginner:

Make checklists for everything!!!

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Equipment needs, drills that work, goals to make, accountability cards, tactical ideas and whatever else you can think of should be written down in checklists. Sure, the beginning athlete will have fewer...but start the athlete off right by using checklists as the key ritual!

Recovery

I wrote this for the Old School Forum about four years ago and I still am amazed how I typed this in about five minutes...yet, it honestly has some value for a raw beginner and an Olympian.

The Ten Commandments of Recovery

Sleep! You probably won't even consider this one, but it is the single best weight loss tool, muscle gain tool, training tool, life tool, I have ever encountered. Read about my short term study of more sleep in this section. The Cuban lifters sleep nine hours every night, PLUS a three hour nap! Turn off the TV and go to bed!

The body is one piece! Don't think you have an upper body and a lower body. Stick a fork in someone's thigh while they are benching and it will stop the lift, even though some think that bench presses are for the upper body. If you play three hours of pickup basketball games, it will hurt your training. If you slam tequila shooters with the cute girl just back from the Mexico trip, it will hurt your training. Staying up all night with sick children will hurt your training. An infected toe will hurt your training. You are one magnificent piece, keep that in mind. The first line of defense against injury and overtraining is monitoring your life as well as your training.

Don't think about recovery and you won't! Hoping that you recover will not help you recover. Somewhere, in your calendar or training notebook, you have to make some clear decisions to focus on recovery. O lifting three days a week can exhaust the human body, but you can easily recover during the other four days off. You can recover unless you spend the other four days snowboarding, hauling rocks or playing six hours a day of basketball. I fully believe in "active rest," adding recreational

activities to help the mind and body heal, but you need to be very moderate in your non-lifting energy wasting movements. You also need to let the mind heal and recover. The first sign of exhaustion is the lack of enthusiasm to train with weights.

Program and Plan! At some level, know what you are going to do in the gym each day. True, you can overplan, but basically have some idea why you are there. I like to focus on two things in each workout, this week and the next meet. Simply, each week, I try to be sure to include a solid pulling workout, a pushing workout, a squat workout and a technical workout. I might do each movement every workout, but somewhere in the week, I like to make sure I "worked hard" on each phase of the O lifts. Depending on how close or far my next O lifting meet is on the horizon determines the reps, sets or weights. That is a fairly simple long-term plan, but it seems to work. I often take an "easy" week, too, but I tend to cover the four elements in these weeks. I keep my "eye" on the long-term each workout. I remember watching new lifters back in college show up to the HPER gym with the newest magazine article that had them do multiple sets of multiple reps with multiple exercises for each tiny bodypart. Having no idea of even the rudiments of lifting, they would toil endlessly moving from tiny weight to tiny weight. True, they had a program, but no real plan! Make sure you keep each workout in full view of your long and short-term goals.

Eat your protein. Eat your fats. The greatest mistake of my life was listening to the high carb nonsense of the Seventies and Eighties. It is nearly impossible to recover, not to mention grow and improve, on a high carb diet. You need protein and fat to recover, grow and improve. Ignoring this advice will be very detrimental to your lifting career. Don't make my mistake! The Bulgarians are reported to get half their calories from fat, the Romanians discovered that ultra-high protein diets increased muscle mass (no surprise) and lifting ability. I favor the The Meat, Leaves and Berries Diet, but there are many other variations.

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Minerals: Biggest Bang for the Buck I was sitting with Brian Oldfield, former World Record Holder in the shot put, at discus camp and he leaned over and told me: "None of these guys will listen, but they should be taking minerals." Brian was tired of throwers asking about the newest fad in nutritions, mostly this or that magazine's magic protein, and gave me the secret to recovery: minerals. "They are the biggest bang for the buck." Magnesium and Potassium are my two secret weapons. Mg is the best single nutrient I can think of, see the Eades' book, "Protein Power Lifespan Program" for more information. K is great, too, as any low carb dieter will tell you. Those two supplements are start to a better recovery.

Hot tubs and cold showers Myth or not, I don't know, but the combination of hot tubs and icy showers is the best combination I have ever read about or practiced for recovery. The Bulgarians explained the benefits of both in the Seventies and I find the combination wonderful for joint recovery as well as a chance to simply "chill." Cold showers have even been touted as a fat loss tool, so maybe you get an extra boost for doing them. I am convinced of this combinations ability to help recovery.

Ab work: Okay, how does working more help recovery? In the area of abdominal work, it seems to help the O lifter. The Chinese lifters consider the abs a "second" backbone, hence stronger abs=stronger torso=bigger lifts. I like those ten dollar "ab wheels" as an ab workout, although sit ups and one arm work seem to help, too. If I have to explain how to do ab work, then...maybe you REALLY need to try another sport.

Splurge I bought a hot tub a couple of years ago. I have a friend who gets a monthly sports massage. A visit to a chiropractor might help some lifters...a vacation might help others. That is what splurge means: spend some money or time providing recovery. I thought of this while sitting in my hot tub watching the stars.

Pay attention to who you listen to: Friends, family and training partners will often be your

first line of noticing your overtraining. Also, pay attention to people you respect. If you trust somebody enough to follow their program, trust them when they tell you to ease off OR train harder! Discernment is a key "virtue" in long-term success.

Remember why you don't listen to some people. Once you decide on a route to take in training, be careful of listening to every "whisper in the wind." Every time I lift at a spa, some gym expert comes over to discuss why front squats are bad, or some other moronic thing I honestly don't have time to debate. "Dude, will creatine help my biceps?" I don't know, I don't care, honestly, I don't. Magazines in the muscle field are one step from porn and cater to the fears and insecurities of adolescent boys. When you want into a nutrition store looking to buy "Horny Goat Weed" or some other "hot" supplement, remember "why you don't listen to some people."

All right then...is there an order to this list? Sure...even if you are a raw beginner. Basically, whenever you train, take a moment to look down the list and make sure you are following all ten!!!

A Training Model

What can we do to train young athletes? Well, first and foremost, you need to organize **what you want to accomplish!** I always thought that the Southwood Junior High Weightlifting Program was a good way to introduce weightlifting. Literally, everyone knew what to do in the weightroom by the second day! *The article, from Issue 20, follows in its entirety:*

The Southwood Junior High Weightlifting Program

Every so often, I will get an email from a high school coach about teaching a group of kids to lift weights. The emails often sound like the task...to get kids to lift...is insurmountable. Some of the coaches sound like they need a miracle worker to come in and exorcize the student body before beginning the exercise program.

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I always argue back to these fine men and women that it **can** be done...easily and inexpensively. I can't claim any credit from the following paragraphs, but I am indebted to Mr. Dave Freeman, my ninth grade P.E. coach for making us do this program!

After eight years at St. Veronica's School, I transferred to Southwood Junior High to begin junior high. It was a helluva transition. From Irish Nuns to public school is transition enough, but I was also going to play football. At 118 pounds of ...ahem...pure muscle, it was obvious to everyone I needed to lift weights.

It was at this time I was introduced to Southwood's lifting program. In a portable building, the school had outlaid about 15 of those cement filled weightlifting sets that everyone from my generation remembers as their first bar.

Mr. Freeman spent little time explaining the "rep-set" system of 8-6-4 because of everybody, except me, knew what to do. That is part of the brilliance of the program...you learned it once and then you lifted. Not exactly rocket science...but who needs rocket science on the football field?

The program was very simple. First, groups of four boys were given a bar. The bars were weighted from very light...maybe 25 pounds...up to perhaps close to 100 pounds. Each cohort of boys would lift one at a time, put the bar down, then the next boy would lift. The four would constantly move from lifter to watcher...the bar never stopped. The three sets (explained in just a moment) would not take very long...in fact, sometimes it was hard to catch your breath in time for your next set.

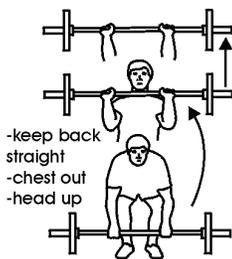
The reps were very simple:

First set: 8 repetitions

Second set: 6 repetitions

Third set: 4 repetitions

The goal was simple: when you got all 16 reps (8+6+4), you added weight. If you started with a bar that was too light, the next workout, you would be bumped up to the next weight and a stronger group. (Of



course, actual variations could include making a whole new group with more weight, too...or whatever necessary to make the group work together).

The program involved four lifts:

- Power Clean
- Military Press
- Front Squat
- Bench Press

Each lift was done in the 8-6-4 format. The bar was cleaned (once) for the set of Military Presses and the bar was also cleaned (once) for the Front Squats. For the Bench Presses, the lifter lay on a board supported by cement blocks (or, later, actual padded benches...without racks) and the other lifters picked the bar up for him to begin the presses.

To "hurry up" the training...as if it was necessary, there were times when Mr. Freeman recommended combining the Power Clean and Military Presses...one clean and one press, repeated for a total of eight reps. This was done with a lighter weight. One could also do the Front Squats after the clean and presses, too. This was an amazing cardiovascular workout.

Each day, to warm up, we had to "run two laps and an obstacle course." The two laps were about 600 meters and the obstacle course had a wall, various upper body challenges, and some balance walking. All in all, this was not a bad program.

We trained this program three days a week during the summer before football season...when we could. As I have noted in other places, I started to focus on the bench in high school and erred by ignoring the clean, press and front squat. I was on the right track here, but, as youth often does, I went the wrong way.

All in all, a pretty good program!

Power Clean

8-6-4 reps

Military Press

8-6-4 reps

Front Squat

8-6-4 reps

Bench Press

8-6-4 reps

Increase weight when you get all the reps!

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Goals: A Key for Coaching Beginners

David Witt



*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.*

When Dan told me that this issue was going to be written around the theme of coaching beginners, I thought back almost 24 years ago to when I was a beginner in track and field with hopes of throwing the discus. Back to a time when I couldn't even imagine 24 years. But that's another topic for another article.

One of the best things my track coach Marty Mayer did for us was having us set goals. We set a mid-season goal and an end-of-the-season goal. This gave us something to work toward, and focused our training. The standing reward for achieving our goals was a milkshake from the local dairy bar. Ironically, I never got a single milkshake in my four years of high school. I never set my goals too ridiculously high; I just never got my timetable just right. Invariably I would go out to a summer track meet, the week after the season ended, and throw three feet past my end of the season goal. This was probably because I was more relaxed after the season. Hmmm, that's another article.

A coach needs to review the goals that an athlete sets. Many times frustration occurs because an athlete feels they are not progressing as fast as they would like to. What would be an average rate of progression for high school throwers? I would think that 15 to 20 feet for the discus for boys per year and about five feet for the shot for boys per year would be average. Weightlifting? I dunno, never competed in it. Highland Games? Ask me next season.

In high school I bought a book called "Getting into Olympic Form" by Thomas Fahey.

In it, John Powell talked about vision, specifically how unrealistic vision, or goals, often leads to early retirement for a lot of athletes. John told of an experience in which a young long jumper told him that he was going to break the world record and make the Olympic team. At the time the young jumper was only jumping 23 feet. John asked him "Why don't you shoot for 23 feet-6 inches before dreaming about taking all the marbles?" The young long jumper was not being realistic. John emphasizes building your vision is built upon a series of small steps, and as an athlete learns their capabilities, they adjust their goals accordingly. **"Yard by yard it's hard, but inch by inch it's a cinch."** Copies of this book can still be found on Amazon.

If you're not using goals with your athletes, try it. You may find that it can solve many problems. For example, it solves the issues of motivation, focus, and retention among others. I still set mid-season and end-of-the-season goals 24 years later.

May we recommend one book?

When the Game Stands Tall: The Story of the De LA Salle Spartans and Football's Longest Winning Streak, ISBN 1583940863,

by Neil Hayes, is simply the single finest insight in to what we should be doing as coaches. Simply, read the section on "Accountability Cards" and tell me if these guys don't know what they are doing! As of this writing, they have won 150 straight football games!

Published by Daniel John

Daniel John, Editor

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