



The “Us” Rant

Kim Goss, noted editor of “Bigger Faster Stronger” Magazine mentioned that he didn’t understand the rant in last month’s edition.

Clearly, he doesn’t understand us.

Noone does.

Let’s remember the mission here:

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*.

Squat RX

Boris Bachmann

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c2

“My squat is plateaued at XYZ pounds. Should I do the Supersquat program, conjugate periodization, Smolov, or a modified Sheiko program to boost my numbers?”

Sound familiar? It should because I’ve seen it, literally, hundreds of times on internet forums and hear it pretty frequently from people in gyms. People are always looking for that magic program that is going to propel them to lifting greatness, but they’ve put the horse before the applecart, so to speak. A good training plan is an absolute necessity, but you’ve got to think it out and mindlessly punching numbers into a calculator isn’t going to cut it for most people. As you examine your training, trying to look for areas to improve, ask yourself the following questions.

1. Do you do form work?

No matter how advanced you are, form work is a necessity. Look at the best squatters in the world - what do they all have in common? Impeccable form. Form is something that always needs attention, ESPECIALLY if you are getting stronger.

Doing form work DOES NOT preclude heavy training – I feel I have to say this because every time I hear someone say “I’m doing nothing but squatting with the empty bar to work on form for a while”, I feel like tearing my hair out. If you’ve developed some bad habits, lifting with proper form is going to make lighter weights feel heavier than they should, but that doesn’t mean you can’t

lift “heavy”. Bump the weights down a bit, but challenge yourself.

2. Do you work on your weaknesses?

Here’s a checklist within a checklist.

Ask yourself “When the last time I worked on...?”

***Flexibility?**

Here’s a big one that most powerlifters and lifters in general set aside and never, ever get to. You can convince yourself that stretching makes you weaker, but if you have tight hip flexors, guess what – they’re putting the brakes on your squat. Got tight hamstrings? Could be contributing to anterior pelvic tilt. Tight pecs? Probably making it tougher to maintain upper back tightness when the weight gets heavy.

Stretching and range of motion work is just like anything – you need to be progressive. Don’t start cranking away and expect anything more than increased potential for injury. Take your time and no one said you have to do it *before* training, but DO IT.

***Posture?**

Do you sit hunched over at a computer all day and then expect to be Mr. Bigshot in the squat racks at 5:30pm? Posture is one of those things that most of us ignore 24 hours a day, everyday and then wonder why we have glutes that don’t fire, why our shoulder flexibility sucks, and why our upper back is riddled with adhesions.

Practice good posture ALL THE TIME. It’s going to be rough for a while, but deal with it – you’ll reap the benefits long term.

***Abs?**

If you’re like me, you save your ab work for the end of the workout and then you

go home right after you strip the bar. Abs (and rotator cuff) are one of those things you can only ignore for so long before it comes back to bite you in the arse, or the lower back.

I don’t think you have to do ab work every session, but don’t let them be the weak link... ever.

***Glutes?**

I remember reading an interview about Andy Bolton that said he had a special training day dedicated to “Ass Training” – I don’t know if he was joking or not, but any elite deadlifter or squatter will have a serious backside powering them to glory. If you aren’t doing them already, try some ultra-wide stance squats, heavy glute-ham bench work, pull-throughs, Romanian deadlifts, sumo pulls, or some good mornings and get your ass moving!

***Upper back?**

Most people with any kind of balanced training plan will be doing plenty of upper back work. I mean, who would ignore rows, chins, bent-over laterals, and shrugs, right? Certainly people who read Dan John and stuff like MILO wouldn’t fail to do back work, right? Well, I’m sad to say that I have on numerous occasions. When work or family made training time tight, I used to knuckle down on the big three... well, who am I kidding? I used to do lots of squats and bench, and once in a while, I’d do some deadlifts. That’s fine occasionally when you’re strapped for time, but don’t let it become a bad, bad training habit like ignoring abs – you’re setting yourself up for shoulder issues and when 500lbs is on your back, you’ll wish you were better prepared.

***Unilateral work?**

How many hardcore squatters do you know that do lunges? I'm guessing not many. How many hardcore squatters do you know that actually LIKE lunges? I don't know ANY.

The beauty of unilateral work, like lunges, Bulgarian split squats, pistols, step-ups, and one-legged deadlifts is that if one leg is lacking in strength and flexibility, it has absolutely nowhere to hide. Doing walking lunges with 135 for any appreciable distance can be a humbling experience.

3. Do you have a “routine”?

When I say a “routine”, I don't mean a training plan – I mean a routine that you follow before any attempt at a heavy weight. Do you have something that you do that puts you in the right frame of mind for success? Something that focuses you? When we load up the bar with 500 pounds, people have a tendency to get focused pretty quick, but if you can't get focused, those needless and, usually, negative things start popping up like self-doubt, analysis, evaluation, anxiety. Do this often enough, and you'll very quickly find yourself in a very real rut.

A proper “routine” can help you focus on lifting heavy and well. It helps you trust your ability to lift heavy weights. Here are some tips on coming up with a proper “routine”:

- *Find things that transition you smoothly from the warm-up to the attempt
- *Find things that make you feel strong and in-synch
- *Be consistent
- *Keep it simple
- *Be flexible – a routine differs from a superstition in that a routine is based on elements common to success and is modifiable, whereas superstitions are

unbending, prescribed patterns that, if broken, will raise anxiety

4. Do you “mix it up”?

Variety and novelty, are important to lifting longevity, both mentally and physically. If you do high-bar squats, when was the last time you did low bar squats? If you are a powerlifter, when was the last time you did a good, hard set of 20 reps? If you find yourself doing the 5x5 often, when was the last time you set the pins in the power rack and had an honest-to-gosh one-rep max effort?

5. Are you consistent?

In Japanese, there is a proverb “*chirimo tsumoreba, yama to naru*”, which means something like “Even grains of sand can become mountains.”

We all have other commitments, but do you get to the gym 3x/week when times get rough, or are you lucky to get one or, maybe, two training sessions/week most weeks? Do you get enough sleep, or do you caffeinate yourself to the brim every day and then collapse into bed? Do you eat at least one healthy meal a day? Do you start a new training program every other week? Are you constantly searching for the one new exercise or supplement that will propel you to greatness, or have you moved beyond that? Be honest with yourself.

Consistency is the key to long term, significant gains. Consistency is what you need to make mountains.

Sometimes you just have to show up.
Amen!

Prepping for the First HG...another "First Person" Get Up *EXCLUSIVE!*

Matt Vargochik

When we asked Matt for a bio, he mentioned he was a graduate from Wake Forest. Wake Forest! Outside of Utah State, that is the number one school for automatic entry into the Hall of Authors here at Get UP!!!

If you ever get the chance to attend the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, I suggest you take it. It is a fine festival of Scottish tradition and athletics taking place on a meadow in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains. If my girlfriend had not taken me there as part of a vacation in 2006, I would still be sitting around, reading Get Up! and wondering what might have been. Instead, I can now say I have competed in Heavy Athletics, and in this article, I hope to encourage others to do the same.

In August 2007 I was nursing a back injury that had plagued me all summer. A return trip to Grandfather in July had filled me with enthusiasm, and after rereading the entire Get Up! catalog, I knew that signing up for a contest would be the perfect thing to spark my return. Thanks to the words of Dan John and Mike Rosenberg, I decided to take the plunge. I sent off an E-mail, and on September 5th found out that I had a spot in the B Class of the Waxhaw Scottish Highland Games.

That was the good news. The bad news was that the contest was on October 27th. Seven weeks may seem like plenty of time, but my excitement quickly turned to panic. I have no track background, and I had none of the Heavy Athletics equipment at my disposal. I was in trouble.

I took inventory of what I *did* have, and knew that I would have to make do. First, I organized my training, which due to my rotating schedule at work would have to be flexible. I decided that lifting twice a week would be manageable. Throwing technique would be my biggest problem, and I opted for three sessions per week.

In the gym, I kept it simple. Here is a sample:

Swiss Ball Sit-Ups – 3 sets of 8
Hyperextensions – 2 sets of 15
Power Snatches – Singles up to a heavy weight
Incline Bench – 5 sets of 5
Front Squat – 3 sets of 8
Lifter's Choice (Dumbbell row or side bend e.g.) – 3 sets

The whole routine would take about an hour. It would be preceded by 10 minutes of loosening and limbering movements I picked up from Pavel's *Super Joints*. If my spine, shoulders, knees and hips were feeling good, I would do more sets and go heavier. More often than not however, it was a matter of using what weight I could without hurting myself again. Afterwards, it was an icepack and a phone call to my girlfriend, reassuring her that I had made it through another workout without injury.



Doing gym work was all well and good, but I still needed to learn how to throw. That meant improvising some implements. The stone was easy. I found a nice, roundish rock at a construction site in my neighborhood that was about the correct weight. For the hammer, I used a Powerball with a length of rope looped through the handle. My 35 and 53-pound kettlebells would soon learn to fly as stand-ins for the weight-for-distance. There were no cabers convenient, and I had no clue what I was going to do about a sheaf.

My throwing routines had no set structure, but here is a sample:

Warm-up

Stone puts – 3 to 5 standing, 10 to 15 using glide

Weight for distance turns (no release) w/ kettlebell – 10 to 20

Hammer winds with Powerball – 5 sets of 10 in each direction: 2 with the ball only, 3 with rope attached.

Jumps/Bounds – Up short hill or over trashcan

Sprints or Sled Drags

I am sure that my throwing form would have caused our editor to crack up laughing. Any resemblance to real athletes, living or dead, was purely coincidental. But I was conscious of how bad I was, and it drove me to keep going. The thought of being embarrassed in front of a whole crowd at the Games is a great motivator. One Saturday morning, as I was putting in a session before going to work, I thought about how easy it would have been just to blow it off. It was right then that the value of ‘showing up’ made sense to me.

I was now training, which was great. But something was still missing. I knew I needed to get my hands on the implements before the contest. Luckily, the athletics director of the Waxhaw Games, Donna Nichols (who deserves special thanks for her efforts) pointed me in the right direction. I found my way to the SHAG and SSAAA boards, and came across a post inviting North Carolina heavies for a training session. Looking back, I cannot imagine how much worse off I would have been had I not responded. So, on a fine September day, I drove the 90 minutes to the horse country of Mocksville, NC.

It was there that I met a very large and generous man named Chuck Herrin. While we waited for the rest of our group, Chuck tried to show me how to use a hay fork to toss a sheaf. I picked up the fork and the end fell off. I took this as a bad omen. As soon as the other dude arrived (Steve Bruton, an A Class competitor and very nice guy), we headed up to the north forty, where all the gear was already set up. We started with the stones, and Steve taught me a new glide technique that made the whole trip worthwhile. Afterwards, we start throwing the 56. Or, more accurately, they throw the weight, I get thrown *by* the weight. After a half-dozen attempts, I manage to stay in the box, but my right arm is dead. Since the field is overgrown with weeds and briars, shagging the weight has caused my legs to get chewed up. I look like I picked a fight with a raccoon.

The 28 is easier to handle, and when Chuck asks if I want to tape up my fingers, I decline. After four throws with the 28, I tear a chunk of skin off my

ring finger. I reconsider the tape.

It was hammer time next. I learn the magic of tacky, but nearly lose more skin off my hands. The hammer is a nifty contraption made of three 5-pound plates on a PVC shaft. Works great for one toss. On the second go, the PVC snaps. Game over.

I managed to pick up some pointers on the sheaf, and find that I have a knack for the weight-over-bar (56 for height). At this point the guys suggest we have some fun and use the 28 to clear the 12' standards - for distance. Obviously, I offer little competition, and on my third attempt, I sling the weight into the uprights and take down the whole apparatus. Fortunately, it is easily repaired.

Nothing left but the caber! This was actually



the real reason I made the trip. For all

my substitute toys, there's nothing that simulates a 17-foot tree except a 17-foot tree. The guys take their turns and I absorb their teachings. I then fail to pick up the caber 10 times in a row. Nothing prepares you for how awkward this is. If you fail to 'pick' the caber, it falls. There is no stopping it. The large man tells me to get away from the falling log. I promptly ignore this wisdom. Instinct causes me to push it way. I nearly lose an arm. Later, the caber falls backward over my right shoulder, leaving a mark through my shirt that looks like I was attacked with a belt sander. I manage to get my revenge by making a legit turn of the caber. I had not had that sense of accomplishment in a long time.

Later that afternoon, we pack up the toys and go home. I'm beaten, battered and bleeding, but ready to take on the world. I quickly order a 3-tine hay fork and make a homemade sheaf. It is an ugly affair: half-bricks, pine needles and landscaping burlap. It seems to do the job, however, and my training continues as I wait for Judgment Day.

Thank you for following me this far, and remember to tune in for Part II, when all my training gets put to the test.

That's it. We are doubling the subscription price. Seriously, this is getting far too good for the likes of our readership...

Published by Daniel John

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