

When should I expect improvement?

By Leo Isaac

Making improvement is, of course, an important factor that motivates us to train, and train harder. Naturally people want to see their lifts increasing and a chance to register new personal bests on the platform. Ultimately, the only measure of improvement that will satisfy is extra kilos lifted.

Basically, improvement isn't guaranteed just because you train on a regular basis! Before you get upset at this statement, let's consider a more appropriate statement:

You *will* improve when conditions are right for you to improve.

So, let's look at what conditions are needed:

1. You are injury free. No-one goes forward when they are carrying an injury.
2. Your body is not in a state of overtraining (not going heavy all the time)
3. You have been consistently working on your weaknesses, technique and/or strength.
4. You are training on a consistent basis (not missing sessions)
5. Your health and nutrition status is favourable
6. The training process that you follow is capable of causing improvement
7. You are sufficiently motivated
8. You have confidence when the time comes to test your ability
9. You are managing the general stresses of life outside of training

What often confuses the athlete who is training hard is that progress does not come at regular intervals and in proportionately similar amounts. In other words, progress will not be "linear". Instead, progress will appear in the form of "steps", and there will be an annoying variability in the amount and timing of improvement. After the rapid progress that beginners tend to experience in the first 3 months, performance improvement will occur as a result of well-organised and disciplined training over a sufficient period of time during which the above conditions have been met. Athletes, therefore, should not expect noticeable improvement over short periods of time nor should they expect to gain new personal bests each competition they enter.

Athletes, in Weightlifting at least, tend to place great value in following a written training program as a means to assuring that training will be well-organised and disciplined. The logic is that if a training program is written well it will provide a systematised approach that will cause the athlete to improve. However, although following a systematic training program is a good thing to do, it does not meet all the above conditions. For example, the good work of following a training program can be easily undone by poor health and nutrition, or the athlete fails to manage injuries appropriately, or is experiencing significant stress from work, family or study. Furthermore, a training program really needs to be focused on the individual needs of the athlete. If the program does not cause the athlete to work on their weaknesses then it is likely that improvement will not occur.

Lastly, creating the conditions for improvement to occur is very much the athlete's responsibility. The coach should provide guidance on training parameters and help the athlete to discover the truth about the training process.