

Continuous Improvement in Weightlifting Training Methodology

By Leo Isaac

The task for the athlete and the coach is to work together to continually improve the training process of the athlete over many years. It is highly probable that when this continuous improvement process comes to a halt, the athlete will no longer improve.

From day 1 in the training process, the athlete learns *how to train* to develop good technique and athletic ability so as to improve results. Initially the learning is fast but as the months and years go by, the rate of learning slows as a result of fewer opportunities to learn something new, or perhaps incorrect assumptions that all the knowledge needed has been learned. To make further improvement then, the athlete and coach must work harder to find solutions to the perfection of the training problem.

Essential in any quest to improve is the asking of questions on a regularly basis. The athlete should ask questions such as “how can I improve my technique further?”, “what more can I put into my training?” and “is my training as effective as it can be?”. The coach should ask questions such as “how can I facilitate the athlete’s learning better?”, “what can I do to monitor the athlete’s training input?” and “is my coaching as effective as it can be?”. The athlete and the coach must address these questions together and seek to avoid the assumption that everything is as good as it can be. If the coach is no longer in a quest to improve their own performance then how can they expect their athlete to do so?

It is common for athletes in Weightlifting to think that the limit of their lifting ability is governed by genetic inheritance. This is an example of what psychologists call a ‘Fixed Mindset’, a belief that one’s potential is pre-determined by circumstances beyond the athlete’s control. In reality, a far more important factor than genetics is whether the athlete can develop a better training process. Ultimately, sport at the highest level is so competitive that only those that strive to continually improve their training process will emerge as winners. This willingness to see one’s performance potential as bound to consistent hard work, learning and ingenuity is referred to as a “Growth Mindset”.

The following are among the many possible ways that the training process of the athlete can be improved:

1. The athlete can develop an understanding that the form of the Weightlifter rises and falls as a consequence of the training process i.e. stress – recovery – adaptation. Building in significant intensity fluctuation into the training program is extremely important i.e. the athlete must have really heavy days, really light days, and days in between.
2. The athlete should develop an understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, and learn the value of working conscientiously, creatively and consistently on improving their weaknesses. The athlete is only as good as their weaknesses will permit.
3. The athlete should closely observe the effort of other athletes in the training environment and begin to discern the factors that lead to more successful training outcomes. In reality, the training habits that lead to success are obvious if one looks.
4. The athlete must appreciate that the purpose of training is to improve their result in the competition arena. This requires that the athlete focuses on perfecting their technical execution in training so that in the toughest pressure of competition the athlete has full confidence in their own ability and is more likely to succeed than to fail.

5. The athlete must learn to maximise the value of their training time. Ultimately, poor usage of time in training, hands the advantage to the athlete's competitors.
6. The athlete must learn to self-monitor and self-regulate their own training performance, and strive to understand the positive and negative effects of the training that they undertake. By engaging in such self-monitoring, the athlete will be better able to understand how training can be improved to achieve optimal effect. The keeping of a training diary is helpful in this regard.
7. The athlete must organise their daily regimen so as to provide the greatest advantage to their training effort. Included in this daily regimen is nutrition, sleep, work, recreational activities, shopping, household chores, and family responsibilities. In addition, work on flexibility, planning of training, mental rehearsal, and reflection on training performance are important constituents in the daily regimen. Furthermore, the athlete will also need to find time for activities associated with maximising wellness such as trips to physiotherapy.
8. For continuous improvement to occur, the athlete must love the process of learning and discovery of new knowledge. Optimal learning occurs when the athlete is fully engaged in the learning process. The mere completion of prescribed training is not sufficient to create full engagement in this learning process. The athlete must frequently reflect on their own training and ask the question 'how can I improve my training process?' Reflection (on one's own experience) is believed to be majorly important in the learning process, however living in the 21st century provides constant distraction so that the time available for such reflection is greatly diminished.

The role of the coach in assisting the athlete to develop a process of continuous improvement is critical and largely this is the purpose of this article. The coach and athlete must avoid the idea that it is the written training program itself, the schedule of exercises, reps, sets and intensity that causes success. Instead the coach must facilitate the athlete's learning of the process of training, and more especially how to continually improve their own process. Sometimes the athlete is want to experiment with their own ideas and this is not always a bad thing. The coach can assist the athlete to learn as much from their failures, as from their successes. However the coach does play a supremely important role in shaping the athlete's continual improvement process by providing a caring and supportive environment, helping athletes to reflect on their own experiences, and fostering a belief that further improvement is possible if more learning can be achieved.