

# Overcoming Plateaus

Everyone experiences plateaus, a leveling off or even a dropping off in performance. Weight training is no exception. People can get frustrated, depressed and ready to quit because of this phenomenon. It is very important to realize this happens to everyone and even more important, to know there are ways to prolong one's upward movement and to *Overcome Plateaus*.

I would like to give a ridiculous example to make a point. A coach says, "Men, we are going to improve our 40-yard dash. We are going to sprint twenty 40-yard dashes every day and I guarantee you will become faster." All the athletes are psyched and do it. Afterwards athletes say, "I'm really tired, this is going to be good for us. Thanks coach." No problem so far, right? Well, that would happen if this exact workout were to be done 5 days a week for 8 weeks? Obviously, by the 8th week the kids would hate it and the 40-yard dash times probably would even get worse. They will have gone through Hans Selye's Stress Syndrome. For some it might take 3 days, while for others weeks. However, everyone will go through it.

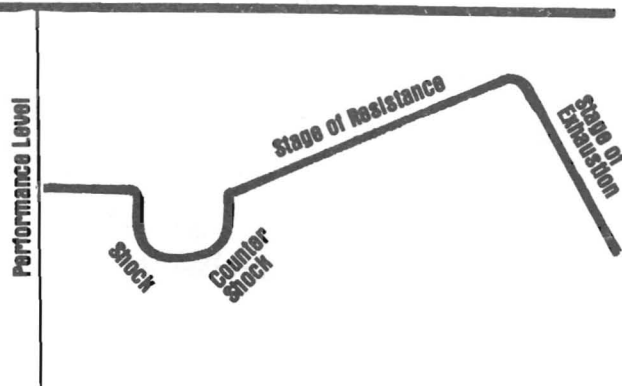
Hans Selye developed his Stress Syndrome in 1928 as an explanation of why some people get sick while others remain healthy when being exposed to the same viruses and bacteria. He found when a person is subjected to any kind of stress, he will go through all or part of this syndrome. I have adapted his theory to athletics. It makes sense and it works.

I'd like to explain Selye's Stress Theory by recalling a swimming experience most everyone has had. A person comes outside all ready to jump in a non-heated pool. His friends say, "Come on in, the waters fine once you get used to it." So he jumps in. Now he is in *Shock* and he wants to choke his friends, but then he does start to get used to it. That's *Counter Shock*. Soon he is jumping in and out and having a great time. This is the *Stage of Resistance*. Eventually, in a matter of hours, depending on the temperature of the water, he will start to freeze and even die if he stays in and this is called the *Stage of Exhaustion*. This final stage usually happens very quickly. In two-a-days, for example, the Stage of Resistance is reached for most by the fifth or sixth day. The problem is how to prolong the Stage of Resistance throughout the entire season and not enter into the Stage of Exhaustion.

## Prolonging Resistance

Here are some guidelines to prolong the Stage of Resistance in weight training. Many may be applied to other sports.

1. Vary the workouts: Monday should be different than Friday.
2. Use charts for motivation where everyone feels successful.
3. Do not go for a maximum attempt every workout. (No more than once a month.)



## Hans Selye' Stress Syndrome

4. Periodically set dates for competitions against another individual, school or for a new maximum.
5. After competition or a maximum attempt back off the intensity and work on 5-rep workouts for one to two weeks.
6. Only squat, deadlift, bench or clean twice a week.
7. Train in cycles. Example of a cycle: Week I - heavy, Week II - lighter, Week III - heavier than Week I, Week IV - new maximum.
8. Another cycle example: Week I: 3-5 reps; Week II: 2-4 reps; Week III: 5-3 reps; Week IV: 2-3 reps; Week V: new max.
9. Another cycle example: Week I: 80-90% of max; Week II: 85-95%; Week III: 82.5-92.5%; Week IV: 87.5-97.5%; Week V: new max.
10. Use motivational films, stories and people periodically.
11. Use Awards (shirts, certificates, etc.)
12. Vary time, place, days, partners, sequence, intensity and/or diet.
13. Use food supplements. Increase diet, sleep and/or rest.
14. When coming back off a lay-off, forget all past achievements; start all new records.
15. Use one or more of the above guidelines at least once a month. Be smart and sensitive to potential problems.

It should be noted that having a regular routine is in itself an important way to prolong the stage of resistance. That's one reason overcoming plateaus is complicated.

However, when entering into a plateau or stage of exhaustion, the tendency is to work harder and increase the intensity of the workout. This usually makes things worse. More rest, not more work, is most likely needed. Overcoming plateaus and combating stress is as much an art as it is a science. A coach should be sensitive in this area and if great expertise is developed in prolonging the stage of resistance, the coach will probably prolong his coaching tenure.