

EATING RIGHT

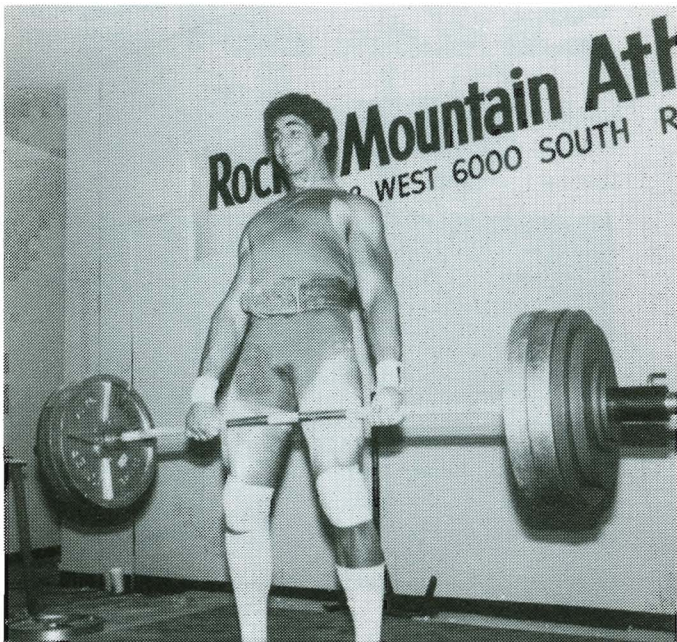
Does it Really Make a Difference?

by Rick Anderson

Part 1 of a Series



Achieving your playing and lifting potential require attention to proper nutrition.



Most coaches and athletes, if asked, would tell you that proper nutrition is important. They would tell you it is important both for good general health and in achieving a higher level of performance in athletics. However Dr. Shepard and I continue to be amazed at how poorly many young athletes actually do eat.

We ask athletes from all over the country about their diets. We ask very specifically about what they do eat for breakfast, lunch, dinner and even snacks. Sadly enough the typical diet for young Americans is a daily dose of pop, pastries, candy and numerous other junk food items. We have also noticed that very few coaches have any clear cut plan to help motivate and encourage their athletes to improve their diets.

Let's see if the above information, put in equation form adds up correctly. Athletes *say* nutrition is important and coaches *say* nutrition is important=poor eating habits. Oops! Something is seriously wrong with the above equation. I think the correct answer comes when we replace the word "say" with the word "believe" and then the desired answer will come out, which is "good eating habits."

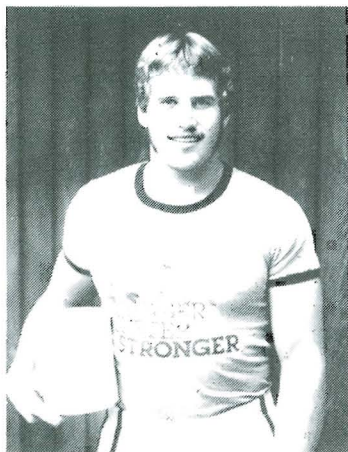
I don't think many young athletes or coaches *really* believe proper nutrition is that important. Truthfully I can see why it *is* hard to be convinced that spending much time planning meals is worth it. After all, if you ask even the worst junk food junkie how he feels, he'll probably tell you that he feels "just fine" or even "I feel great." In addition, as young people begin training programs, especially strength training they make good, if not outstanding initial progress.

If the athlete feels OK, and he is making good progress, then why bother paying much attention to eating habits. The athlete and the coach see no solid observable evidence that proper nutrition is of much value in aiding general health, and improved performance. The result, of course, a careless hit or miss attitude surrounding diet.

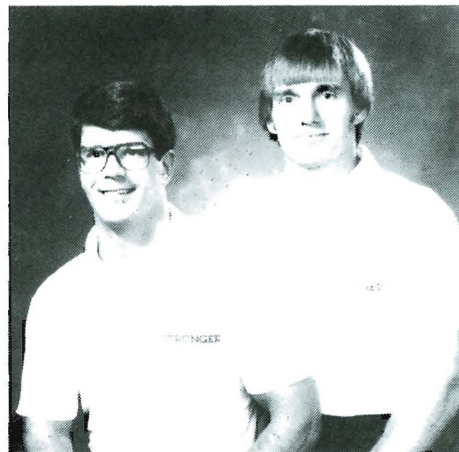
Nutrition related to the athlete needs some simple explanation. Coaches and athletes can then make choices based on facts rather than subjective observation. A thumb-nail rule might read like this: "The *greater* the level of performance desired, the *greater* the need for a complete and balanced diet." Put even more simply, "the better you want to be, the better you've got to eat."

As the body reaches higher levels of conditioning the demands placed on it naturally also increase. Intense training depletes the bodies reserves of energy. Heavy power weight training also actually creates tiny muscular tears. It is in the rest periods between workouts

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that the body rebuilds and repairs itself. It is in this rebuilding period that the body actually overcompensates, and a higher level of conditioning is achieved. If the body is *not* rested properly or is short hanged of proper nutrients the rebuilding process does not fully occur. The stronger and better conditioned the athlete, the more intense and demanding the workouts, and the *more* important nutrition becomes so recovery will take place.

To illustrate the above concepts lets follow the progress of a young athlete on the Bench Press. Let's say our athletes name is John. John is a 16 year old football player. John is 5'10", weighs 160 lbs. and his maximum bench press when he begins training is 130 lbs. John's goal is to become Bigger, Faster and Stronger. Within one year if John trains consistently he probably would be able to get his max on the bench up to 200 lbs. and increase his body weight to 170 lbs. He could do this without much attention to his diet. Unfortunately this reinforces his belief that the way he is eating is OK, no matter how poor it is. If John stays "fired-up" and works hard he might get his bench press up to 250 lbs. and even increase his body weight up to 180 lbs. in another years time. Again this is done without paying much attention to nutrition. However if John really wants to become great, and he wants to bench press 300, 350 or even 400 lbs. then things must change in his diet. At these heavier poundages John's workouts become progressively more intense and depleting to his body. The rebuilding process becomes more and more difficult and if his body is not given the proper nutrients (used as building blocks) John's progress will slow to a snails pace and stop, far sooner than it needs to. For John to reach a level of performance closer to his true potential he will have to become as disciplined about his eating as he is about his lifting.

The coach and athlete need to realize that establishing sound nutritional habits as soon as possible is critical if maximum results are to be achieved. The next articles on nutrition will be "What is Eating Right?" and "The Nutritional Plan," I hope this series of articles will aid coaches in helping athletes train and live toward their greatest potential.