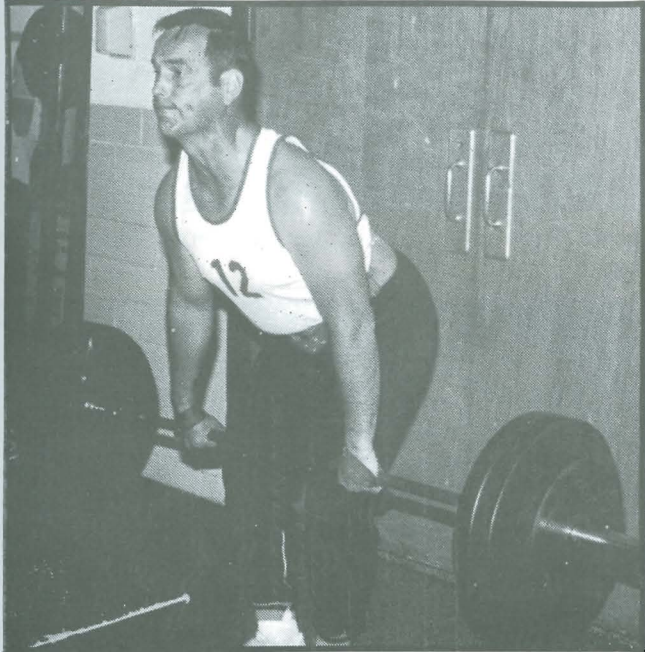


A PERSPECTIVE ON WEIGHT TRAINING FOR ATHLETES

By
Arnold Pope

Editor's Note: Arnold Pope is 53 years old and still competes in the Scottish Games Athletic Events. He tosses the Caber and the 56 lb. Weight Throw. Arnold Pope has been on the Weight Training scene for 37 years. Here is his perspective:



Arnold Pope has won 27 State Olympic Lifting Championships and 6 Southern Championships

One advantage of having been around in life for awhile is that after a bit you hopefully begin to see things in perspective rather than being blinded by the latest fad or craze to come along. For example, having been directly involved in weight lifting since 1948, I have seen a number of training philosophies and systems burst upon the scene amid a great fanfare of publicity blaring that here at last is THE answer, THE secret formula, and THE one and only way. I have now been around long enough to have also seen most of these magical panaceas quietly fade away.

For example, when I first started lifting weights in 1948 to gain strength and weight for high school football, the accepted wisdom regarding weight training for athletes was DON'T! Barbells were supposed to make you "musclebound," tight, and slow. They created "artificial" muscle as opposed to "natural" muscle (as if there were really two different kinds). Coaches dourly warned that they would cause everything from falling hair to flat feet, and most prohibited their athletes touching these dangerous objects.

The only trouble was that an increasing number of athletes — especially shot putters and football players — were too naive to realize how calamitous lifting weights was, and began on their own to develop into a bigger and stronger breed of athlete. Training routines were often hit or miss, and athletes trained on their own individual initia-



Arnold competes in the 56 pound weight throw and is now throwing farther than ever!

tive rather than as a team, but coaches gradually came to realize that just maybe some weight training might give their athletes a competitive edge. But for a long time many would not allow football backs and ends to lift, because of persistent worries about tightness and loss of speed. Others grudgingly said weight training might be appropriate for sports requiring strength (like shot putting), but not for "speed and skill" sports like basketball.

Thus, many of the first attempts to lay out training programs were normally made by coaches who were unfamiliar with weight training theory and experience, and continued to reflect fears and reservations. The general philosophy of most of these early programs was to "train not strain" and usually featured pumping light weights 12-15 reps as fast as possible in order to prevent that dreaded loss of speed. Some results were obtained, since any resistance exercise is better than none, but nobody got really strong off such a system. Strangely enough, a variation of the same approach is being currently touted by a few strength coaches who ought to know better. Reps are still up around 12, but the latest wisdom says to move the weight as SLOWLY as possible. The only problem is that no one's getting very strong off this approach either!

A little later a highly touted "scientific" experiment came along that promised astounding results from 15 minutes worth of work — Isometrics (pulling against an immovable

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bar) or Isometric With Weights (pulling an extra heavy bar off power rack pins and holding for 6 seconds). To coaches wondering how to find enough practice time in which to get everything done, this seemed like a godsend. But strangely enough, no one seemed to get the amazing gains that had come to the 2 outstanding proponents of this approach. The mystery was later cleared up when it became known their gains had come not so much from their being pioneers of a special exercise routine, but from being pioneers in the use of steroid drugs in this country.

Steroids were an approach where the term "magical pill" could be used in a literal sense. No need to sweat and strain, just pop your pills twice a day! But then it became apparent that even steroids only seemed to produce results when used in conjunction with a heavy weight program, so the search for an easy way had hit another dead end. Abusers of the pill found even worse news in the form of tumors and liver trouble. Medical and ethical problems should flatly rule out this avenue to bigger and stronger athletes.

The marvelous muscle magazines proliferated, offering all kinds of "latest super-secret workouts" and dazzling uninformed minds with impressive terms like "flushing, blitzing, super sets, etc, etc, etc." Besides their workouts being too long and exhausting, their total approach was directed toward developing muscles that looked good, with little or no concern as to how they could perform. This approach has done little in athletics beyond showing most coaches what they DON'T want their athletes to look like.

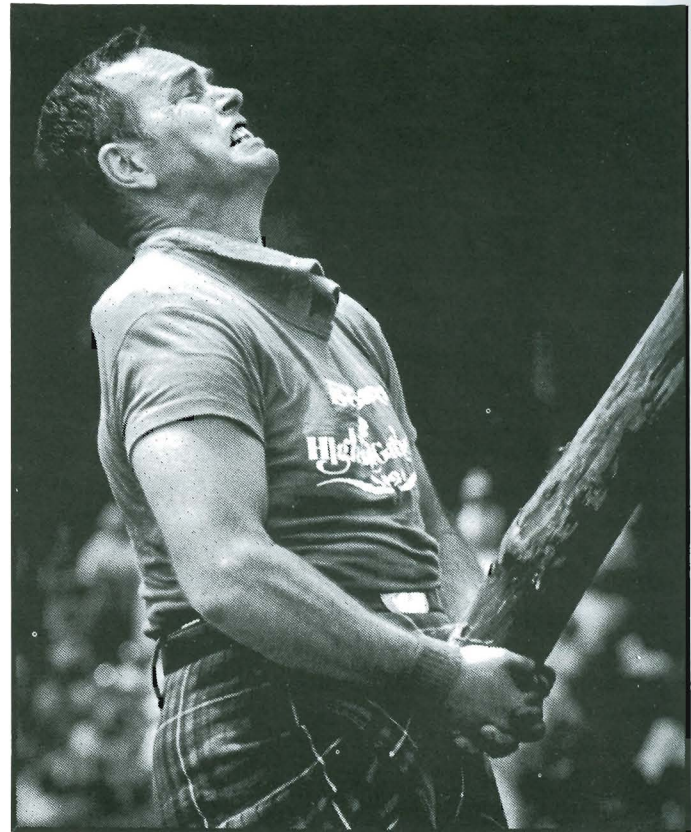
Next the "Magic Machines" came marching down the turnpike. Sporting computer design and claiming to eliminate the "dead spots" found in barbell resistance, here at last was truly the wave of the future! They can produce some results (as I said earlier, any resistance work is better than none), but so far have produced no really first-class athletes. Besides, how many high schools can afford to buy a machine for each individual muscle to the tune of a couple of thousand per machine?

Computerized workout schedules are one of the latest kicks (anything today having to do with computers is supposed to make everyone bow down at least 3 times). I suppose it must be a thrill — assuming you have the bucks to afford it — to clutch in your hot little hand a printout that charts every lift you are to make on your way to becoming a world champion. But somewhere along the line, the realization will set in that the human body is NOT a machine that can be predictably programmed — some workouts you GOT IT — other days you may have trouble lifting your voice. Any workout system HAS to have some method of on-the-spot flexibility built into it.

To make a long story (37 years worth) short, it all comes down to what I said in the beginning — you have to keep some kind of sane perspective and not blindly fling yourself into the arms of each latest beguiling fad. This is NOT to say that at least some of the approaches that have come along in recent years do not have something of value in them. Most things in life usually contain at least a grain of truth, else people would not become enthusiastic over



Arnold Pope getting ready for the Caber Toss which is a 17 foot log.



Arnold was first American to win a Caber Toss Event in Scotland!

them. Maybe true maturity and perspective does NOT consist of automatically rejecting anything novel, but in seeking to discover what aspect of something may have some value while at the same time not unthinkingly swallowing the whole package.

To try and end on a positive note, I would like to offer some tests or guidelines by which coaches can chart their way toward a more ideal weight program for their players:

1. The chief value and purpose of weight training is the development of STRENGTH. Schedules should be set

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storming stage needs to happen; but if a coach allows it to become too intense, or lets it go on too long, it will be destructive.

A coach would do well to prepare for this stage. The storming stage is very real. Its positive effects need to be encouraged and its negative effects discouraged if a team is to perform optimally. Coaches often make the mistake of continually forcing team members to compete against each other during this stage (fight for a position), when cooperation is necessary.

NORMING. After storms, a calm usually occurs. So it is with teams. If they have worked effectively through the storming stage, the team naturally eases into the norming phase.

The norming stage is a time when resistance is over and group feelings and cohesiveness develop, new standards evolve, and new roles are adopted.

The team begins working together as a cohesive unit with mutual support, cooperation and integration. During the norming stage, an almost family-like structure begins to evolve. Remember the Pittsburgh Pirates a few years ago — winning the World Series to the tune of “We Are Family”? This feeling of “groupness” leads to finding ways to achieve goals. Conflicts within the team tend to stabilize and team goals become cooperative. Coaches need to support these emerging patterns of norming and cohesion.

PERFORMING: Little needs to be said about the performing stage. We have all seen teams which have reached it: when athletics becomes art, performance becomes aesthetics and competition becomes creativity. It is the Los Angeles Lakers fast break, the Edmonton Oilers scoring machine, or the passing game of the San Diego Chargers. The performance stage is achieved when structure is internalized by team members and each individual feels a responsibility to the team, its tasks, and its goals.

The performance stage carries no guarantee of self-maintenance. Crisis will continue to arise and the performing team may find itself suddenly back in the storming stage.

A perceptive coach will slowly work his team through the various stages of group development and then maintain the performing phase. A team may not always go undefeated, or may not even have a winning season; but if it has experienced the forming, storming, and norming stages in a healthy fashion, it will perform to the best of its ability. ☺

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up with this in mind, and oriented toward that end. This automatically rules out the 12 rep system a few coaches are currently advocating — you simply cannot get really strong off such a schedule. While weights can be used for conditioning, aerobics, etc., their chief contribution lies in developing bigger, stronger, and faster athletes. Do not expect

optimum results if the training program is not oriented toward the nurture of strength.

2. Usable athletic strength springs from the legs, hips, and back — thus the majority of training effort should be centered there. Exercises that affect this area should come first in a workout schedule while the lifter is freshest and strongest. After this priority need has been met, less vital areas can be trained.

3. A schedule should concentrate on exercises that work a related group of muscles at one time rather than isolating on a single muscle. This not only saves an awful lot of time and energy (for instance, compare a BFS workout with the long list of exercises required for a routine that utilizes a couple of exercises for each separate muscle), but also produces stronger and better coordinated muscles because of a natural grouping working together.

4. A workout routine should incorporate some type of flexibility in its system rather than stubbornly hammering away at one fixed approach. For example, there are any number of good set and rep systems (5x5, 3x10, 5-4-3-2-1, etc.) but to pick one and continue solely with it will eventually result in mental staleness and a progress plateau. I have been recently following in my own workouts the BFS technique of 3x3 one week, 5x5 the second week, 5-4-3-2-1 the third week, and a “wild card” workout the fourth week. After 37 years of dedicated training, any approach that has me feeling fresh and eagerly awaiting each workout has to have something going for it!

5. True athletic strength cannot be derived from weight training alone. The areas of flexibility, speed, reflex training, and endurance also have to be continually worked on in order to be able to most efficiently utilize his strength. Most people would regard the sport in which I competed for 30 years — Olympic Lifting — as a pure strength sport. But even here a good amount of time had to be devoted to developing flexibility and reflex speed. This type of multi-faceted approach is one thing that really impresses me about the BFS system.

6. Do NOT be misled into following the fabulous workouts and flashy titles publicized in some of the more sensational type muscle magazines. In most cases, they tend to produce “pretty” muscles that may not be nearly as strong as they look. Moreover, anyone going to school or working would no have time to follow these routines anyway. Concentrate on the development of strength and let muscle size or shape come as a consequence.

I suppose most men by natural inclination seek to find an easier way or some “magical” solution toward a desired goal. Consequently, I have seen many systems and solutions appear on the scene promising such, only to give way in turn to some newer system. Maybe we all occasionally need to be reminded of the necessity of that inescapable ingredient John Houseman talks about in his TV commercials: “the old-fashioned way — HARD WORK!” ☺