Consistent Messages

The Downfall of Here-and-There Programming to Advanced Lifters

By Chris White

The tenants of general fitness are based on one's ability to express all bio-motor abilities with equal competency at an above-average level. In other words, an individual is regarded as "fit" if he/she possesses equal parts power, strength, endurance, balance, coordination, flexibility, speed, agility, and accuracy. General fitness does not however guarantee success at the extremes of strength, power, or endurance respectively. Rather, success in pure strength, pure power or ultra-endurance sports/activities necessitates a bias in fitness toward the bio-motor capacities that characterize those activities, even if it means a compromise in other areas of fitness.

For example, the Iron man should never train to possess the same level of speed and/or power of a 100m sprinter, as high levels of speed and power are not as essential to success as an Iron man, just like the 100m sprinter should never train to possess the endurance capabilities of an Iron man, as high levels of endurance or ultra-endurance do not make for successful 100m sprinters.

It is important in the context of this article to make a distinction between beginner and advanced level athletes. For beginners a training program focusing on general fitness characteristics is most appropriate and will produce significant and rapid gains in all areas of fitness even with relatively little volume. For instance, gains in maximal strength (defined as one's ability to produce maximal force) for the beginner can be realized with as little as one training session per week. The same is true for power and endurance.

However, if a high level of strength is the essential component of a sport (i.e. Shot-putter, American Football lineman, or for anyone desiring a high level of maximal strength) one training session per week focusing on strength will, over time, be insufficient once baseline levels of strength have been achieved. The same is true for any other bio-motor ability. Once basic fitness has been achieved a more focused approach to the development of a specific bio-motor capacity must be established. Here we use training phases.

Training phases are 4-6 week cycles designed to focus 65-80% of all training on the development of a specific bio-motor ability, namely endurance, power-endurance, strength or pure power. These cycles are based on the idea that the body responds best when it is sent consistent

messages. If the goal of a particular training cycle were the improvement of maximal strength, 65-80% of all training sessions in a 4-6 week period would be maximal strength sessions. That is, 80% of all training would be characterized by high intensity (85%-100% 1RM loads) functional lifts executed at low repetition ranges and high sets, divided by long rest periods.

The superiority of these cycles compared to here-and-there programming of a specific bio-motor ability cannot be overstated, as even the most advanced athletes can see 10-15% improvements in performance during 4-6 weeks of focused effort. And while 4-6 week cycles of focused training can and will compromise other areas of fitness, particularly those that are antagonistic like strength and endurance or power and endurance, an effort should be make in the other 20-35% of training efforts in that phase to maintain these areas of the fitness continuum.

What is also important to remember is that all training is complimentary. That is, even though focused efforts are being applied toward the development of a very specific bio-motor ability doesn't mean that other areas of fitness won't benefit, even is that benefit is indirect. For instance, when one's ability to produce maximal force improves so too does their ability to move lower percentages of that load for more repetitions, therefore constituting an improvement in endurance via and an improvement in maximal strength.

In conclusion, if you are experiencing a plateau in any one area of your fitness I suggest you experiment with a 4-6 cycle of focused efforts toward the area you wish to improve. A sample week of training has been provided below to illustrate a strength cycle for an advanced shot-putter.

Training Cycle: Strength
Sport: Shot put
Season: Late Off-Season

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THRUSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT	SUN
Strength: Deadlift, Front Squat	Strength: Presses	Short Power Endurance: Progression	Rest Day	Strength: OHS, Front/Back Squat	Power: Jerks	Active Recovery: Long, slow distance

In the above weekly plan three out of five training days are dedicated to the development of maximal strength with an emphasis on the slow, grinding lifts characteristic of this phase. These sessions constitute roughly 60% of the training effort for the week, and if continued for the duration of a 4-6 week cycle would be very effective for the development of maximal strength above all other bio-motor abilities.

References

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