

The Lure of Intensity

By Chris White

I am constantly amazed at the level of inadequacy I see from so-called fitness ‘experts’ when it comes to training their clients / athletes. Too often we are drawn to push the envelope with our clients, adding more weight, more sets, less rest, etc. And as the intensity of our programs increase, so too should the level of awareness and technical prowess of our clients. Unfortunately, the lure of higher intensity forms of training has blinded us to the necessity of the basics.

The basics are hardly basic though. In fact, higher forms of education are necessary to understanding the basics. Basic understanding does not require basic education. We are better able to communicate and comprehend the most basic of concepts only when we have fully grasped the most complex versions of the same ideas.

Unfortunately, weekend seminars and mismanaged certifications are pumping out new ‘trainers’ every day, creating a virtual cesspool of impostures vulnerable to the lure of training trends and the latest you tube craze, incapable of answering the essential questions, “how, what, when, where, and why?”

Now anyone with a few bucks and an Internet connection can open a gym and call himself or herself an expert. As a result, the foundational principles of conditioning are lost. This is why beginners with little to no training experience are doing high rep power cleans and snatches for time, yet don’t even possess the technical precision to execute a dead lift, front squat, or overhead squat at the slowest of speeds.

Need I remind you that high-level Olympic lifters spend the first six to twelve months using only the bar! It is this dedication to technique, timing, flexibility, stability, and body awareness that sets the stage for record performances.

The lure of intensity is whimsical, for it excites, but ultimately does more harm than good.

All clients should be cleared for movement competency. Their stress levels should be evaluated. And a full medical history should be taken. To prescribe a high intensity-training program to someone with multiple orthopedic injuries, who cannot squat, dead lift, lunge, etc. due to flexibility limitations or instabilities in the spine and/or lower extremity, and who consistently gets to bed after midnight with little to no water throughout the

day is criminal and unjust. Yet, it is done every day in the name of improved health. The sooner we begin to see exercise as the catabolic (tissue destructive) activity that it truly is, a combined stress to the nervous system, hormonal system, and soft tissue of the body, the sooner we can begin to see our 'high intensity' exercise programs for what they truly are: *Too much, too soon!*

On the next page is Go Primal Fitness' Performance Pyramid. It is an illustration of our approach with all clients and can be learned in much greater detail in our Level II certification program, which by the way is nine intensive days long. Students apply, are accepted, and must pass rigorous testing to be 'certified'. This is the only way we can ensure the material has been digested and assimilated at a baseline level. Fully integrating this work at a high level requires months if not years of application and trial and error efforts.

The Performance Pyramid paints a clear picture of what is expected before high intensity training is prescribed. The length of the base-conditioning phase (the bottom half of the pyramid) is variable, based on the client's training age, experience, and medical history. Generally speaking the bigger and wider the base the more potential the pyramid has to grow in height. A small, incomplete base limits the growth of pyramid, and ultimately the potential of the client. Trying to build a high pyramid on top of a narrow base is a recipe for joint pain, injury, overtraining, etc.

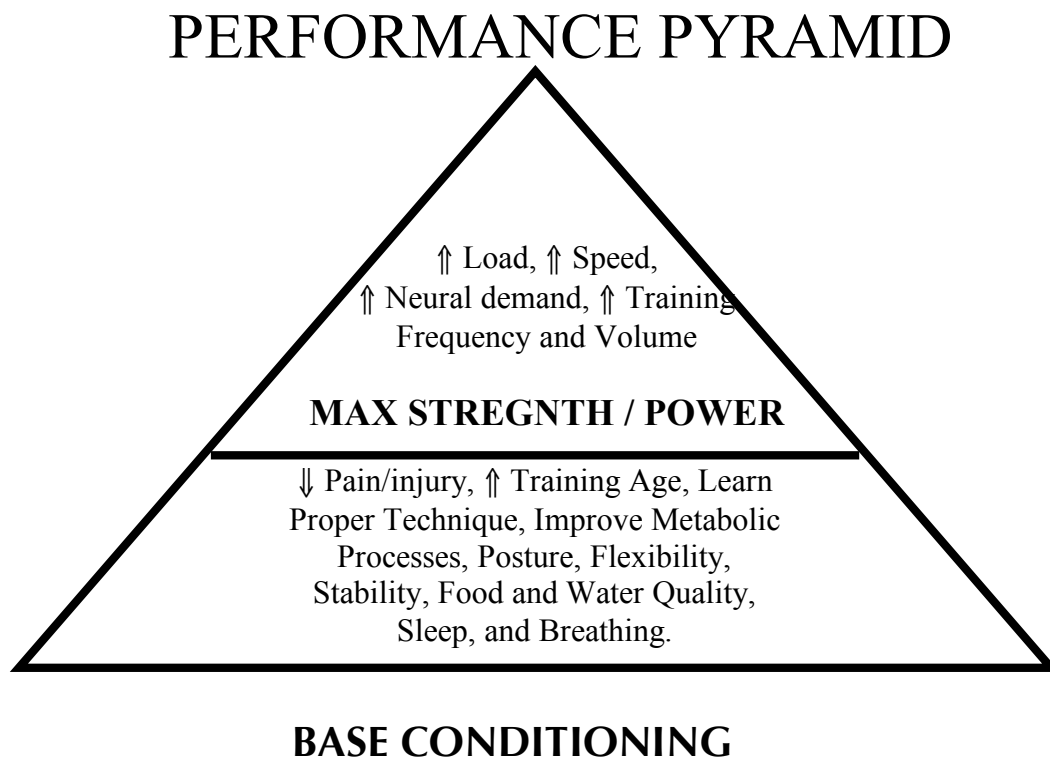
As the pyramid clearly shows the first year(s) of training are spend resolving injuries, perfecting technique, flexibility, and educating the client on nutrition and lifestyle strategies to support training. The word *exercise* literally means *to cut away*. If we're cutting away more than we have the challenge of getting results becomes obvious.

Once technique becomes automatic and stability and flexibility are co-existing at optimal levels, only then should higher loads (100% - 85% 1RM), faster speeds, and more training volume become part of the performance equation.

My guess is many of the so-called 'high intensity' gyms that exist today are producing the same results that many of the trendy, fad diets are. Yes, there are some people that experience long-term success. But, more often than not, there are far more who report less than optimal results. For so

many the reason is because their performance pyramid has been flipped upside down. They're learning to run before they walk.

My advice: find the gyms and trainers who are consistently producing results. Go there, speak to them, watch, ask questions, and think! If you're averse to thinking, get a desk job somewhere punching numbers. This profession is in desperate need, as it grows at a blistering pace, of highly qualified, passionate, fully committed coaches. If you can't afford to travel, buy books, pick up the phone, email, etc. Don't be your biggest enemy by making excuses why you can't, won't, or haven't. Life is too short.



Train Smart!