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Approaches to strength training vary

■ BY MATT BRZYCKI

Most strength and fitness professionals would agree that strength training decreases the risk of injury and increases performance potential. However, many would disagree over which approach is best for strength training. Understandably, the different approaches – and the abundant amount of conflicting information – often leave people quite confused.

Many individuals are quick to jump on the bandwagons of successful sports teams or programs – a practice that frequently adds to the confusion. Here's a classic example: Many readers who are sports fans will recall that at the conclusion of the 1997-98 college football season, the University of Nebraska and the University of Michigan were named NCAA co-champions. The two schools were unbeaten; Nebraska was ranked first in one of the two major polls and Michigan was ranked first in the other. This was prior to the Bowl Championship Series so the two schools were considered to be co-champions. Both schools had – and, for the most part, continue to have – a long history of success on the gridiron.

Let's suppose that it's 1998 and you're an athlete. You watch both teams play on television and are very impressed. Players for both schools are very big and very strong. And being an athlete, you naturally want to be as big and as strong as their players. So you send a letter to the strength coaches of both schools – Boyd Epley at Nebraska and Mike Gittleson at Michigan – requesting information on their strength-training programs. If you were to compare their strength-training programs, you'd be in for quite a surprise. Not only are their approaches vastly different, they offer contradictory information. One strength-training program suggests relatively fast repetition speeds, the other relatively slow speeds; one suggests mostly multiple sets of each exercise, the other mostly single sets; one recommends split routines, the other total-body workouts; one mainly uses free weights, the other mainly machines; one uses periodization, the other doesn't; one favors one-repetition maximum



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efforts, the other discourages them; one advocates plyometrics, the other opposes them. You get the picture. And by 1998, Nebraska and Michigan had pretty much used their respective approaches for about 25 years.

So despite having a long history of using vastly different approaches to strength training, athletes at Nebraska and Michigan managed to achieve remarkable levels of size and strength. So, how do you choose which strength-training program to follow if you're looking to get bigger and stronger?

SELECTION GUIDELINES

When choosing an approach, it's important to consider the scientific research. Interestingly, researchers have been unable to determine that one method of strength training is superior to others. Studies have shown that a variety of methods can be used to improve size and strength. Improvements in size and strength can also be produced by a variety of equipment. Studies have shown that there are no significant differences in the improvements between groups that used free weights and groups that used machines.

When choosing an approach, it's also important to consider anecdotal evidence. Though anecdotal reports lack the same scientific scrutiny as research studies, their sheer volume is so overwhelming in this case that they cannot be overlooked. The fact is that countless individuals have obtained significant improvements in their size and strength despite using different approaches. Remember the results at Nebraska and Michigan?

So, it's possible for many types of approaches to yield favorable results. In determining which approach to implement, you should ask the following five questions:

Is it Productive?

The approach that you select must be productive. It makes little sense to invest time in a strength-training program if it doesn't produce meaningful results. A program will be productive as long as it's based upon the Overload Principle. Essentially, this principle states that in

order to increase the size and strength of a muscle, it must be stressed – or “overloaded” – with a workload that's beyond its present capacity. In layman's terms, you must challenge a muscle with progressively harder demands. This can be accomplished effectively by using the Double-Progressive Technique: Every time you work out, you must attempt to increase either the resistance that you use or the repetitions that you perform in relation to your previous workout. Stated otherwise, you must impose demands upon your muscles that they haven't previously experienced by either using more resistance or performing more repetitions.

Is it Comprehensive?

The approach must be comprehensive in several ways. First of all, a strength-training program must address all of the major muscle groups in your body, not just the “showy” ones. Frequently, muscles that are often injured are ignored (such as the neck and groin) while muscles that are more cosmetic than anything else get highlighted (such as the biceps and triceps). Secondly, a comprehensive strength-training program means that it's performed year-round, not just prior to a fitness test or before “beach season.” Remember, those in the law-enforcement community must always be at their best in terms of strength (and conditioning); in a sense, you're always “in-season.”

Is it Practical?

The approach must be easy for you to understand. In many instances, strength-training programs have become ridiculously overcomplicated and correspondingly confusing. The use of pseudoscientific terminology coupled with pre-planned workouts that specify inflexible instructions to vary the sets, repetitions, intensity and volume of activity in rigidly defined “phases” adds to the confusion. Remember, too, that references to competitive weightlifters and bodybuilders are irrelevant and, therefore, don't apply to you – unless you're a competitive weightlifter and/or bodybuilder. Strength training is actually quite simple: Over time, progress in resistance and/or repetitions.

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Irvington cop recognized as Officer of the Month

The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) has announced the selection of Patrolman Christopher Jenkins of the Irvington (NJ) Police Department as its Officer of the Month for July 2006.

At an early age, Chris Jenkins knew he wanted to make a positive difference in his community. Prior to joining the police department in 2001, he was a court appointed Case Advocate, investigating allegations of child neglect and then for three years served as a Prevention Intervention Education counselor warning teens about the dangers and consequences of using illegal substances. Since joining the Irvington Police Department he has consistently demonstrated himself as a truly heroic and dedicated officer. His investigative skills and selflessness have saved not only millions of dollars in fraud and copyright infringements, but also human lives.

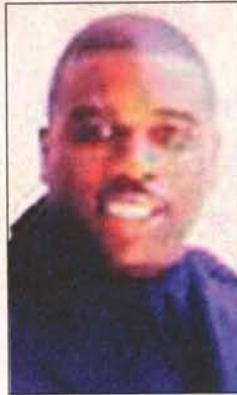
On November 29, 2002 Officer Jenkins responded to two different calls at a local motel. At first glance, the first incident appeared to be that of an armed robbery; however, Officer Jenkins' investigation revealed that the incident was actually a botched drug deal. Returning to the location for the second call, a report of a man with a gun, Officer Jenkins learned that the suspect was in a room of the motel. He and his fellow officers, initiating proper

investigative techniques, were able to develop the requisite probable cause, resulting in an arrest and the seizure of controlled substance(s).

Together these two assignments resulted in the arrest of five suspects, the recovery of a stolen vehicle and confiscation of drugs with a street value of more than \$3,000.

On the afternoon of December 3, 2003, Officer Jenkins along with other officers from the Essex County Sheriff's Office and the New Jersey State Police (NJSP), responded to a call of a car-jacked vehicle having been sighted. As police cruisers, with lights and sirens activated, approached from both the front and rear of the vehicle, the driver of the car-jacked automobile rammed the NJSP unit. In an attempt to flee, the suspect struck several motor vehicles, causing injury to many civilians in the area.

Recklessly driving down the road, the suspect swiped several vehicles before ramming an automobile driven by an elderly



Christopher Jenkins

woman, pinning her inside. Although a NJSP vehicle was positioned in such a way as to block the suspect, he continued to ram the car-jacked vehicle into the elderly woman's vehicle and the state police cruiser. As officers jumped on the roof of the car and broke through the sunroof, Officer Jenkins was able to position himself between the elderly woman's vehicle and the car-jacked vehicle. With only seconds before the victim's car would be rammed again, Officer Jenkins entered the woman's vehicle and removed her - to safety.

The suspect continued ramming the vehicle even after repeated oral commands for him to stop and exit his car. Fearing for his own safety, as well as that of the civilians on the scene, an officer from the Essex County Sheriff's Office was forced to fire at the suspect, while Officer Jenkins shielded the elderly woman with his body. Thankfully, none of the officers or civilians were seriously injured and the suspect recovered from his wounds. For their heroic actions and placing themselves in harm's way, all four officers received the Two Hundred Club of Essex County's 2003 Valor Award.

Reprinted from the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund

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Is it Efficient?

The approach that you choose must be efficient in that it should produce the maximum possible results in the minimum amount of time. An approach that requires you to exercise for more than one hour per workout or perform more than three workouts of strength training per week isn't efficient nor is it necessary. By utilizing a strength-training program that's efficient, you'll have more time available to pursue other activities such as perfecting operational tactics, practicing marksmanship skills and performing other types of physical training (such as aerobic training). And don't forget about the extra time that you could dedicate toward your personal activities and interests.

Is it Safe?

At first glance, many approaches look

great. Closer inspection, however, may reveal that the approach is highly questionable in terms of safety. The main objective of a strength-training program is to strengthen your muscles, bones and connective tissues thereby reducing your risk of injury on the job. It's contradictory, therefore, to use potentially dangerous activities or exercises in the weight room. Movements that have an unreasonable amount of orthopedic risk include the power clean and snatch as well as plyometrics, especially those that are done in a vertical plane. Performing any exercise in the weight room with an explosive speed of movement is also potentially dangerous.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Unless you happen to be a competitive weightlifter or bodybuilder, there's absolutely no need for you to train like one. These athletes have different goals than

police officers. Essentially, the main goal of a competitive weightlifter—a powerlifter or Olympic-style lifter—is to do one repetition with as much weight as possible; the main goal of a bodybuilder is to achieve the best physique possible. With no disrespect to these athletes intended, their goals have no relevance to police officers.

Ultimately, you must make the decision on which approach to implement in the weight room. You owe it to yourself to select an approach that's productive, comprehensive, practical, efficient and safe.

Matt Brzycki is the coordinator of Recreational Fitness and Wellness at Princeton University in Princeton. A former Marine Drill Instructor, he has authored, co-authored or edited 15 books on strength and fitness, including SWAT Fitness (available at www.operationaltactics.org).