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Don't Waste Time by Thomas Kurz

"If you love life, don't waste time, for time is what life is made up of."—Bruce Lee

If you waste your time on the wrong exercises, you rob yourself of the time and energy for exercises that could make you a better athlete—and better than your opponents.

Next time (and every time) you plan your workout, keep these thoughts in mind:

- There are exercises with an optimal effort-to-effect ratio, then those with a less than optimal ratio, then the useless or indifferent ones, and then those that are outright harmful.
- Depending on the athlete, at some point in training, any exercise may belong to any of the above categories.
- Every minute wasted on less than optimal exercises could be invested instead in the optimal ones—those that unleash your full potential.
- A minute spent on the wrong exercises is the minute that increases your chance of being injured or overtrained. Actually, with every minute spent on wrong exercises you can waste days (if not weeks or months) of progress and tons of potential.
- Doing something because others are doing it is not a good enough reason. But if all those others get the desired results, then maybe you could too. Depending . . .
- Think clear—work smart. Examining exercises and training methods, check claims against facts, especially if claims are contrary to everyday observations. Only clear thinking can lead to smart training.

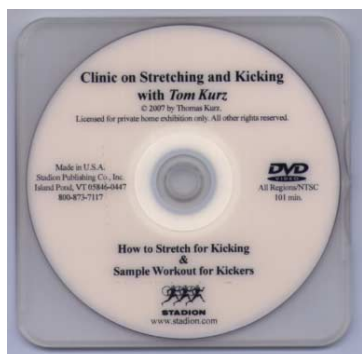
"Take what is useful, reject what is useless."—Bruce Lee

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Review of Clinic on Stretching and Kicking



"Last week I received your *Clinic on Stretching* and the *Power High Kicks*

DVDs and I already watched them several times. While both of them are great and worth every cent I must say I'm really blown away by the *Clinic on Kicking* DVD. Every time I watch it, I discover new important info and details about correct technique, especially your description of the roundhouse kick (and why and how to chamber it the right way) is fantastic. And by the way, your comments on the students' techniques are also quite entertaining. I can't wait to try everything! Thanks for making these great products!"

—Oliver Klettner, Vienna, Austria



I have your video . . . With your method I got the side split in about 4 or 5 months
—Oliver Klettner, Vienna, Austria

Stretching in Sports

by Thomas Kurz

Experts discuss whether to stretch, how to stretch, and when to stretch.

First, in the 80s (about the time when the first edition of *Stretching Scientifically* was published), the experts discovered that strenuous static stretching decreases strength and power output. It finally occurred to them that it is not a good idea to include it in a warm-up for dynamic actions. (Some needed to read several research papers on these effects of static stretching instead of just noticing it. . . . What keen powers of observation. . . .)

So, instead of those static stretches, they advocated warming up with “dynamic mobility exercises” (*i.e.*, dynamic stretches, as defined in the 1985 edition of *Stretching Scientifically*). Some even went so far as to eliminate static stretching from workouts completely—so no static stretching at all, not even in a cool-down. Then they noticed that athletes trained in this fashion have insufficient range of motion (ROM). Apparently the experts did not know that dynamic stretching gives athletes the ability to move within their full static passive ROM, but that obtaining this ROM takes either strength exercises done throughout one’s full ROM or static stretches.

So, these sports training experts came up with the following scheme: static stretches first, to increase the static passive ROM, and then dynamic stretches. Why static stretches at the beginning of the warm-up? Several possible reasons (in no particular order):

1. These experts don’t know that static stretches are most effective when muscles are well warmed up—even mildly fatigued—which happens at the end of a workout.

2. They have been told that “postworkout stretching does not seem to produce gains in flexibility” and they actually believed it—no matter the overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

3. They do not know how to set up a strength and flexibility training program so that athletes may access their full ROM with only a brief dynamic warm-up.

4. They uncritically adopted methods of physical therapy to sports training. They didn’t think through the differences between the joints and muscles of a patient and those of a healthy athlete.

5. For many it could be a face-saving device: It rationalizes doing static stretches in a warm-up for mainly dynamic actions—which is what they were doing before they became aware of dynamic stretches—and is as idiotic now as it was then.

More on point 4: One should not thoughtlessly transplant methods of physical therapy to sports training and vice versa. Order of exercises and other therapeutic modalities, which is a must in physical therapy, is a waste in a workout of healthy athletes. Selection of exercises, which is best in sports, is harmful in physical therapy. So copying physical therapy procedures to sports training shows lack of understanding of either.

I will spell it out: Injured athletes or any patients may begin a P.T. session with static stretches, fascial releases, and such because their muscles and joints don’t work right—THEY ARE INJURED. Their joints may be poorly aligned or not mobile enough to do the therapeutic exercises safely—that is why the patients have to do the muscle-relaxing and joint-mobilizing techniques prior to strengthening exercises.

If athletes have to begin their warm-up with therapeutic techniques, such as myofascial releases, trigger point releases, and static stretches, it means that there is something wrong with them. Namely, that their training gives them muscular imbalances, fascial tightening, and trigger points—signs of poor exercise selection, or poor arrangement of those exercises, or poor application of means of recovery (or all of those three).

More on point 2: I will begin with a sample of wisdom from hotbodytraining.com. Here it is [boldface mine—TK]:

“Top soft tissue experts are now recommending that static stretching should be done cold, without warming up. The idea

behind this is that when warm, the muscles simply elongate and then return to their normal state, whereas stretching a cold muscle will force it to undergo structural changes and increase in length. So, does that mean we’ve come full circle and should stretch at the beginning of our workouts?”

“I’m sure you can now see where the confusion comes into play, but that still leaves us in the dark as to when to stretch. Static stretching should be done to increase the length of the muscles and reduce injury risk in the long term, not as a warm up. We’ve already established that it’s not that effective after a workout when the muscles are warm, so the only logical time to do it is at the start of a workout or at a completely different time, outside of your workout.”

So what about all those athletes who show great flexibility, who do the bulk of their stretching when well warmed up? Like the gymnasts, the track-and-field hurdlers and javelin throwers, the wrestlers, the kickboxers, and so on? Are the flexibility feats they display just a mass hallucination?

And how about this?



A display of flexibility with strength—the result of doing stretching and strengthening when well warmed up.

While people who follow my method can do splits and back bridges without any warm-up, in this method all work on increasing ROM is done when warmed up, at the end of a workout. What do “top soft-tissue experts” have to say about that?

Let us know what you think about our newsletter. Have you learned something that improved your or your athletes’ performance or health? What would you like to learn more about? Write to us at news@stadium.com

Sports Training and Good Posture

by Thomas Kurz

One of the first steps in a sports training or fitness program is evaluation and—if needed—a correction of posture. An exercise program that does not take into account one's postural problems will likely cause chronic injuries and dropping out of the program. In the best case, the uncorrected postural imbalances will limit one's progress.

There are many common postural problems, relating to the head and neck, shoulders, upper back, lower back, hips, and legs. The common ones, which may be fairly easily fixed with corrective exercises, are caused by the so-called modern lifestyle. Here are the activities of this modern lifestyle that cause bad posture:

- Sitting for long periods of time and reading or writing with the work surface at an angle that forces stooping
- Doing manual work, leaning forward, with arms in front of oneself (think a machinist, or an assembly worker)
- Not exercising arms through their full ROM (e.g., not climbing, rowing, or shooting arrows)
- Not exercising legs through their full ROM (e.g., not squatting deeply enough, not running and walking enough)

These are exacerbated by stupid exercises, such as the bench press (vain men mostly) and spinning (naïve fitness maniacs).

Now, I could list many postural problems, with their causes and remedies, but that would take a lot of space, and then, some could still be left out. So here is something better: a set of principles. When you understand the principle of a matter, then details fall in place without your having to memorize them. Without knowing the principle (or principles) that makes a system work, one has to memorize the “routines” and do them without the understanding needed to individualize them. Yes, the “devil” is in the detail, but each detail is governed by a larger principle.

Principles of Posture Correction

1. Find and remove the cause of poor posture.

It is useless to prescribe (or do) corrective exercises while still doing the same activity, in the same way, that has ruined the posture in the first place. Or not correcting the poor eyesight that forces one to assume a harmful head and neck position for work. Or the weakness of muscles holding and moving an eyeball, which causes a compensatory head tilt.

2. Feel the good posture.

A person who wants to correct his or her posture must be put in a position in which he or she can EASILY maintain the good posture.*

Only after one becomes aware of how the good posture feels and its benefits can one strive to attain it or regain it.

A very important threshold in posture correction is becoming aware of discomfort when letting the posture slip and of the relief that a correction brings.

3. Do corrective exercises (actually, all exercises) in a way that makes it impossible, or at least difficult, to assume a poor posture while exercising.

Why have I singled out the bench press and spinning as examples of stupid exercises?

The short answer:

Because these very popular exercises exacerbate postural problems.

The longer answer:

Bench press

1. It wastes time and energy that could be used for more effective upper body exercises.

2. It predisposes one to shoulder injuries.

Spinning

1. More sitting after sitting for most of the day at work.

2. Excessive intensity, which results in the opposite effect than that sought.

The long answer:

Bench press

To see the main reason the bench press is a stupid exercise, do the following:

1. Test your maximal (1RM) bench press.

2. Test your maximal (1RM) standing overhead press (military press).

3. Work on increasing your maximal standing overhead press only (no bench press during that period), until your max in the overhead press improves.

4. Test your maximal (1RM) bench press again.

When doing the tests, follow the guidelines of the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA).

Results will speak for themselves.

Note: Avid bench pressers should not be surprised if they have trouble doing the overhead press correctly—one more reason the bench press is a stupid exercise. (People who don't bench press but do overhead presses have no trouble doing a bench press correctly.)

There are more reasons that observant people notice in many gyms, and in one of the forthcoming articles I might spell these out.

Spinning

To see why spinning is a stupid exercise, observe the spinners and then re-read this article—especially the part about posture and work.

Sitting for long periods, at work and then during exercise, can cause tightness and hyperactivity in the hip flexors (such as the psoas). This can inhibit the hip extensors (such as the glutei). Inability to produce hip extension with the gluteus maximus shifts the job onto the low back extensors. The low back extensors then become tight and hypertonic and in turn inhibit the abdominal muscles.

Excessive intensity compounds work stress, soon causing hormonal imbalances, typically high cortisol and low testosterone levels. Results: poor sleep and poor recovery, reduced fat-burning, diminishing muscle strength, and other symptoms of overtraining.

If you want more reasons, study the works of Philip Maffetone that are listed at the [Athlete's Bookshelf](#).

* Good posture is such in which all muscles exert a minimal effort to maintain it—and all work in a balanced way, with none fatiguing to the point of forcing its load on other muscles. Bad posture is such that some muscles carry most of the load, until they give up and others must compensate. The muscles forced to compensate are not in the best position to do the “not their job” and so they get too tense and too short, while those opposing them get lax and too long. The compensations cascade, affecting more and more muscles and causing tension pains, weaknesses, poor stability of joints, and eventually an injury.

Q and A on Stretching and Training

Study these questions on training carefully. You may find information that relates to questions of yours. Questions are in *italics*.

■ *I watched the video of Ivan Chakarov squatting 583 lb with no belt and no wraps. I think some comments are in order as I think many will ask the same questions. I was always taught that wraps and a belt are necessary equipment. Obviously not. Please comment on this as I believe the great majority of lifters hold this opinion. I was also always taught never to go below a 90 degree angle in squatting—tops of thighs parallel with floor—as it placed a great deal of stress on the knees. Thighs parallel to the floor is a “legal” squat in powerlifting.*

I wrote an article on belts and knee wraps in the Summer 2006 issue of *Stadion News*. You can download it at www.stadion.com/freebies.html.

On not letting the tops of the thighs go below parallel with the floor: It seems that your teachers confused the powerlifting competition rule for a squat with what is a biomechanically sound form. The squat that is “legal” in a powerlifting contest is not deep enough for Olympic weightlifters or for athletes of other sports who do squats for function—not for squatting records.

About the stress on the knees: If you squat badly you’ll damage your knees, your back, maybe even your hips. So observe those who squat correctly, such as Chakarov and other healthy weightlifters, and copy their form.

■ *What type of stretches would you recommend for children?*

Whether children should do stretches or not, and if yes what kind, depends on the biological age of the children.

So, at the preschool age (2 to 5) children don’t need any deliberate stretching—as they play, they put their joints through their full range of motion (ROM).

From the age of 6 to 10, children should do mainly dynamic stretches—best if “hidden” in movements of games and other fun exercises.

Between age 10 and 13 (before the growth spurt), the quantity and intensity of stretches can be increased, with dynamic stretches, also called “dynamic mobility exercises,” dominating.

From the ages of 13 to 15 (during the growth spurt), greater use of static stretches may have to be made to prevent or correct postural problems caused by rapid and uneven growth.

Note that dynamic stretches encompass a wide variety of exercises. Here is my definition of dynamic stretching from *Stretching Scientifically*:

“Dynamic stretching involves moving parts of your body and gradually increasing reach, speed of movement, or both.”

So you see that any movements fitting this definition can be considered dynamic stretches (e.g., deep squats, lunges, Hindu push-ups or downward dog push-ups, full ROM exercises with medicine ball).

Dynamic stretches such as leg raises or arm swings increase dynamic ROM only within the limit of the maximal static passive ROM. However, dynamic stretches in which one has to overcome resistance at the end of ROM develop passive static ROM. Such stretches (or resistance exercises throughout full ROM) are preferred to static stretches if a young child has insufficient static passive ROM for such sports as gymnastics.

For children, body-weight resistance exercises at full ROM are better than static stretches. In a preadolescent child’s (up to 13) nervous system, excitation dominates over inhibition, so it is hard for such a child to properly do static stretches. But squatting, crouching, reaching back and picking up a ball, and similar exercises can be used safely with very young children.

So, in the example of insufficient ROM for gymnastics, a young child could do body-weight deep squats or deep squats while holding a light weight (say, a small medicine ball), lunges, and movements in a crouch position to increase ROM in the hips, and downward dog push-ups or throwing a ball held in both hands overhead for increasing ROM in the shoulders.

More information on age-appropriate flexibility training is in the book *Children and Sports Training* by Józef Drabik.

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