

Sandbag Arsenal
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One of the biggest dilemmas in training today's athlete is that they are out of shape! Whether it is a professional athlete or a young man/woman they all seem to share a common problem of coming to their teams being severely out of condition. With physical education programs being cut from school curriculums and child obesity rising every year, we need to take a long hard look at the values physical conditioning provides.

In 1974, John Jesse wrote a landmark book called Wrestling Physical Conditioning Encyclopedia. In this great book Jesse hits on a key problem that has escalated to an epidemic today! According to Jesse,

“In accepting the concept of progressive resistance training with weights the coaching profession in the English speaking countries, particularly America and Canada, were faced with cultural problems. With machines doing most of the work the majority of young men entering athletics were not drawn from a background of labor work in the mines, on the farms, in the forests or on the docks. With increasing affluence, urbanization and mechanization, children were losing the philosophy of hard work and patience to attain a goal.” (Jesse, p. 65)

If this was a problem in 1974 we can only imagine the dilemmas that are facing today's athlete. Parents and even coaches want their kids to specialize earlier and earlier, however, their sporting lives and health may be compromised from not building a strong foundation as Jesse refers. Rarely do kids do any form of manual labor, whether it is chores around the house or jobs that require strenuous physical activity. A lot can be considered lost by this change in our society.

Overuse injuries, burn out, lack of progress can often be contributed to our society's lack of interest in building and athlete with a strong foundation. The term “GPP” has been used a lot in the past few years. GPP (general physical preparation) has become revitalized because more and more coaches are experiencing the problems of having out of shape athletes. However, GPP is more than just “conditioning”. It is the development of general qualities in a wide spectrum; flexibility, muscular strength, muscular endurance, speed, and proprioception. This is a concept the Eastern Europeans used a great deal in building the great Olympic athletes. It is also similar to what great strongmen of the past used a great deal as well.

While this sounds wonderful, the implementation of such a concept can often be difficult as coaches have less and less time to work with their athletes. Now we have to prioritize methods that help increase these levels within the framework of what we are allowed as coaches. This is one main reason the use of “strongman” training has seen a big boost in sports performance training.

You don't have to change your name to Magnus, or exclusively use strongman forms of training in your system. Very basic implements and ideas can be used to greatly

accelerate the success of your program. For example, Allan Hedrick, strength coach of the Air Force Academy is a big proponent of keg lifting for his athletes. Coach Hedrick believes such training is great for sport-specific training as well as injury prevention. I personally have a great fondness for sandbag training.

Why sandbags? They offer many of the same benefits of odd lifting, but also possess many advantages. For one, the weight can be changed very quickly for different level of athletes. They are inexpensive so they are perfect for team training situations and even being taken outdoors. Sandbags train multiple qualities at once such as hand strength, back and hip strength, speed or maximal strength, general conditioning, core strength, flexibility, tendon and ligament strength, and mental toughness. One workout is all it takes to begin to appreciate the impact sandbags can have on one's training.

Below are two different workouts, one that exclusively uses sandbags and one that shows how to integrate them with barbells and dumbbells.

Workout 1: Sandbag Only

- A1. Shouldering: 6 sets of 3 each side, rest 75 seconds
- A2. Push Press: 6 sets of 5, rest 75 seconds
- B1. Zercher Squats: 4 sets of 6, rest 60 seconds
- B2. Half Moon Snatches: 4 sets of 6 each side, rest 60 seconds
- C1. Bear Hug Carry: 2 sets of 2 minutes

Workout 2: Mixed Implements

- A1. Back Squat: 3,2,1,3,2,1 rest 90-120 seconds in between
- B1. Sandbag Clean and Press: 5 sets of 3, rest 75 seconds
- B2. Shouldering Lunge: 5 sets of 4 each leg, rest 75 seconds
- C1. Pull-ups: 3 sets of 8, rest 60 seconds
- C2. Sandbag Zercher Get-ups: 3 sets of 5, rest 60 seconds