

PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT II: TRAINING MOVEMENTS NOT MUSCLES

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In recent years there has been a large shift in the general philosophy associated with resistance training. We have moved from what has been historically aesthetic based training to exercise focused on performance. In the past, most people engaged in resistance training primarily to build bigger and better looking muscles. Today, the dominant trend is leaning towards utilization of resistance training as a means to attempt to improve the actual function of their bodies rather than appearance alone. This new emphasis has led to numerous theories, methods and tools aimed at achieving different goals such as improving posture, correcting muscular imbalances, and increasing bio-motor abilities such as sports specific strength, endurance, joint mobility, stability, speed and power.

However, whether they are aware of it or not, most people and trainers alike are still highly influenced by the traditional aesthetic approach to resistance training. This becomes blatantly apparent if you simply examine the exercise programs they are performing. Most resistance exercises people do today are still classified by the muscles they target such as the “chest press”, “lat pull-down”, “biceps curl”, “triceps pushdown”, or “calf raise” just to name a few. Even most resistance exercise equipment is still predominantly named by the muscles they target and tend to train individual muscles with unnatural bilateral movement patterns that are never used outside the gym.

For those who are intently training for performance enhancement, they should be focusing more on training movements, not muscles. This is just as important for the average person as it is for the Golfer or any competitive athlete. Although there are times it may be important to isolate a specific muscle for rehabilitative reasons, the fact is, the body rarely ever uses isolated joint motions or recruits individual muscles to perform life or sports movements. Instead, the body recruits muscle synergies and muscular subsystems to perform whatever the desired movement is. All the while, the neuromuscular system is constantly providing feedback, analyzing input from the body and environment and then altering the unique mix of muscular recruitment in order to modify the movement as needed for continued or improved performance.

These facts have prompted the broad change in resistance training theory. This shift has produced a plethora of new “functional” and “corrective” exercise movements, programs and devices that make promises of being capable of helping people improve their performance. However, to legitimately improve performance it takes much more than completing sets of randomly selected multi-joint motion exercises classified as “functional” or that claim to target the all important “core” muscles. Research has also confirmed that doing such exercises on some sort of unstable surface such as a wobble board, Swiss ball or Bosu have very little transference to improving balance or strengthening the core in any manner that would improve performance of any sport or life movement. In truth, it requires a very informed and strategic selection of particular

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exercises carefully performed with specific techniques, in order to train the body in a gym setting that will actually transfer to the fairway, the court or life in general.

Resistance training exercises that attempt to mimic the exact movement pattern we seek to improve, such as a Golf swing, a tennis serve or throwing a ball, have also shown little value for improving performance. There are numerous differences in the actual forces applied to the body during such types of resistance training exercises versus those that are actually occurring on the tee box, tennis court or baseball diamond. Therefore frequent practice of such exercises that may appear to be “sports specific” may actually further impede performance rather than improve it. Just because an exercise looks different than the traditional body-building or machine based movement and is classified by someone as “functional” or sports specific, does not mean that it will truly improve function or performance.

In truth, most sports specific movements are patterns we decided to perform but are not necessarily in line with what we were designed to perform. Swinging golf clubs, racquets, and bats as well as swimming, excessive running, jumping, starting, stopping, twisting, turning and the often high impact of sports are damaging to the body and often decrease joint function. Considering these facts, it is imperative that the exercises selected in the gym seek to repair and restore the body while also attempting to increase performance. Improper selection of exercises or exercises carried out with poor technique may worsen, not just fail to increase performance and could promote faster deterioration.

With all this in mind, we can see the obvious need to consider the movement of the individual as well as the movement of the sport. Corrective and performance based exercise programs should be tailored to the individual’s present movement or lack of movement abilities. This can only be done if the person’s overall movement ability and limitations are known and have been assessed. It is also imperative to learn how to assess and train to improve authentic functional movement patterns such as gait, squatting, lunging, and unilateral pushing and pulling. Done properly, the exercises always offer beneficial improvement to sports specific movements, while simultaneously restoring the body’s ability to move better and last longer. We welcome you to experience our entire TELOS performance training program that always begins with our proprietary A.I.M. (Advance Movement Assessment) by simply calling our member experience director at 972-386-2580.

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