

Mike's Gym Newsletter



The hardest thing to do in starting a newsletter for a select group is figuring out what to present on a quarterly basis. Thanks to Mike Conrow of Boise, Idaho and Lars Anderson of Ohio, articles and information have been given to me to get out to you. Mike has written several interesting pieces on the training of athletes and competition environment. Lars has put old school information on a disk for me to look at and see what would be relevant for your information. As always I want you the reader to give me constructive feedback of the information you would like to see. I promise you that as I get use to using Pages as my template the look of the Mikes Gym Newsletter will be better!

The following is an interesting note from a reader of mine and a response from Steve Gough, senior international weightlifting coach, regarding the training of athletes using the Bulgarian approach to training. First the question:

eye Coach,

Before I get to what I really wanted to talk about, I just wanted to say that I've been doing a few light snatch lands, especially as part of the warm-up, and they have really helped a lot.

Anyway, what I want to ask about is Bulgarian (or Americanized-Bulgarian) training. I was listening to interviews by you and Steve Gough with overheadandheavy.com and my interest was peaked. I love to do snatch and clean & jerk and I feel like

what I really need training with is heavy weights/singles. This week, I had sets of doubles at 80% and they felt really solid. I felt like I could have gone on all day (although the two pulls + snatch afterwards was not so easy at the same weight). The problem with lighter weights I find is that I can get away with a less solid lockout, which does not work when it gets heavier and I feel like if I trained the heavier weights more, I would be able to do more when comes time to really go for a max.

Enough rambling. What I really want to know is 1) is a Bulgarian style program inappropriate for me given my relative inexperience? 2) if not, what are the general guidelines? Do I, for instance, warm-up snatch with some light doubles/triples, work my way up with singles, and then try and get 4-5 singles in the 90%+, then take a break, repeat for C&J, then do some heavy doubles/singles for squats?

I am also curious what Steve Gough has to say. I found it a little ambiguous in his interview and you seem to have an interesting discussion interspersed

in your Q&A section, although I couldn't get all of it.

Thanks,

Cristian Rosu

Now the response

Cristian,

There are always many factors to consider. And since I do not know you nor have the ability to judge firsthand such questions as... your age, your fitness)and ability to recover), your technique and general talents for lifting as well as your "grasp" of the lifts and how to perform them, I can only give you an imaginary scenario as if viewed from my eyes.

First off, regardless of weights/percentages used, you should always be striving to perfect your technique. Once perfected that technique needs to be guarded by you diligently in order to get your best results. A question that comes to my mind in your "lockout"... is "are you taking the lighter weights "too lightly" at least from a mental point of view? In other words are you just being lazy or lackadaisical? If so, that can be easily corrected by you with a little change of attitude. I have often heard commented by some of the world's best lifters "that they concentrate fully on the first/lightest of warmup weights to their heaviest (or words to that affect). If this is not your problem and the heavier weights really tests your limits, then all I can say is welcome to

the sport. For the more you are tested and the more you respond to that challenge the greater the weights will become as you push to your ultimate outcome.... whatever that may be.

As for the Bulgarian program being right for you... what could possibly be not right for you? I think no other philosophy attacks the lifts in such a constant/persistent way. Of course if you find certain flaws/weaknesses in your "motor path" that the lifts themselves do not appear to address than there are many assistant type movements that can be included in a timely manner to address said shortcomings. Since you apparently do not have someone with a fairly adept/critical eye watching you, then you need to give yourself an honest evaluation on your strengths and weaknesses so that that latter can be overcome. All you have to do is ask... Mikesgym.org

Steve Gough

I thought the question and the answer was an outstanding dialog regarding the Americanized Bulgarian training system. Both Steve and I have discussed this ad-nausium and found that we agree on several aspects, more than less, but we also have a different twist regarding how we choose to apply this system with our athletes. As Steve suggests you can determine he uses other exercises to help mold the lifter from their weaknesses. Let me then say that After reading the articles by Bud Charniga of

www.dynamic-eleiko.com it is clear that most of the great lifters today use in their training the snatch, clean and jerk and front squat. Bud does a great job in addressing why not to use pulls in the training of athletes. This all makes sense to me and therefore rarely will I use pulls in training unless there is a specific reason. What I have found is that with most of my athletes I can determine weaknesses that are inherent to the structure of the body and I will work hard to address those weaknesses and improve them. Most of the time these are core related issues and are there because the athlete is new to the sport. In reality we don't want to train new athletes in the sport using this Bulgarian approach. The coach has to pay due diligence in getting the athlete functionally strong in order to later train the specific way. I do believe that all athletes will get better when they snatch, clean and jerk and front squat. But I also believe that one needs to work on specific weakness of those lifts. Aimee Anaya coming back to training after a 4 year lay-off and a bout with motherhood needed to be retrained and made strong again. Consequently we train Aimee using the Americanized Bulgarian approach with modification. I found Aimee lacking in the bottom strength required to hold heavy snatches. We added to her training overhead squats with sotts presses while in the bottom of the overhead squat. This worked wonders for Aimee's core stability as well as her confidence in getting stronger in the

right positions. Training my son, Casey, I found that when we did the Americanized Bulgarian system he did wonders, but I also added heavy snatch balances and heavy rack jerks behind the neck to his training. He thrived on this training because it gave him great confidence in holding heavy weights over his head. His real weakness is his functional leg strength so we had to be aware that when we worked hard on the leg strength, sets of 5's and 3's his lifts would not be as sharp. When we switched back to heavy singles the classical lifts took off. Therefore the coach has to be aware of subtle differences when training for strength and when training for the specificity aspect of the classical lifts.

The other issue that needs to be addressed in my opinion is the need to have a qualified coach present at all training situations. The coach controls all workouts and workout poundage based on what he sees happening with the athlete during each training session.

There you have it, the American/Bulgarian approach that Steve Gough and I use depending on the athletes we train. Please feel free to address your comments regarding these thoughts.

The next article that I think has some value and insight is the Mike Conroy's article on real pulls. Mike webs together a different approach which is what I like about the newsletter I want to produce. I want different Approaches to training that get results. I feel that there are many ways to skin a cat and they all work. As coaches we all have varying approaches in preparing our lifters but the bottom line is that we all want our athletes to do the best they are capable of doing. Its up to us to get our kids ready, regardless of our philosophies. Enjoy Mike's article.

“Real Pulls”

Michael Conroy
Idaho Weightlifting



During the 2004 Junior National Squad Camp, held at the OTC in Colorado Springs, I had scheduled a session in which the athletes were going to perform 3 pulls to a Snatch, in the morning, and then in the afternoon session 3 pulls to a clean. (For those of you that have read the article Com-

petition Strategies: Staying “warm” after warming up which appeared in the first edition of MIKE'S GYM NEWSLETTER this article is the 'prequel' to that article.)

I had been reading up on and using “Potentiation” for some time and had actually gotten the idea for pulls to a lift from Dr. Marc Cardinal, father and coach of National School Age Record Holder, Sarah Cardinal, who in turn had gotten the idea from Yurik Vardanian, the 7 time World and 2 time Olympic Champion who was using this technique with his son Norik, also a National School Age Champion. (I am certain that last sentence has just infuriated every English Teacher in the country.)

As is always the case with the National Junior Squad Camp, Dr. Michael Stone was there and using the squad members as subjects in his most recent study. Dr. Stone had observed the morning session and at lunch he sat down with me to make a suggestion.

We discussed the 'value' of pulls and all the research concerning the 'how' and 'why' of them.

I was fortunate to work with the Junior Squad Camp between 1990 and 2004 and have always been indebted to Harvey Newton, Bob Takano, Lyn Jones, Roger Nielsen, Mike Burgener, and especially John Thrush for this incredible opportunity. During this time I was involved with a Dr. Stone study practically every camp and always appreciated his willingness to share his knowledge and make suggestions for the practical application of the results gained from the studies.

Back in 1984 the “Finns” had released a study stating that the main problem with pulls was that, very quickly, they stopped looking like the pull phase of the actual lift and as a result became a completely unrelated and possibly non effective exercise. Their study went on to say that 5 sets of 2 repetitions at 80% of a one repetition max might very well be the 'top end' of how a 'pull' still replicated the pull phase of a lift.

They also made a suggestion that an elite athlete had perhaps a 10kg 'window' over the top lift of the day as having a positive relationship between the lift, itself, and an effective pull. (If an athlete snatched 100kg during a session than the snatch pulls should not exceed 110kg or the pull would start to look like a snatch grip deadlift.)

Shortly after that the Bulgarians and the Germans made the statement that after completing a session of competition lifts that the athlete would benefit from 3 sets of 2 reps of Power Movements at 80% of the top competition lift completed that day for maximum benefit. (Especially in the final preparation phase of training for a competition.) Other countries 'chimed' in with the idea that pulls off the blocks was the best way to practice '2nd pull' acceleration and the debate over the usefulness of pulls, at all, began.

As our discussion continued Dr. Stone related a study that he had conducted along with Greg Haff , A. Whitley , LB. McCoy , HS. O'Bryant Lon Kilgore and Kyle Pierce on waiting a set period of time between pulls and certainly between pulls and a lift, completed in 2003.

I asked him what he would suggest and he stated that we do the session just as planned but make two adjustments. First, we have the athletes wait, approximately 10 seconds between each pull and then approximately 20 seconds between the 3rd pull and the lift.

Dr. Stone was present as I spoke with the athletes prior to the session. The session had four sets of 3 pulls to a lift at 80% as the "target" and the athletes had anywhere between 3 and 5 warm up sets, depending upon what 80% actually was. I asked the athletes to perform their warm up sets under the same condition as the target sets and off they went.

Nothing scientific here, but we did speak with the athletes and each of the 15 stated that they were 'surprised' with how 'easy' the actual lift felt, despite the 3 pulls

prior to the movement. (A positive effect of 'potentiation')

At dinner Dr. Stone suggested that I perform a study to show that not only would the pulls look more like the pull phase of the lift but there would be no significant difference between the two movements for "Peak Power", "Peak Acceleration" and "Peak Force".

I promised him that I would and with the help of Dr. Chad Harris, Christoff Kipp and Josh Redden I was able to get the Center for Orthopedics and Bio-Mechanical Research at Boise State University to allow us to perform the study. The study had 3 different protocols to it. 3 pulls to a clean, performed at 80%, a single clean pull at 100% followed by a clean at 90% and a clean at 90% for 'baseline' data. The athletes appeared for 3 different sessions and completed each protocol after being randomly selected. Warm-ups were, defined, set and exact despite which target protocol had been drawn.

Weightlifters are few and far between, in Idaho, but fortunately every hammer, weight-thrower, shot-putter and javelin athlete at Boise State University is Swedish and these fine athletes were more than happy to assist, especially since every one of them snatched and cleaned as part of their 'normal' training. (In fact several of them had been competitive weightlifters, as juniors, back in their homeland.)

The results were exactly as Dr. Stone predicted. Barbell trajectories were well within the accepted norm as were ground forces, acceleration and power outage,

Ever since that study when my athletes perform pulls they pause between each rep and I suggest to them they do not use straps.

As I mentioned in my prior article my athletes have both pulls and powers built into their training programs, as well as block work. Everything we do is to maintain, as much as possible, proper barbell trajectory, acceleration and power outage as it relates

between pulls, powers and the actual lifts themselves.

If you would like to 'see' how Idaho Weightlifting actually incorporates this into our training go to: <http://www.eteamz.com/idahoweightlifting> and 'click' on the Programs Icon. Scroll down to the *Partial Movement* and *Conceptual Training* program. (You will notice in the Conceptual Program that after the athlete snatches or cleans that 3 sets of 2 reps are listed. These are the "German" Power movements.

As always I hope that this article has been helpful in aiding you to make 'pulls' more effective in your training program.

Finally I really like the piece on the Impact Of Coaches on athletes and or students.

IMPACT OF COACHES

I HAVE COME TO A FRIGHTENING
CONCLUSION.

I AM THE DECISIVE ELEMENT IN THE GYM,
ON THE FIELD, OR IN THE YARD.

IT IS MY PERSONAL APPROACH THAT CRE-
ATES THE CLIMATE.

IT IS MY DAILY MOOD THAT MAKES THE
WEATHER.

AS A COACH, I POSSESS TREMENDOUS POWER
TO MAKE AN ATHLETE'S LIFE MISERABLE OR
JOYOUS.

I CAN BE THE TOOL OF FORTUNE OR AN IN-
STRUMENT OF INSPIRATION.

I CAN HUMILIATE OR HUMOR, HURT OR HEAL.
IN ALL SITUATIONS, IT IS MY RESPONSE THAT
DECIDES WHETHER A CRISIS WILL BE ESCA-
LATED OR DE-ESCALATE AND AN ATHLETE
HUMANIZED OR DEHUMANIZED.

If you have any questions and or comments regarding the information in this newsletter, contact me at: mikeburgener@mac.com or thur my website. If there is something you would like to see or information you think would be informative, by all means ask and I will try to take care of your request.

Mike Burgener