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Layoffs from Training

In an earlier chapter on the requirement for irregularity of exercise, I mentioned the fact that training should never be permitted to degenerate into a rut – wherein the subject merely goes through the motions without really extending himself; such training will never produce much in the way of worthwhile results, and if continued long enough will usually lead to a loss of interest in training of any kind.

Thus, in the vast majority of cases, best long-range results will be produced if infrequent, irregular – but rather prolonged – layoffs from training are permitted; but such layoffs should not be scheduled in advance – for a number of reasons. If a subject is looking forward to a scheduled layoff from training, then his incentive will usually be greatly reduced – and if he is forced to take an unscheduled layoff, then he will normally return to training with greatly increased enthusiasm.

But totally apart from psychological considerations, although the responsible physiological factors are not at all clear, it is obvious that the system requires rather prolonged – if infrequent – breaks in training. In most cases, such layoffs from training should involve at least a week of almost total inactivity – and in some cases, a month out of training will do more for progress than six months of steady training without a break.

Any degree of strength/endurance that may be lost during such a layoff from training will usually be reestablished within a very short period of time after training is resumed – and in almost all cases, progress towards higher levels of ability will immediately follow.

In fact, best possible performances in many types of sports activities can sometimes be produced only after a layoff; power lifters, for example, are well advised to avoid training entirely for several days prior to a lifting meet. A longer layoff might – and probably would – result in reduced performance levels, but a few days out of training may make it possible to lift more than would otherwise have been possible.

The same sort of results can be observed in any sports activity that requires brief but very intense effort – pole vaulting, shot putting and short dashes are examples of such activities.

In almost all cases, if a month of constant training fails to produce marked degrees of improvement, then the need for a layoff is indicated; and in most such cases, the most desirable period out of training is a full week – or, in fact, a period of ten days, since training would normally be terminated on a Friday and would not be resumed until Monday of the second-following week.

Upon resuming training, at least some degree of muscular soreness can be expected – but another period of break-in training is not normally required. Individuals differ to some degree in their reactions to exercise after a layoff, but in most cases training should be resumed at the same levels at which it was terminated.

Except in cases involving injuries or illnesses, layoffs from training should never exceed a period of a full month – within that period of time, any normal physiological requirements for a break in training will have been fully met; and additional periods out of training will merely reduce the existing levels of ability without compensation.