How to Get the Best Results from Exercise

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There are really only a few important points that must be clearly understood…and if these points are understood, then getting the best results from exercise is very simple. Or it could be, and it should be, and it would…if people weren't involved.

The breeding, the feeding, and the training of animals is almost an exact science by comparison to the same subject involving people…because, in the care and training of animals you are not involved with the opinions of the animals. Something works…or it doesn't work…and you don't have to ask a horse what he thinks about it.

Which is certainly not meant to imply that athletes are "animals"…but it is meant to imply that their opinions seldom add anything apart from problems in the field of exercise.

One of the strongest men in the history of the world recently told me that literally ANYBODY could produce the same level of strength that he did…"if they trained in exactly the same way, and if they were as DEVOTED to training as he was."

And then he went on to add that he had given up everything else in life in order to devote himself entirely to his training…no job, no home life, just training.

But the fact is that his results were produced almost literally "in spite of his efforts."

He gives no slightest credit to the fact that he is 6 feet 4 inches tall and the he weighs well over 300 pounds…and while it may be true that some of his size is a result of his training, it is certainly true that his genetic potential made such size possible in the first place.

The man is an outright freak…a genetic freak. And, to at least some degree, so are most of the other outstanding athletes in every sport. Seven-foot basketball players certainly are not "average" men…and neither are 300-pound weightlifters…and you could not even begin to turn the average man into either one of them by exercise, nor by anything else.

So, when such an individual appears on the scene with set opinions about "why" he is so strong, the result is usually merely added confusion in a field that is far too confused already. Which is not meant to imply that being large makes a man stupid…but size doesn't automatically impart knowledge or judgement, either…and it frequently does result in bias.

When a man has devoted five or six hours a day to training, six or seven hours a day for a period of several years…and when he has eventually produced an outstanding level of strength…then it apparently becomes almost literally impossible for him to admit that his training methods were anything less than perfect.

And when you tell such a man that, in fact, most of his efforts probably did nothing except delay his production of results…don't be surprised if his reaction is stronger than disbelief.

Such men, like all men, want credit for their efforts…and giving credit for their strength to an accident of birth may seem, to them, to somehow reduce the value of their efforts.

Also…being forced to admit that 95% of your past efforts were wasted, or even counterproductive, is a very hard thing to do. And if you have managed to produce a high level of performance, it is probably only natural to try to use your ability as "proof" of the value of your methods.

And many other people are quick to believe the opinions of such "champions", also…and then are surprised when the methods suggested the champion don't work for them as well.

Men with an unusual level of ability are just that, "unusual"…far above average. Proper training can and will improve the ability of any athlete, in any sport…and this applies to the unusual men as well as to the average man. But the unusual man has certain natural advantages…a larger frame, the potential for great muscular mass, superior leverage, outstanding neurological efficiency, or some other genetically produced advantage.

Given any one of those natural advantages, a man will probably be stronger than average…given all of them, and he may well be almost superhuman.

As a coach, you cannot produce such men…you can only look for them. And having found them, then you can try to get them to train properly…which may well be harder than finding them.

Many, perhaps most, of the men that I haven known who belonged to this upper strata of the physical world refused to train at all…being wrongly convinced that exercise was of no value, to themselves, at least. But in fact, such men have far more to gain from proper exercise than an average man does. If an average man doubles his strength as a result of exercise, he may still not be strong enough to compete with the champions…but if a naturally superior athlete doubles his strength, then a new and much higher level of performance is suddenly thrust upon the scene.

And when that happens, people rush to the new champions for "advice"…and he gives it freely, and it usually means literally nothing. But for a while, people attempt to duplicate his results by practicing his training methods…almost always with miserable results.

Every time this happens, and it happens often…more "secrets" are revealed to the hopefuls, more "information" is made available to coaches and athletes.

Under the circumstances, it is surprising that the overall situation isn't more confused than it is…or maybe there is a limit to the amount of confusion that can exist at any point in time, and perhaps we have reached that limit of confusion.

But for whatever reason, the situation certainly is confused…and the primary purpose of this book is to bring at least a few of these confused opinions into the light of a logical approach and expose them for just what they are.

YET…herein exists a danger. Because such misinformation is so widespread, so often repeated as "fact", so apparently "accepted", that almost all coaches have fallen prey to at least a few of these myths…and when you come right out and tell them that many of their pet beliefs are utterly false, you run the danger of closing their minds to anything you have to say.

So I might be well advised to make no mention of such controversial matters…but, unfortunately, such an avoidance of the truth is simply not possible in this field if you are sincerely interested in producing worthwile results. Because it just so happens that the most common beliefs are related to factors of great importance…and it also happens that most of these beliefs are untterly false, in most cases the exact opposite of truth.

But what does research show?

Quite frankly…research show almost anything you want to see, and the opposite, and a number of results somewhere between.

I am personally not even aware of a single long-range, large-scale, properly conducted program of research that has ever been conducted in the field of exercise anywhere in the world at anytime. But I am well aware of a large number of research programs that have been conducted under such haphazard conditions that almost any conclusion could have been reached.

Which should certainly not be misread to imply that I am "anti-science"…on the contrary, I am strongly in favor of the truly scientific approach to problem solving. But I am also well aware that such a truly scientific approach is seldom found in practice…at least in the field of exercise.

Before the Colorado Experiment (which will be covered in later chapters), I was firmly convinced that blood-pressure and electrical activity inside a working muscle would be higher while the muscle was performing negative work, during an "eccentric contraction". By comparison to positive work, "concentric contraction."

But careful measurements of both blood-pressure and electrical activity that were made during the Colorado Experiment indicated that I had been wrong…in fact, according to those tests, both factors where LOWER during negative work. Which surprised me.

I had also expected that electrical activity would increase markedly during an exercise…that is to say, I thought it would be fairly low during the first repetition, higher during a second repetition, and far higher during a final repetition.

But again I was wrong. While it does increase repetition by repetition, it increases only slightly…far less than I expected.

Which surprised me again…but pleased me, because it taught me something. It taught me that I don't understand the significance of such tests…and it taught me that a large number of other people don't understand these tests either, because I have read literally dozens of widely varying opinions on the subject.

Then, about a month later, while talking to a friend on the telephone, I was re-surprised on the same subject…because he conducted tests of the electrical activity during exercise, and also compared this factor in negative work to the same factor in positive work. And his results were the opposite of those that we produced.

So I called Dr. Elliot Plese, who conducted the tests during the Colorado Experiment, and told him what I had heard from my friend... and then I was surprised yet again. Because in the meantime Dr. Plese had conducted some additional tests, and his results were also the opposite of the first ones…at least in regard to electrical activity.

Thus, at this point in time, the situation in regard to such test is left firmly up in the air…if they have any significance, then I don't yet understand it. And I don't think anybody else does either.

But such a lack of understanding certainly has not prevented a number of people from making claims based on such tests, using results of such tests as "proof"…some proof.

Commercial bias is obviously responsible for a large part of the phoney research that has been so common during recent years…but to at least some degree, the scientific community is itself to blame for what I can only describe as an "attitude of fear". An attitude that makes many scientific workers literally afraid to speak up plainly…and an attitude which leads them to look in all directions for "loopholes", just in case their theory turns out to be something less than perfect. Such writing is frequently justified on the grounds that they are "being fair"…or "trying to look at all sides of a question". Which would be fine, if it was true…but it seldom is.

So I would like nothing better than to totally ignore the "theory" of exercise…and I would, except that many readers would refuse to accept simple facts presented in plain English.

Certainly I am interested in theory…but I am far more interested in results, and I am practical enough to make very good use of obvious facts even when I can't explain them even to my own satisfaction.

So you will be exposed to a bit of theory in later chapters…but you will be exposed to a great deal more in the way of simple, practical, "how to do it" instructions.

Instructions dealing with tested and proven methods, methods that work…even if we don't always know exactly why they work, or even how they work.

So the best results from exercise can be produced by following the simple instructions contained in the last few chapters of this book…but you can't skip to that point immediately; because, if you fail to read the chapters that come before the chapters of instructions…then you probably won't have all of the information required to make proper use of those instructions.

And you certainly would still be restricted by many utterly false beliefs…the most important of which I will attempt to put to rest in the next several chapters.