The Correct Amount of Exercise

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Question…"How much exercise is enough?"

Answer…The MINIMUM amount that will produce the desired result.

Any exercise in excess of the minimum amount REQUIRED, will be wasted effort at best…and counterproductive at worst.

For an athlete, too much exercise may well be worse that no exercise at all.

Yet, simple from the apparently natural inclination to equate "more" with "better"…many coaches still train their athletes far too much. To the point that they are literally preventing results.

One very simple but badly misunderstood point must be understood right at the start…it is utterly IMPOSSIBLE to train "hard" and train a large amount at the same time. You have no coice in the matter; you can have one or the other…you can NOT have both. If you insist on a large amount of training, then you will be forced to reduce the intensity of training.

In some cases, an apparently large amount of training is required; it depends upon the sport, and upon the circumstances. A distance runner must train, at running, more than a sprinter. No amount of 40-yard sprints will properly train a man for a 20-mile run.

But on the other hand, frequent practice of 20-mile runs will literally prevent a sprinter from improving his performance.

And in either case, there is a definite limit to the amount of training that either man can do…while improving, or even maintaining, his level of performance.

If the distance runner runs too much, his times will get worse instead of better…and the same thing will happen to the sprinter.

The sprinter must train with very high-intensity, he must run as fast as possible…for a short distance.

The distance runner must NOT train in such a fashion; if he attempts to run at a maximum level of intensity then it is extremely unlikely that he would last a full mile…much less twenty miles.

So the amount of training, and the intensity of training, must be directly related to the particular sport…and they must be balanced in relation to each other. If you increase the intensity, then you MUST reduce the amount of training…you have no choice in the matter.

Yet, during the last few years, the trend has been in exactly the wrong direction in many sports…not in all sports, but in some sports. In a few sports, the results of overtraining are so obvious that it is utterly impossibly to miss the implications. And in those sports, current training practices come fairly close to a practical balance between the intensity of training and the amount of training.

This balance is probably best in the sport of Olympic weightlifting…and I think I can demonstrate just why this is so. Weightlifting is one of the few sports in which the athlete is constantly made aware of his momentary ability…so a loss in strength is immediately obvious.

To lift a maximum weight, an athlete must perform at the highest possible intensity of effort…but if such maximum intensity is involved in every workout, then the workouts must be brief and infrequent. If not, then losses in strength will be produced instead of gains.

So weightlifters have been forced to limit the amount of their training…and even if they fail to understand the exact cause and effect factors involved in this relationship between intensity of training and amount of training, they are at least aware of practical implications.

As soon as the football season is finished Mercury Morris starts losing weight…because he stops training. His “normal” bodyweight is considerably below his “conditioned” weight…so his weight drops when he stops training.

A muscle will not grow beyond its “normal” level unless such growth is stimulated by heavy exercise…but exercise is also required to maintain an existing high level of muscular mass. So a strong athlete will lose muscular size, and thus strength, if he stops training entirely.

At least two factors will influence the rate at which such losses of strength will occur…(1) the difference between an athlete’s normal weight and his “conditioned” weight…and (2) the length of time that an athlete has remained in good condition.

If a loss of bodyweight does not occur when training is stopped, then this is clear proof that fatty tissue is being added…and this usually what happens in practice. So it is important to reduce the amount of calorie intake in direct proportion to any reduction in the amount of training.

But it is equally important to avoid the trap of equating gains or losses to changes in bodyweight. It is easily possible to lose strength while gaining weight…or gain strength while losing weight…so progress must be measured in the basis of performance. If strength is increasing, then progress is being made…regardless of what may be happening to the bodyweight.

After three or four months out of training, Morris may have lost 20 pounds in bodyweight…and perhaps as much as 30 pounds of muscular mass (lean body mass, or LBM).

But upon resuming hard training, his bodyweight starts climbing rapidly…and his muscular mass increases are even faster than his bodyweight increases. Because proper training produces a rapid increase in lean body mass (LBM)…and a simultaneous reduction in fatty tissue.

During less than two months of regular, hard training, Morris gained approximately 25 pounds in bodyweight…but his actual increase in LBM was probably on the order of 40 pounds.

When he resumed training in the summer of 1973, Morris weighed approximately 170 pounds…less than two months later, he weighed 197 pounds. At the start of his renewed training, he trained three times weekly…for approximately 40 minutes during each workout. But two months later, he had reduced his weekly training to two workouts of approximately 30 minutes each.

Such a reduction in the amount of his training was an absolute requirement for continued progress…the stronger the athlete becomes…the greater the load imposed upon his overall recovery ability.

During the Colorado Experiment (detailed in a later chapter), Casey Viator gained a total of 45.28 pounds in a period of 28 days…while reducing his starting level of body fat by 17.93 pounds. So his net gain in muscular mass (LBM) was 63.21.

Conducted under strict laboratory conditions in the Physical Education Department at Colorado State University, this Experiment clearly established the fact that very rapid increases in LBM can be produced while simultaneously reducing the level of fatty tissue.

Viator's results were produced by a total of 7 hours, 50 and ½ minutes of training within a period of exactly four weeks. Fourteen workouts with an average time of 33.6 minutes.

A large amount of training is neither necessary nor desirable…on the contrary, best possible results can only be produced by a very brief training schedule. Additional training will reduce the production of worthwhile results…and as an athlete grows stronger, his training program must be reduced.