



What is trained today in weightlifting?

I ask those who read my editorials to be patient. You will no doubt have noticed that in an almost cadenced, cyclical and recurrent manner, I return to the subject of training and the process of training in particular. Time goes by and the appeal of this complex and highly articulated process leads me to reflect, lucky as I am perhaps, having the privilege of

being able to attend national and international weightlifting competitions very frequently, competitions that represent the conclusion, the final act, of days, weeks and months of training, major and minor processes of preparation of a performance, which for various reasons are always exceptional regarding a determined subject.

I am very curious to understand what is behind a performance, be it positive or not, and what the elements are that have determined it. I am intrigued by the attitudes and approaches of the various coaches in achieving that type of performance and if I observe and note here and there most of the aspects that seem involved, one part of them alone does not allow

you to fully complete the entire puzzle of the final performance. It is not merely a sum of things; it is not a predictable whole, it is not mathematics!

In competitions I often see attitudes and different approaches, which are rarely or perhaps never used in training, different in any case from commonly used routines. Let me give some examples: I have never seen any coach in training put a blanket or a towel on an athlete's shoulders between lifts. During regular training I have never seen a coach check an athlete's hydration level; I have never seen a coach massage an athlete before a maximum lift, let alone slap them or make them sniff salts before lifting or repeating a maximum lift. And yet a maximum lift is a maximum lift, whether it is in training or attempted in the competition: and still, the approaches are different. The determination of the coaches is different, the language is different. But are competitions so different to training? Let me be clearer: perhaps other things are done in competitions that require different behaviour than during training? If so, then we should reflect on what training actually means; and we must be aware that our reflections must be oriented towards understanding the different elements that make up competition, such as requiring different approaches, which in some cases, are never used in training.

Let's try to analyse these approaches from different points of view. Firstly: the psychological aspect. What can happen in an athlete's psyche if, during the most important event, when he/she should be aware of the progress made in training, the coach, in

other words, the most important person there and then, sends a series of objectively very negative messages.

The messages say: ... I'm covering you because otherwise you'll get cold and if you get cold you won't be as good as I want ... the message is loud and clear!

I'm taking care of you because you are unable to regulate your own body temperature; I'm telling you how hot you should be. In actual fact, all weightlifting competitions are held indoors, so is this type of attitude really necessary? Hydration. Rarely have I seen in training coaches worry about whether the athletes have hydrated enough before starting the workout. Many scientific studies demonstrate the value of this practice applied to strength training, which is hardly ever used, even on the days when the maximum lifts are scheduled. The message is more or less the following: ... I know when and how much you have to drink! In weightlifting competitions, there is the age-old habit of the "slapping" technique. Once again, this is used only in competitions and is actually devoid of any scientific or functional value (those who do it should have some knowledge of how the nervous system works, what a mechanoreceptor is, etc.), as well as being horrible to witness, when it comes to both male and female athletes.

A dreadful gesture on all fronts, but in particular for the intrinsic message this action conveys: I, as coach, can invade the personal space of an athlete, and can also slap him/her, because in competitions (there is no corresponding action during training) the

athlete often becomes an instrument in the hands of the coaches. For years I have been insisting on the international scene that this practice be banned. Unfortunately, however, I have always come up against a brick wall. Another custom often noticed in competitions is that of coaches repeating all the technical and postural moves like a mantra before the athlete steps onto the platform and repeating them again, often shouting them, before the athlete starts the lift. This practice is also rarely seen in training. I wonder and I put the question to you: if before a lift a coach has to repeat what needs to be done, what use are the days, weeks and months of training? Shouldn't training prepare for competition? If so, why are certain things done in competitions that have no corresponding action in training? All the behaviours listed above demonstrate, that both those who endure them and those who exercise them, have indeed poor mental preparation for the competition. Competitions must be prepared mentally on a par with the physical preparation. Strategies to improve safety and, in particular, the independence of athletes must be adopted (coaches often enjoy treating the athletes as competition toys, the prevalence of the child within the adult) and this often means that the competition, therefore direct confrontation with adversaries, produces stress which, if not ably managed, transforms into uncontrollable anxiety.

In conclusion, I put the question to everyone: do coaches train mentally for training?

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