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Body Balancing

There has been a lot of confusion as to what body balancing (also known as functional bodybuilding) is. I think you will find the answer is simpler than many people make it out to be. Let's begin with the concept of specificity of sport: If you are an athlete, your training should be specific to your sport, to varying degrees depending on what it is that you do.

Example: A sprinter will perform exercises that will make him or her run faster and a shot putter will perform exercises that make him or her throw farther; however, beware of overdoing this concept. A shot putter throws, or essentially pushes, a ball; therefore, he or she trains muscles that push and doesn't waste valuable training time on other exercises. While on the surface this methodology makes sense, in the long run, it could be a big mistake.

The purpose of body balancing is simple: to create a body that is balanced in its development and function. You would be surprised at the number of injuries that occur from muscles that are over or underdeveloped. For almost every skeletal muscle in the human body, there is an agonist and an antagonist.

For example: The bicep flexes the arm, the triceps extends it. For a curl, the bicep are the agonist, the triceps the antagonist. For a pushdown, the triceps are the agonist and bicep the antagonist. The quadriceps group extends the lower leg, the hamstring pulls it

toward the body. These muscles need to all be trained correctly for the body to be efficient.

Exacerbating Factors

People tend to train what they can see.

In my experience, athletes that have very well developed quads often have poorly developed hamstrings. Part of this is due to the nature of his or her the sport, but maybe it is not a coincidence that most non-contact ACL injuries I have encountered have happened to people with poor hamstring development.

The biceps femoris in my arm?

Unfortunately, many strength coaches have incredibly poor knowledge of anatomy. There are 3 muscles with 3 distinct but related actions in the hamstring group.

Do you think simply doing leg curls can adequately train them? "But I squat and that trains the hamstrings!" you say. Sure it does, especially once you go below parallel and you

all do that right? Even on those extra heavy sets when you aren't as confident? Over time, this discrepancy builds up and that is when the trouble starts.

All About the Motion

So how do you go about fixing these things? For starters, don't worry about individual muscles. *Think more about motions.*

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Example: Let's say you just trained bench press, jerks, light incline press and you topped it off with triceps pushdowns. What you have done is trained every "pushing" (technically all muscles pull) muscle in the upper body. If you don't balance this "pushing" with some "pulling" motions, you could be setting yourself up for problems. All you have to remember is to pull or push along the same plane. Specifically, if you perform an incline press, you would want to do some pull-ups, or another exercise, that is similar. There are many ways to approach this, but this is the simplest.

Not One Correct Way

There are a number of ways to implement this type of training such as:

- The "push/pull" method of upper body training has been popular in bodybuilding for years. This is where you would perform a pushing exercise and complete all your sets, then perform a pulling exercise.
- Agonist/antagonist pairing has been popular the last few years in strength and conditioning. This is moving from one exercise to another set for set. So, you perform one set of a pushing exercise, then perform one set of a pulling exercise.

I don't think it is necessary, or the best idea, to pair these all year round for an athlete. Sometimes it just is not practical. Personally, I pair a pulling exercise with bench press about 70% of the time, but sometimes when it gets heavy – it's just time to bench. When your season gets rolling, sometimes you need to really maximize the use of your time in the gym. Maybe you can't keep everything balanced and this is absolutely fine. If you trained well for other parts of the year, there shouldn't be any issues.

What's the Point?

All of this can get very confusing. The point of this is not to get you to rewrite your entire training philosophy, just something for you to consider when training. Remember, don't overreact to something new. The point is: Start thinking about your training. Are YOU balancing it out at least for part of the year? As for specifics on how to do this, you'll have to wait for a future article...

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Rob has spent the last decade researching the best training methods available. A specialist in physiology and biomechanics, Rob has trained and consulted with a diverse spectrum of elite athletes including Olympics track and field champions, National Hockey League (NHL) athletes, National Football League (NFL) players, National Basketball Association (NBA) competitors, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) personalities, powerlifters, bodybuilders, fitness/figure competitors, weightlifters, and collegiate tennis and soccer standouts. Rob is currently working independently in South Florida.

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