

Getting the most out of Bodyweight Training

When it comes to athletic conditioning, most coaches would agree that the athlete should master body weight training before external loading. Each summer I get some young football players that want to bench 215lbs but can't perform 10 perfect bodyweight pushups! The kind of push-up where you are flat as a table top, your nose touches the ground first and the core is engaged throughout the set. I like the bench press as much as the next guy but for function I would definitely look at a variety of bodyweight options and how they can help the athlete. Why bodyweight? Because bodyweight exercises are functional and translate to better athletic performance by teaching the athlete to be aware of the body as an entire unit. Bodyweight exercises can be done anywhere and require minimal equipment.

The bench press and lat pull-down machine are expensive, not portable and many would argue not as effective as push-ups and pull-ups. When an athlete gets good at these it is simple to add a weighted vest, change the speed or in the case of squats add a jump. As well the Push-up and pull-up work a greater amount of muscle tissue than their weight room counterparts. I also add a vertical row to the mix with the Equalizers to work the mid back and the posterior chain (especially when adding hip raises).



Many of the basic compound exercises like the push-up, pull-up, dip and squat provide a foundation of strength and neuromuscular control that will benefit the athlete for years to come. I think that these core competencies need to be well established before too many sport specific movements are incorporated. And there are many more Bodyweight exercises I love- from sprinting (the most primitive form of strength training- you have to be strong, flexible and work the muscles at speed which is most important to sport) jumps of all kinds, skipping, single-leg squats, hamstring drops, back extensions, lunges, jump lunges, planks of all kinds, burpies of all kinds and more!



In reality the athlete is never isolating the chest while engaged in their sport. I am okay with isolating a muscle group to get it stronger but not at the expense of training those muscles for a function. If you are running, cutting and tackling you are not working any muscles in isolation- you need stability from the ground up, balance and a stronger core. In most every athletic scenario the player is most likely standing when engaging the chest (for example) so it is important to train the chest while standing. This is the exact reason I developed the Buddy System to facilitate standing chest presses/ shoulder press/ standing abdominal rotations and much more. It takes Bodyweight training up off the floor and makes it more functional (less aesthetic) and athletic.

With each athlete it is important to assess their specific movement patterns during competition. Is it specific to a few movements in limited planes or is it much more complex? This will help determine which exercises to perform and which method(s) to employ (bodyweight, sled, dumbbells, Buddy System, etc). In some cases when you think a particular muscle is being used it might not be. For example, in football you might think the lineman needs a powerful bench press but they are lowering their center of gravity as much as they can to push in an upward motion more akin to a shoulder press to gain a biomechanical advantage and gain leverage on his opponent. In this case you can move from a bodyweight push-up to a bodyweight pike handstand push-up/shoulder press.

Bodyweight training has many advantages and is a key starting point for young athletes and a trusted athletic conditioning tool for old ones like myself! It maintains strength (all over), functionality and sport specific movements, prevents injury, is fun and provides lots of variety.

Good luck moving your body!



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