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PERSONAL TRAINING

I'm constantly getting pain in between my shoulder blades and my neck and find that I am continually getting grief from my girlfriend about not standing up straight. I figure the two are related, and its time I do something about it. I'd like to get back into the gym again, but I don't want to bulk up. My mates are always giving me grief about my scrawny frame while they work on their beach muscles, but I know how hard it is to run a marathon already without having to lug all that muscle bulk with me.
Cameron

In the words of legendary Anchorman, Ron Burgundy, "the only way to bag a classy lady is to give her two tickets to the gun show." As much as I admire Will Ferrell's brilliant one liners and his perfect 'David' statue physique (anyone who has watched this movie will one hundred percent know that I am kidding about the body), I'd have to disagree. A fit, sun kissed (sunscreen applied of course) healthy looking boy, to me, is a whole lot more attractive. So back the "perfect beach body" truck up and forget about your mates' pursuit of the ultimate bicep pose. I am now going to attempt to change (and hopefully succeed) the way you approach your gym routine. Its time to learn about how an appropriately designed resistance program can and will complement your training at this point in your training periodisation. As we've just hit the glorious season of spring, and the triathlon season is almost upon us, I'm going to focus on the benefits of resistance training during the specific preparation phase.

The specific preparation phase is usually six to twelve weeks long, and is the phase following the base preparatory phase. Up until this point, I hope your training has been general non-specific, and has centred on all over physical capabilities (eg. endurance, strength, power etc). The specific preparation phase is characterised by sharpening skills and techniques, the increase in training intensity and volume (although volume starts to decrease later in this period), plus time trials and interval work are introduced later in this stage, paving the way for the pre-competition phase. Let me just note here that while you may have been working on strength improvements in the gym up until now, more specific strength gains will be achieved in your regular training sessions from here on in. For example, paddles and single arm work while swimming, head winds and hills while riding, and hill repeats and sand work for running. With the added stress to your body in this phase, we are going to look at resistance training to correct muscle imbalances and posture which will ultimately prevent injury. Similar to yourself, if I mention resistance training to my endurance athletes, "bulking up" appears to be the common concern. As a result, resistance training is consistently overlooked in their training plan. So, let me be clear. This resistance training will not, I repeat, will not bulk you up.

This sport by nature produces an enormously high number of repetitions, and can place our body in quite aggressive poses, leading to muscle imbalances and potential postural problems. Consider the power needed to be created for the internal rotation of the shoulder for swimming, then jump on the bike and take a look at the harsh position we're now in with our neck extended forward, and our back and shoulders once again rounded from anywhere between one to six, seven, or even eight hours. Finish all of this off with a snowballing effect of aches and pains which are most often felt when you're running due to the impact placed on the body from this discipline. Additionally, take into account that a large percentage of us spend most of the day sitting in front of a computer, which again exacerbates these postural concerns. By recognising these imbalances and distortions as potential for injuries, we can address them in our resistance training.

Three very common postural problems occur in triathletes; the upper body, lumbar and hip area, and pronation at the feet (flat feet).

The upper body problems present as rounded shoulders, scapula protraction and a jutted forward head. Athletes will usually complain of headaches, shoulder impingement, and thoracic (upper) back strain. An ideal way of counteracting these ailments is by strengthening the opposing muscles. Exercises that use your posterior (rear) deltoids, rhomboids, lower trapezius, latissimus dorsi and external rotators of the

shoulder (rotator cuff) will help counterbalance the effects of training for triathlons. A great example is rear delt rows on a swiss ball. This will focus on all of the above muscles, while simultaneously making sure you engage your core because of the instability the ball offers.

Warning signs that there is a problem with the lumbar and hip area include a lordotic lower back (exaggerated curve of the lower back), and an anterior tilt of the pelvis. The best way I can get you to visualise these symptoms is if I refer to this as a duck posture with the backside sticking out excessively. You will commonly find knee pain, lower back pain, tight hip flexors and calves. The main opposing muscles that need to be strengthened to equalize this problem are your gluteals, hamstrings, and core muscles. A fantastic exercise that will help this is the Swiss Ball Hamstring Curl. Keep your hips high and tuck your bottom under by engaging your gluteals before you roll the ball back towards you. Engage your core muscles at the same time, and you've got yourself a great exercise. An advanced version of this is you're up for it, is the single leg version. This makes you engage your stabilizers even more. You may, however, look like you're auditioning for the circus. So if your mates poke fun at you, just tell them you know the bearded lady and she's got a mean left hook.
Flat feet or pronation distortion can occur independantly, but is also commonly found when there are problems with the lumbar and hip area as it shares some of the same contributing issues. 'Knocked knees' is huge indicator of this problem which can cause plantar fasciatis, shin splints, knee and back pain. Strengthening the ankle flexors, VMO and gluteals will help offset this problem. One of my favourite exercises is the single leg squat. It is also useful for other the prevention of other injuries, but fits in very well here too. You must make sure that your posture is correct while you're doing this though. If you don't have a trainer spotting you, fight your way through your mates checking out their dancing pecs and try to use the mirror as a guide.

When you are performing any of your exercises make sure you follow these simple rules.

- Keep your repetitions from fifteen to twenty. You will increase joint stability, improve muscular endurance and enhance the ability to resist fatigue in those muscle groups. You will not add muscle bulk to your frame.
- Make sure you are aware of what muscle groups you are supposed to be using. These exercises are not beneficial if you are simply going through the motions and 'cheating' your way through the exercise. If you can't complete fifteen to twenty repetitions cleanly, then decrease the weight… You'll only be cheating yourself! (Yes we're given a list of personal training sayings when we complete our PT course, others include, "this hurts me more than it hurts you" and "pain is only weakness leaving the body")
- The core plays such a vital role in triathlons, and it should always be considered when executing these exercises. Now that you're aware of the muscle groups you should be using to counterbalance poor posture, be creative, and turn these exercises into functional ones by adding the element of core stabilization at the same time. Use swiss balls, bosu balls, balance planks, balance disks, balance on one leg etc
- We spend all of our time moving from front to back in the saggital plane when we train. Make sure you include exercises from the other planes as well. Specifically, the frontal plane involves sideways movements (eg. Therra band lateral shoulder raises), and the transverse plane involves rotational movements (eg. Lunge with a medicine ball twist)
- When possible try to use free weights and your own body weight. This is the best way to engage stabilizers throughout the different joints in your body.

I hope this has changed your perception of resistance training as simply just a 'bulking up' tool. The correct type of training and conditioning will certainly aid in postural improvements, facilitate in preventing injuries and hopefully, keep your girlfriend off your back. As for your mates, if the bearded lady's left hook isn't all that tough, and they find out that you sent her, then at least you'll be able to out run them, without injuring yourself.