

DID YOU
GET BETTER
TODAY?

Ryan Murphy



DAN JOHN

BEFORE WE GO

An On-Going Philosophy of Lifting, Living and Learning

Foreword by TC Luoma, Editor-in-Chief, *T Nation*

Before We Go

*An Ongoing Philosophy of Lifting,
Living and Learning*

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Four Ways to Fire Up Work Capacity

WORK CAPACITY IS THAT ABILITY to perform work, which determines your level of fitness that will, in turn, determine your level of preparedness. It's an issue for people in the military and in collision sports. In fact, lifters, off-season athletes and pretty much anybody and everybody would benefit from improving work capacity.

Here are four ways to do it, three you've probably heard of and one that may surprise you.

Groundwork

Literally at your feet is one of the best pieces of training equipment I know of for building work capacity—the ground. As a child, I did judo and it built a lifelong appreciation for falling, breaking the fall and the art of subtle movement. It also taught me to roll in every direction, cartwheel, leap over people (more fun than you think) and not break anything in the process.

When Ken Shamrock's book *Inside the Lion's Den* came out, I saw a gap in my coaching. He recommended a great deal of basic tumbling, and I was inspired to program the same things I'd learned as a child.

- Forward roll
- Shoulder roll
- Various crawls
- Cartwheels
- Basic tumbling combinations

The impact on our athletes was immediate. A shoulder injury plague disappeared, soccer players learned to pop back up into play like football players, and the general conditioning of everyone improved overnight.

Basic rolling—and I include the Turkish getup here—can also be considered dynamic foam rolling. Rolling around opens things up and seems to knit us back into place at the same time.

Aside from teaching a valuable skill, tumbling and rolling can improve work capacity and simultaneously change body composition. You'll be surprised how tired and sweaty you get from doing five reps of tumbling moves.

Hills, Drags, Loaded Sprints

The next great way to build capacity is running, pushing or dragging with a load. Generally, I put these activities in the same category as loaded carries. Hill sprints have been my basic coaching tool for training explosiveness to throwers since...forever.

For whatever reason, it's nearly impossible to hurt yourself while sprinting uphill. It's certainly self-limiting when a tired athlete doesn't have the energy to hurt himself.

Running downhill, of course, is another issue. I don't trust 250-pound throwers sprinting downhill. There's this thing called "physics," and even though I don't understand the math, I can only see bad things happening from small refrigerators hurling themselves down a hill.

Today, you can mimic hill sprints in the gym using Prowlers or sleds. The trouble is, people overload these implements, which takes the “snap” out of the movement. It’s a matter of feel, of course, but both too light and too heavy make these exercises less valuable.

There are so many factors involved (asphalt versus grass, the make and model of the device, the number of runners on the bottom) that I can’t give load recommendations, but err on the side of lighter. If the action makes you look more like a sprinter and less like a plough horse, you have it right.

Don’t “wallow,” as Coach Maughan used to tell us at Utah State when we did sled pulls.

Complexes Made Simple

For years, I’ve introduced complexes to my athletes at times when I thought we needed a bit more muscle mass. My definition of a complex is simple. A complex is a series of lifts back to back where you finish the reps of one lift before moving on to the next. The barbell only leaves your hands or touches the floor after all of the lifts are completed. You can do them with barbells, dumbbells or kettlebells.

The key to organizing a complex is to make sure the bar passes over your head in some kind of logical manner. In other words, if you do rows followed by back squats, how did the bar get there? You need at least one intermediate move to get the bar onto your shoulders for the back squats. I try to have the bar pass backward over the head after a few lifts, but I only pass it forward again once.

When you initially try these, use a broomstick. It’ll save some wasted effort and awkwardness if you get the hang of the transitions before you add weight.

When I want to increase work capacity and build mass, I only assign one complex for a six-week assault on bulking.

There are several reasons for this. First, it helps to master the combination of movements. I can whip up a new complex in a manner of minutes, and that may be great if you're in love with variations, but sadly, those with the most variations in their training are usually the weakest and skinniest.

Second, this complex has a nice mix of pushing, pulling, squatting and bending with just enough rest between to allow some recovery.

Finally, complexes are, well, complex. I don't want you putting the bar down and trying to remember how to do this or that. I want you to stress and strain for those last seconds.

Try to recall my definition—a complex is a series of lifts performed back to back where you finish the reps of one lift before moving on to the next. The barbell only leaves your hands or touches the floor after all of the lifts are complete.

With that in mind, here's my favorite complex:

- Row
- Clean
- Front squat
- Military press
- Back squat
- Good morning

If the workout calls for eight repetitions, you need to do eight rows, followed by eight cleans, eight front squats, eight military presses, eight back squats and then eight good mornings.

Don't load up the bar the first few times you attempt these, though. Trust me, it's a bad idea.

Tumbling, loaded sprints and complexes are amazingly simple ways to increase work capacity.

The other method is simple, too, but it may not make sense at first.

The Deprivation Effect

I've heard hundreds of testimonials from people who bravely assert that they're going to start some tough diet next Monday. These seemingly brave people have all the energy and drive to win several Super Bowls, Olympic championships and World Wars.

Of course, come next Tuesday, I often get a long list of excuses as to why "this ONE time" they couldn't adhere to the diet program.

I know why. Deprivation is tough. Humans seem to be hard-wired to not being able to do something. Yet amazingly, deprivation often works wonders.

If your favorite gym closes down, you might suddenly notice the park next to your house is actually a perfect training facility. Arnold used this method in his youth. He'd gather up his friends, go off into the woods with their equipment and train. He'd choose a lift and just keep doing it over and over. There's more to this, but the idea of leaving the comfy confines of the normal gym to venture out will change your methods of training forever.

Many of us didn't allow our sons and daughters to watch TV on school nights. Maybe they miss some popular culture, but they become voracious readers and get skilled at games and sports. That's the way deprivation works. You give up something and gain something that might even be better.

Probably the only thing you shouldn't deprive yourself of, though, is sleep. That tends to be a dead end for most people.

So, add the floor (tumbling), some hills (sleds and the like) and a classic way of barbell training (complexes) to your training to increase your work capacity.

Before We Go

In addition, consider increasing your work capacity by depriving yourself of some things—the perfect gym, the best equipment, TV or whatever it is that keeps you from focusing on living a full life.

It's hard to manage, but it's completely worth the effort.

For More from Dan—Wandering Weights: Our Epic Journey through All Things Heavy

SOMETIMES YOU MISS THE MOST interesting training-related articles. Sometimes the ideas in the most talked-about articles are confusing. You're not sure what to think.

Sometimes Dan just makes you laugh.

We've got you covered! Each Wednesday Dan gives us a short overview of what he's reading and what he's thinking about while he reads. All you have to do to get his free weekly review is to sign up.

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