

How to Strength Train Athletes, Locking Out on the MedX Chest Press, and Using Supports for Nautilus Machines

High intensity strength training is a vital element in improving an athlete's physical condition. It's necessary to note that designing a workout program depends on the specific sport of your client. Stimulating the specific muscles involved in a certain sport would greatly help an athlete's strength and conditioning.

How to strength train athletes

Training an athlete is basically the same as training anybody else. Of course, there may be some specific considerations that you want to address with athletes depending on the specific sport or athletic event that they are involved in.

One of the things that we should address is the misconception around functional training and that you need to design an exercise program that mimics what an athlete is doing in their sport or in their athletic event.

What you first have to understand is that those skills and athletic abilities are developed completely differently and very specifically and not associated with the physical conditioning standpoint. The development of sports skills is a neurological based event. It is acquisition of learning - mind and muscle connection. This would fall under the scientific discipline known as motor learning.

As soon as you start to train a client and develop an exercise that appears to be similar to what they might be doing on the field, you're just creating a separate skill. Whatever you're doing in the gym is simply you're developing a skill of performing a specific exercise. You are training and conditioning the body to be physically more capable. You're not doing something that's going to make it transferable to the field or make your client a better athlete skill wise.

Another way of looking at it is we're building the raw materials. In other words, we are developing muscular strength, power, and endurance. We are enhancing flexibility. We are enhancing cardiovascular efficiency and so forth. All of those physical attributes are going to be enhanced. The body is going to be more able to perform and have those

capacities that an athlete needs. But it's important to note that the skill-based training is a separate thing. It's done outside of the gym doing very specific training drills, practices, rehearsals, and things like that. Our job as trainers is to build those raw materials.

With that in mind, you're going to train an athlete in a very similar way to how you will train anybody else. The only slight difference that you would give consideration to is that you may utilize certain exercises in the training to work on muscle groups that are heavily used in the sport in such a way that you want to provide protection.

For example, for a football player you definitely want to build their neck strength because it's going to help protect their neck and their head. If you're training a golfer, then the torso rotation or the rotary torso machine is going to be very important because it develops those muscles that rotate the torso which is very heavily used in driving a golf ball and hitting a golf ball. If you're training a runner, you can add some calf exercises and tibia exercises to minimize the risk of shin splints which is very common in runners.

Certainly, you can customize the program a little bit in terms of the choice of exercises and how you can structure the routine. But other than that, you're trying to build a full body strength and conditioning of all the major muscle groups. You're trying to involve all the same principles that we apply with anybody else.

How to sell high intensity strength training to athletes

The high intensity idea of training twice a week, 30-minute a session is a hard sell especially for athletes who are exposed to coaching folklore and trainers that act like they've got some special, magical, functional base program that's going to be specifically transferrable and have some magic effect on making them a better athlete.

So here are some strategies that you can do:

- Discuss that the purpose of training is building the raw materials to make the body as strong and capable for the specific sport.
- Point out specific equipment that you have that helps strengthen more effectively certain body parts and muscle groups that protects them from injury.
- Emphasize that training twice a week, 30-minute a session is the most efficient way of training.

We probably have more success in this area if we're talking about the children of our existing client. I think it is a much easier sell because they are already onboard with the program. They already know us and trust us and have that respect for what we're doing.

Locking out on the MedX Chest Press

Obviously, the idea of not locking out on a pressing movement (leg press, overhead press, or chest press) where you would be just pressing in a straight line back and forth is because the direction of force is completely in line with the bones. And when you lock out technically there is no effective lever to impose any load on the musculature at that point. It is just being supported by the bones and the joints so obviously we don't lock out. We keep just a slight bend in the joint in question to keep a little bit of lever in applying that load at that position.

With the MedX Chest Press or another chest press that has a converging nature to it, you do have this situation where even if you were to lock out there is still a load and a lever being applied to the pectoral muscles, the chest musculature. Then the question becomes do you allow that lockout or whatever.

Let's address the proper form for this certain exercise. As you lay back against the seat pad or the back pad you would lay back, keep your chest elevated, there literally shouldn't be a little bit of an arch or an extension in your low back. Your rib cage and your chest area are elevated. Your shoulders are driven down and back keeping them fixed into the back pad. As you press forward and allow the arms to converge together you are not changing any of that relationship I just described. In other words, you don't slump your chest, you don't hunch your shoulders, you don't shrug, and you don't allow your shoulders to roll forward away from the back pad. If you maintain that posture and positioning and then you press and the arms come together and you abduct the arms together and so forth, you can essentially have your elbows lockout and still have a meaningful load in the pectoral muscles of the chest.

In that case, I do two things. I can have that full extension of the elbows, but I also apply the squeeze contraction for a moment. In many of the rotary single joint movements you perform the positive movement, pause in the contracted position for a second or two and then return. I do pause in that contracted position on the MedX Chest Press, keeping the contraction, squeezing the pectoral muscles for a second or two before performing that turn around and come back down through the negative.

One of the things you have to watch for in terms of maintaining a load on the pecs is keeping those shoulders down and back, keeping the chest elevated, not slumping or hunching, or rounding the shoulders forward. There are a lot of things that people can do wrong on this exercise. If they are doing some of those other form discrepancies, they could be unloading the pecs and not training effectively.

Using foam, blocks, or supports for seat bolstering

This idea of using memory foam or some other pads and things like that to provide support, I definitely advocate that in certain situations. I have a lot of various little pads, foam neck rolls, and lumbar support pads.

I use that on the MedX Chest Press to put down in their lower lumbar region and that causes them to get their back in an extended position. It keeps that back up and extended and signals them to keep that posture and to keep that chest up. On the MedX Leg Press, whether it is the regular leg press or the avenger, it's the same type of seat. I've got a lumbar support, a lumbar roll that I do put under their lower lumbar region to support their back on that exercise. Obviously, there are a number of exercises where I may put a head pad or a neck roll behind their head to help hold their head and neck neutral.

On occasion I've used it on either the MedX Seated Leg Curl or the Leg Extension. I can't really use it all the time because the back pad is not tall enough for really tall individuals. I don't think it's a bad back pad. It's just that for some people it doesn't extend far enough up to be behind their head so you can't really put a head pad behind them on that.

For the Nautilus One Leg Press where the seat is too low for a lot of people even with the angle of the back seat increased. In that machine where you're six inches off in your positioning if you are sitting on the back pad, I would do one of two things. I would get rid of that machine and get a better one. Or I would try to construct something to permanently raise that seat pad up. You could remove the seat pad and underneath the seat pad get a big spacer block, drill some holes in it, and you could take and mount that seat pad six inches higher and have it permanently mounted and fixed in that position so that you don't need any supplementary seat pads to put on there.

In lieu of that, you'd have to come up with some elevation pad like a bolster pad to lay on top of the seat pad. You might have a tendency for that thing to move around. I think if you're sitting on it, it would probably stay pretty fixed.



But you can't always count on that for beginners. When you look at applying this across the board to all the different types of clients and some people that are not just very skilled and they don't have very good control and have form discrepancies and things, I would want to try to eliminate any potential problems and minimize the need for getting overly complicated with form and positioning.

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