

Stuart Martin: It's just Snatch, Clean & Jerk, Squats and Pulls



Figure 1 Stuart Martin (centre) is the British Weight Lifting Talent Pathway Manager and Manager of the England Weight Lifting Team which brought home 6 medals at the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

In a recent session I was recently asked by a coach, why do you do so many random accessory exercises (it wasn't that eloquently phrased, but you get the gist).

Why...? Well it's not because arbitrary random stuff is the secret to success. If you're in the back end of a session and you've not done at least one variation/derivative of the Competition lifts and 1-2 variations of a Squat, Pull, Press and/or Row then the training principle of specificity might have something to say about the effectiveness of your training. To answer the question, you need to challenge yourself to move past the little bits which 100% of good weightlifting coaches know transfer directly to lifting performance to the 1-2 accessory exercises at the end of a training session that should exist.

Accessories at the end of peoples training isn't uncommon but the approach is where the conflict lies. So, let's start by asking yourself the question, what is an accessory?

Definition of “Accessory”: *a thing which can be added to something else in order to make it more useful, versatile, or attractive.*

So what things are useful in weightlifting. The list can be as broad as you make it but let's keep it simple. Few people would disagree that being a good weightlifter requires the following physical abilities; Skill, Balance, Power & Strength.

Skill - we develop this through quality practice of the competition lifts and by developing specific strength which helps us hold the appropriate postures and shapes.

Balance - to apply big forces to the barbell we need to maintain our balance, you can't accurately fire a cannon from a canoe.

Power & Strength - weightlifting requires us to move heavy weights relatively fast to be successful.

Traditional training lets us develop the majority of what we need as beginners, but as lifters graduate traditional training doesn't always allow us enough variation or emphasis on specific weaknesses to develop the physical qualities which will advance our long-term capabilities. Let's start by considering the 3 core training principles.

The principle of variation, being capable at practicing a range of accessory exercises is essential to avoid psychological staleness and overuse injuries.

1. Your body needs to function inside and outside of the gym to avoid injury.
2. The goal is to make every lift the same, but not every lift will be, physical stability to handle the variation is essential.

The competition lifts and traditional lifts will remain a fairly consistent features of the training process, so accessories are a great place to create this variation to ensure we create new training stimuli and are adaptable to the rigours of daily life.

The principle of overload, The competition lifts and traditional exercises are multi-joint movements and create general overload of the muscular system but will not emphasise specific muscle groups. Weak links in the chain will limit the progress of the competition lifts or traditional exercises. Accessory exercises which target the development of specific physical motor abilities are essential for intermediate and advance lifters. Targeted bodybuilding style training to overload weak muscle groups will be required to build big muscle

The principle of specificity, adaptation to training is highly specific, Its why regular quality practice of the competition lifts and other traditional (transferable) exercises is essential to

increase performance. If you are looking to raise the potential of a specific weak motor abilities the same rules apply. The competition lifts develop power at one point of the force-velocity curve, to improve the velocity element of power generally other non-weightlifting exercises can be more effective for increasing the rate at which we produce force, which will indirectly raise our ability to accelerate the bar.

So what does that mean practically? To keep things simple, the following 3 key categories of training are a good start point for prescribing accessories for weightlifting.

Accessory option 1 - Stability training, helps to maintain or return the body to a position of balance to avoid injury.

Volume - 18-24 total reps per exercise, x 1-2 exercises

Intensity - Moderate-High (2-3 reps in reserve)

Exercise complexity - non-specific and multi-joint, create instability (single leg, single arm or added perturbations are great options)

Objective - maintain balance, try not to fall over or drop the implement

Accessory option 2 - Hypertrophy Training (bodybuilding), helps us increase muscle mass, bigger muscles = bigger forces and less weak links in the chain.

Volume - 25-40 total reps per exercise, x 2-3 exercises

Intensity - Moderate but to fatigue (0-2 reps in reserve)

Exercise Complexity - simple, specific and single joint

Objective - get a pump

Accessory option 3 - Power training, helps us to increase our general ability to move heavy loads as fast as possible

Volume - 18-24 reps per exercise, x 2-3 exercises

Intensity - moderate

Exercise Complexity - simple and relative to athlete's co-ordination

Objective - move fast and be explosive, INTENT, INTENT, INTENT!