

## Stuart Martin: Fail to Prepare? Then prepare to fail (Part 1 - Nutrition)



*Figure 1: Stuart Martin (left) 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.*

If there's one thing any good weightlifter will tell you it is that glory is gained on the platform, what you lift out there is what matters most if you're looking for the satisfying nod of approval from your role models or team mates and eventually a place in weightlifting Valhalla.

Unless you're one of the rare immortals that has a 20kg deficit between what you can lift in training and what you can lift fuelled from the burst of adrenaline then the chances are that Stepping onto the platform can be daunting and sometimes quite a disappointing experience. You turn up part boiled from making weight with super high expectations and often walk away having chased PBs in excess of your best training total, leaving the day

feeling quite underwhelmed with a similar total to last time and failing to properly celebrate all the hard work you put in to get you there, does that sound familiar? Well-read on because this one's for you.

Step 1 of turning your disappointment into gains is to REVIEW what you actually do in competition! Consider the following 3 questions

1. How did you cut bodyweight?
2. How many lifts do you make out of 6?
3. What were your expectations?

**Question 1** – How do you cut bodyweight? To identify if you cut bodyweight effectively, consider the following 3 questions;

1. Do you cut more than 2% in the final 7 days?
2. Do you drop more than 5% in the final 5 weeks?
3. Are you significantly taller than most of your competitors?

**If you answered Yes to question 1**, consider how you cut your final bodyweight... generally good practice shows positive effects on relative power from cutting around 2% bodyweight but a range of negative physiological effects from attempting to cut >5%. If you cut around 2% but struggle still, consider the way you cut your final few Kg's, there are a variety of options with varying degrees of safety, effectiveness and personal preference. Common methods include;

- water/fibre manipulation
- Calorie restriction
- Dehydration (sauna or salt bath)

Each has strengths and weaknesses, visit a nutritionist and learn a bit more about the options, talk through your process and ask them to help you find a more effective method.

**If you answered yes to question 2**, you're probably the kind of person who loves food and maybe doesn't exercise moderation very well when there is no "pressure" on you? I'm certainly guilty for that as are many of us, #NoCarbsbeforeMarbs! Let me guess, if you're this type of lifter, you're crushing PBs about 5-7 weeks out and then struggling to match them at competition? Why I hear you ask, because during training you're sitting in a massive calorie surplus fuelling your sessions and recovering effectively, then when you're in the final stages of preparation you're running on fumes, sitting in a massive calorie deficit which is out of whack with the fuel required to complete your training, knocking your confidence and

scraping your way on to the competition scale narrowly avoiding a trip to A&E. The logical solutions to this challenge are;

**Option 1** - Keep eating, go up a class, embrace your lifestyle choices without guilt and enjoy the gains!

**Option 2** – Change your method. In the perfect world you would steadily increase your calories across the transition weeks following each competition, gaining 0.2-0.5kg a week until you level out around 3-5% above your weight class, ready to go back into full training fitter, healthier and with more lean muscle mass for your efforts. But if this doesn't work for you because you're the kind of person who has to eat every food you've seen on Instagram posts for the previous 5 weeks of making weight until you feel sick then put a limit on the length of your binge. Start to tighten up on the amount and frequency of junk you consume after that date, hoping that the damage done isn't too high and that small healthy food choices will drop your calories significantly enough that by the time you've built up the courage to step on the scale again to assess the damage, you're back to fluctuating around that 3-5% mark.

**If you answered Yes to question 3** then the answer should seem fairly logical... pump up those calories and accept that it's time for a level up to the next weight category. Rarely do effectively managed gains in bodyweight (specifically lean mass) have a negative impact on weightlifting performance. Low bodyweight is quite often the biggest problem holding lifters back from realising their potential in the sport of weightlifting. The idea of moving up a category can of course be daunting for a number of reasons like body image, increase in qualification standards & medal zones, higher food bills etc. But if you care to see your performance on the platform increase, it's quite often the right decision to take and the medium-term gains to be made are often significantly in excess of your previous ranking at a lighter bodyweight.

Unless you're already winning the medals and producing the performances you are satisfied with then invest in decisions which benefit your development long-term.