

Be not afraid of growing slowly,

Be afraid only of standing still.

Chinese proverb

A personal return on experience from over 30 years strength sports experience.

By Mark Notschaele

5. Decades of knowledge in a nutshell

Mindset

If you try a personal best a certain exercise and already think “it will be heavy”, unrack it and it crosses your mind it is heavy, or alternatively think “it will not be heavy”...very likely you are lost and might as well not even unrack the barbell. You will need to learn to think positive and be confident when breaking through your personal barriers. It starts with learning to think “I will feel what I expected – I am prepared and programmed to do this”. A good start is to learn to treat light and easy weights as heavy and heavy as light. Exercise movements take a several 1000 reps to be engrained in your CNS (central Nervous System). If you do the light reps sloppy, that is also what you will do when moving to heavier weights. Remember that changing habits of bad form thus also take 1000-s of reps to change.



To prepare for personal best efforts, a good practice is to plant and program an vivid image in your head what you want to look like, how you will feel while doing your personal record attempt, doing your pose on stage, and even what you will feel afterwards. I use simple forms of self-hypnosis at quiet moments during the day to establish that. I use relaxation and imagining practices often before going to sleep to go through the emotions of doing heavy attempts, posing routines etc. Vivid imaginations are for the brain very close to the real thing.

My relaxation method is simple: you lie down with arms beside you and concentrate only on your breathing. I do this on my bed, with no music and complete silence. Blend out all other thoughts (that is actually the difficult part. Breathe through the stomach and feel your belly go up and down. After some minutes your breathing and heartbeat will now be very relaxed. Think of nothing but breathing. Now image that your right leg is getting real warm, just by thinking and concentrating on it. You do the same for your left leg, left arm, right arm, one limb at a time. After that you imaging that your left leg is getting very light, feels almost no gravity. Again you do this for your other limbs, one at a time. I actually once in a while have an arm of leg “lift off” during this exercise. Keep concentrating on your breathing as described before. If you did these relaxation practices you will be in a state of total relaxation. Now I start to image, for instance, the whole routine of preparing, doing and wrapping up my next personal best effort in squat. I imagine how it feels to put on the knee wraps, suit, belt, the sounds and smell of the gym, the music I will play when doing the attempt. I feel the actual weight on my shoulders, feel how my body does the motions, the rush to get out of the hole, how it feels to stand there with the weight after the attempt and how it falls back into the rack. I also imagine what the success will feel like with my wraps coming off. After this I

still continue lying there concentrating on my breathing for a while – and wrap up by stretching my whole body, which usually gives the feeling of getting up with the tingling and shivering feeling in the whole body – jus as you get up in the morning after a real good nights sleep.

If you learn to practice this regularly, you a creating a program which you can call upon when doing the real thing – and not feel surprised. Of course you can apply this to many aspects of “mastery” in your life. Sport, but also exams, important meetings, public speaking.

Everyone has its own “routine” before doing personal best attempt. Some people shout, need to be beating or slapped in the face to get the adrenaline running. There is nothing wrong with all that, but in the end it all boils down to find a way to get real concentrated on the job to be done and already know what you will feel and do during the event before you started. If you feel surprised when unracking a weight, odds are against you of breaking records.

