

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

4. Lifting forever

The year is 1981. I am 17 years old, and I am growing up in Zeeuws Vlaanderen, Netherlands. The main and very much only sports available in the village Sluiskil I grew up in are soccer for boys and handball for girls.

From the age of 6 till 16 I thus played soccer and loved it. I was fan of Ajax and Barry Hulshoff the bearded right wing defender - the position I played in the field. I liked soccer above all or at least thought I did, lacking any experience with alternatives. For sure the achievements of Ajax and the Dutch soccer teams were great motivators in the 70's to play soccer as a youngster. As a disrupting milestone and in this 10 years streak, I can mention that I rebelled a bit and at 15 I quit being an altarboy in the local catholic monastery, and at 16 I quit soccer. Quitting the altarboy mission was driven by changing interests on what to do with weekday and Saturday evenings. Quitting the soccer team was due to team atmosphere being rockbottom, since we lost almost all our games that year.

We had a small number of players in the village in the various age groups, and our team had many young players of 16 and 17 with dispensation to play against 18 and 19 year olds. In physical development a huge difference at that age, and loosing most games made the older players in our team cranky and molest dressing rooms. It hit rock bottom when a fan of ours molested a linesman. I felt miserable, unable to influence the atmosphere. I remember I did not mind losing too much, as long we played our tactics well, and if I felt for myself that I played well. Our trainer kept telling us that due to our age our team would stay together long as a team, eventual we would start to win again for sure. My parents noticed my growing discontent and encouraged me to make the right choice to not be voluntary miserable for a long time. So I decided to quit the team. I ended up telling my trainer that I could not come to training anymore because I had to study more for school - a chicken way out. The trainer did not ask any further questions.

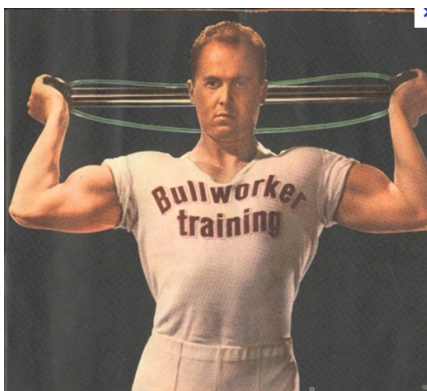
For the next 2 years I changed my focus away from any kind of sports to being a typical adolescent with ditto activities. So from 16 till a few days before my 18th birthday I enthusiastically concentrated on driving and repairing my 50cc motorbike, a Zündapp GTS 50, and going out to the Disco. In the process learning to tolerate a few beers here and there and discovering the nice sides of girlfriends. During that period I did no sports whatsoever, apart from the school gymnastics. Which was some volleyball, basketball and thing like that at very basic level.

Then, a few weeks before my 18th birthday at the Zeldenrust Atheneum our teacher got more enthusiastic and made us do a power-circle-training. I participated fanatically because I immediately liked the movements, the intensity and feeling of it. Interestingly enough this resulted in my collapse – I

was sick during 2 days seeing all black dots dancing in front of my eyes. It suddenly dawned on me that at near 18 years old, I had the physical condition of a wet towel.

In the same period, Roland joined our school, the Zeldenrust Atheneum that year, moving from Veldhoven. We rapidly became close friends. One day, going out in Terneuzen, we spotted some guys with black "KSC Groovy T-shirts". We hung out mainly at Disco 2000. A very loud and crowded disco. In those days "bodybuilding" and "powerlifting" was pretty well unknown, at least to us, and there were no public gyms to my knowledge in the area we grew up in. I cannot even recall having seen any sort of "strength" magazine in those days. The tight t-shirts had the logo of a small posing bodybuilder and the text under it "We Are Growing" – and we were truly amazed and impressed by the size of the guys. We could not stop staring at them. Roland even knew one of them: "Kees van de Meer", who happened to live in the same street in Terneuzen as himself. We felt lots of respect and for sure did not dare to approach them and ask them what they were doing to get this big. But we were fascinated.

After and due to my "black dots" experience and seeing the "KSC Groovy" guys, Roland and I started to



device plans to get stronger and bigger – and we desperately wanted to wear a "KSC Groovy" t-shirt of our own at some point. We knew we would need to deserve it one way or another and had to be pretty big to look good in it. Since we knew of no available gyms and did not dare to ask the "Groovy guys", but saw advert of some home training equipment in magazines (yes the European version of the "Atlas" adverts ..) we set our sights on starting some serious home training. For my 18th birthday present, March 17th 1981, I persuaded my mother to go shopping with me in Sas van Gent at the local sport store and buy me a "Bullworker" !

A fine piece of equipment to get started out. I still have one at my house now. For the next 6 months I did exactly what the booklet said: Once a day some dozen isometric exercises for 8 seconds static holds each. I did this with such a fanatics, that I swear that I did not miss a single day in those whole 6 months – even being it very early morning or very late at night. This is where my parents must have started to worry about my almost "sacred" sticking to the plan and hearing the "squeaks" of the bullworker every day. Think they went from being happy that finally I started to do some sports again, to disbelieve and shaking their head about me being so "hooked" on this. In those days and period to come I was also very much more fanatic at sticking to my "strength" plan, my Zündapp, girls and going out versus attend diligently to my school duties, which in hind sight was clearly observed by my parents as "wrong priorities". One also needs to be aware that the whole popularizing "fitness" wave as we know it know anno 2012 did not exist yet, so weightlifting had an image of something very un-socialized, louche and a very much seen as a weird sub-scene and mingling with the wrong kind of people.

The bullworker training did really work. I noticed my arms develop, getting a slight V in my back, develop the onset of a six-pack. At school, at gym classes the other boys started to note my developments. I

remember that for the first time being asked to flex my biceps “again” and get looks of surprise and questions on how on earth I developed that. Probably the surprise effect was more that I had always been rather skinny, invisible, timid boy. As a typical teenager I was very unsure of myself. I remember vividly that I was even afraid to show myself naked to the other boys after the shower at school gymnastics, and always tried to dry off and dress inside the closed shower cabin. This was noticed by the rest of the boys. Roland and I even got into a fight with some others because they stole and soaked my underwear in an attempt to lure me out of my dressing routine. I had to come out of the shower and Roland stood up for me and took some blows, bleeding from a cut under one eye. That was the only time I ended up at the school director and Roland and I got suspended for the rest of the day to “cool off”. At least, to the positive, that incident made me change my dressing routine, and stopped further harassment.

The training routine I stuck to catapulted me into one of the more “muscular” boys. Mind you this is all very relative and just comparing to the “other boys”, but indeed the development of arms, shoulders, back getting a slight “V” could not be overlooked and got noticed. My legs had always been quite developed due to ten years of soccer practice.

Slowly I added some extra gimmicks to my “home gym” equipment. An “Spring Expander”, A heavy bending-spring with handles to “bend” it and handgrip “squeezers”. I remember having the poster with expander exercises stuck on my bedroom wardrobe door and admiring the model who figured in the exercise photos. He looked so darn athletic. I realized I needed more knowledge on training to get ahead.

In those days my parents were member of a mail book club, and one day I spotted Arnold Schwarzeneggers book "bodybuilding" in the catalogue. Very much his autobiography and his view on his take at the best training routines in one book. The cover picture shown just dropped my jaw. Without my parents noticing I snuck the book onto the order form. When it came in my mother was quite mad at me, probably due to my secret action, but also seeing the huge muscles of Arnold on the cover most likely made her worry about what the heck I was up to. Nothing good in her eyes. I got to keep the book after some negotiations (I paid it out of my pocket money), and read it in one go. The story of Arnold's struggle for recognition was truly inspiring! I knew what was ahead for me now. I continued to focus on training even more. Unfortunately also on going out to the disco. I admit that I neglected my school duties to much during those days. My results in school made my father disappointed and led to a clash, where he ripped the "expander exercise poster" off the wall and shred it to pieces. Also the food supplements I used at that time, see weed tablets (not sure where we picked up this stuff would do any good to build muscle), got thrown in the bin. I cried my head off, but it did not stop me from continuing working out. It just made me more deliberate in carrying on with it.

The one good memorable day, after summer in 1981 finally a real gym started in our neighbourhood! Roland had started to study in Eindhoven, and since I flunked my exam (I already admitted that I was distracted from school duties) on the athenaeum and thus stayed in Sluisil for another year I decided to go there. It was Krijn Dobbelaer who started a powerlifting gym called “Sandow” in the “bomvrije” in Terneuzen – a former first world war ammunition storage bunker with massive walls and arches and

thus had the look of a real dungeon. I had no idea of the difference between Powerlifting and Bodybuilding and the term “Fitness” had not even been invented back then I guess. In that time I also took up Jiu-Jitsu in Axel. So I worked out 2x per week in Krijns gym, and 2x per week doing martial arts. My parents were very worried that I again had my focus wrong, and would again not make the exams, but the onset of discipline in sports started to carry over and also the fact it was now the second time around (and less party times with Roland) made me get it all balanced and straightened out.

The first encounter with real weightlifting at Krijns gym was one of a kind. We had to do a stretching warm-up routine together as group (I still use the same warm up routine these day). I saw Krijn press 120kg at just over 60kg bodyweight. The gym was equipped with all self-made equipment, included crudely shaped weights, cut out steel plates with a blowtorch. No chrome and mirrors at all. Krijn put a lot of focus on good full movements vs. ego boosting through increasing weights on the barbells. He told us to rub our legs with “Midelgan” – to heat up the muscles. The stench of ointment enhanced the experience. Krijn got us cheap but functioning self made weightlifting belts made out of a bright green colored used drive belt, and told us to buy heel-joint protectors, and wear them as knee wraps (and thus a nice snug fit for sure). We learned to “buddy” and “spot each other”. Krijn appointed matching couples as training partners and made us steps through the training as a group. This approach, which is very uncommon these days in modern gyms, of course taught us a lot of discipline and got us good individual attention. As far as progressing on weights - Krijn would say when you were allowed to add weight and how much. He always went for perfection on the movement first.

At a training session a few months after the start, a person visiting the gym approached me and watching from close up as I was doing triceps extensions – asking Krijn “how long I already trained” seen my evident development of muscles. Krijn responded "a few months" and that I am "just responding very fast to the training". This gave me a real boost. Despite all my fanatics, I was not able to make it to participate in the first powerlifting contest I was invited to. This due to my weight/strength ratio compared to others in the gym. I was 1.85m tall weighed 68 kg and could bench 67 kg, squat 80, deadlift 120... of course I felt disappointed, but in the end it just drove me to train harder, and even more determined, realizing that as a tall and skinny youngster I had a long way ahead to fill my frame up with muscles.

Later in early 1982 we (Roland and I) got into contact with the “KSC Groovy” guys I mentioned earlier in the story. We managed to get invited to work out at their gym and get a perspective outlook of getting our so much desired T-Shirts !! So I moved from Krijns gym to KSC Groovy ! That gym was located in Axel, and was well hidden over a pub called “Groovy”. There were no trainers, no routines to use and just a lot of self made equipment available. We paid a small fee and could get the key from the bartender whenever the pub was open. The main point there was “powerlifting” and when the heavy guns came out to do deadlifts, downstairs in the pub you could hear the pounding of the weights on the wooden ceiling and see dust float down in the bar. In the groovy gym I have never seen any fights, the



presence of the bigger guys having a beer after the workout had a very calming and selective effect on the visiting audience. We used routines I picked up at Krijns gym, mimicked what the guys did at the Groovy gym, and what we read from Schwarzeneggers book. Roland was also working out at university in Eindhoven, where they did real old fashioned strength training movements, swinging weights from left to right, one arm dumbbell raises - that kind of stuff. So we just used all that mixed up.

I usually went to the gym on my bicycle or Zundapp, but at some point a powerlifter from my village also training there, offered me to pick me up in his red Corvette Camaro. Although the offer was very tempting, I probably rightfully judged that this would not do any good to the already existing and growing disapproval of my parents of my weightlifting fanatics.



Finally we got our Groovy T-shirts. We proudly paraded them around when we went out. We had a real feeling of having reached some genuine milestone. I need to mention that we were not happy that one of friends, who got infected by us on working out, and just started out at the Groovy gym got to wear the shirts as well. In our eyes not living up to being strong and muscular enough to do justice to the "we are growing" statement on the shirt. We were just fanatic and proud, and did not want to have the hard fought image of the shirts being influenced

negatively.

Fall 1982 – I started to study Mechanical Engineering in Eindhoven and took up working out at the Essbra gym. The gym was owned by Hein Essink Harry van den Branden (Ess-Bra!). This was a next dimension for me – super large gym, lots of fancy new equipment and machines, mirrors, chrome, way more bigger guys that I had ever seen for real, very good looking girls and on top of it all “mature women” trying to seduce the younger trainees. The trainer Frits warned me openly for not going home with the lady who said she wanted to “paint a picture” of me. Guess he realized I was a “country boy” with no experience of all this big city stuff.

We shared a house with three of us, Roland, John Bremmers (Brummel) and myself – with Oscar vd Weide (Ozzie) being a very regular visitor and becoming my long term training buddy.

Since we soon realized that the gym was quite a cost for us as students – we decided to equip our “student gym” at home in the 3 by 3 meter shed behind the house. We bought some 100kg of weights, a clunky lat pull machine. The pulley had no bearings and was very heavy going to use. We screwed some swing hooks - to put a bar through it - in the wooden beams of the ceiling to do pull-ups. The “weight bench” we had was literally a slightly reinforced wooden apple-crate. We had no weight supports, so just handed each other the weights and became very good “spotters” through this. Our lives depended literally on our buddy. On one occasion I had to kick a 10 kg plate away with my knee, which had slipped from the dumbbell that Oscar held over his face as he was doing dumbbell fly’s. We did dips in my student room, since I had 2 identical heavier sturdy chairs which I got from my grandmother - which



worked well for the dips. I even convinced my father to chip into purchase cost of the equipment since this was cheaper vs. paying for the gym. I have always been a convincing economical thinker so to say.

So we started out training in our shed behind the house. There was no heating so in winter we dressed with thick sweatshirts, wool hats and gloves. The first weeks the neighbors continued to look outside their back window since they heard all the pounding, screaming and shouting many time a week in the evenings. The shed was very small and so we devised a schedule between the 4 of use to train in the shed taking turns (i.e. an early / late shift). We were pretty fanatic at all this – to the extent that I remember the occasions where Oscar and me started working out at 23:00pm on Sunday, after getting back from visits to our parents over the weekend, ending the

training at 01.00 am on Monday. Of course as a student we did not need to get up to early the next day, which was real convenient.

I soon found out that I could train near everything very well in the shed, and was able to bench my first time 100kg, without having our apple-crate collapsing - except for legs. We did not have enough weights, and no squat rack, which made it all quite dangerous. I was clearly the more fanatic and thick skulled with all this from our group, so I decided to go back to Essbra to train my legs in a heavy fashion 2x per week. 1 session in the week I did even on Friday early mornings, before going to school. So I ended up training 6 times a week at this point! This is also the period where my girlfriend at the time asked me once if the thing I was doing was really called "fitness", and when the point would come when I would feel really fit. This because I was always having sore muscles and was exhausted in the weekend. 6 sessions a week on double split was for sure overdoing things.

I started to feel the need for a goal – and as such I subscribed to do my first bodybuilding contest in 1983 – the Essbra club championships, I understood what would make me train harder and boost my progress. Having a fixed date for a contest a few months out is a great motivator and reason to be very disciplined. I guess for the first context I made all mistakes possible. I dieted on a few protein shakes and a serving of salad per day. I was clearly craving for carbs – so I bought the occasional sweets, because I needed something... (it was over Xmas time with me on my first diet with all shops full of goodies). I for sure ended up with very low fat in my body, being very ripped, but also lost significant muscle mass in the process and still had very little body symmetry overall. Especially my chest muscles were lagging, and in contrast my shoulders developed fast. What I did prove to myself was the ability to be very disciplined and carry through such a tough contest preparation. I



ended up on 5th place and the exposure to such a contest motivated me enormously. I was ready for more.

My first real contest in front of a big crowd (some 1000 people) came with the Mr Lichtstad 1984 in the stadschouwburg in Eindhoven posing on “Franky goes to Hollywoods” - “two tribes” ... I did not end in the top 3, but it boosted my willingness to train even harder for sure. The feeling to be on stage, and have people applaud for my posing was such a great feeling, it makes you feel totally warm and full of adrenaline inside – which makes all the efforts leading up to the contest worth it. I trained so hard for this contest that I once got cramps in my back muscles while making love with my girlfriend, a real one of a kind experience.



Meeting friends in my home town that did not see me for longer periods, started to ask me what the heck I had been up to. I usually told them that I was doing some internal reconstruction of my body and we had a good laugh. The reactions to how I started to look were widely varying from very positive to seemingly provoking aggression in some mainly male persons I met. Especially if girls showed an interest, the boys seemed to have an urge to show aggression towards me. With girls I sometimes had the issue that I made them feel "fat" and be discomforted with themselves. I found out that being bigger vs. average quickly gets associated with being aggressive. I ended up many times explaining that being muscular indeed means being strong but does not mean wanting to fight or prove something by smacking someone. I must add that even my training buddies accused me at times to be too gentle. I usually stepped aside when people provoked me. I just never had the desire or felt any reason to prove anything. I guess it was in the end a combination of just a sign of being confident (also because of jiu jitsu training) with just being too tired from working out during the week to get worked up when being provoked.

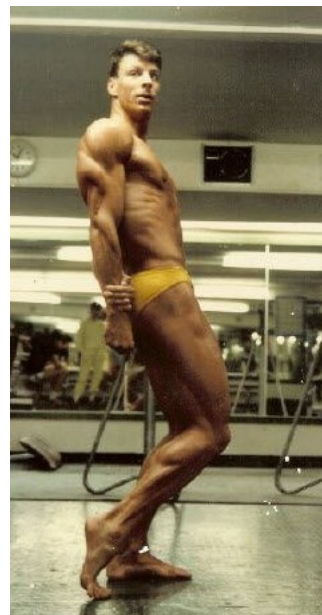
An interesting incident of confidence came one night in a bar. I was there with Oscar, Roland and John when two guys got into a fight with each other. When one of them wanted to go after the other picking up a barstool to hit him over the head, we just grabbed the barstool and told them to slug it out with bare fists or buzz off. This flabbergasted these fighters to the extent that they lost posture, and we just ended up pushing them aside so we could continue the normal bar activities of chatting and dancing. I need to be add here that next to working out Roland and Oscar did full contact Karate at the university and John was practicing Taekwondo.

In our young foolishness there were occasions were Oscar and I ended up sparring in the mensroom of a cafe, which probably looked like a real fight to others, and stopped people from entering the toilet. At the local dress up carnival a person also made the famous mistake of showing up dressed in a karate suit and making fighting moves in front of and towards Oscar. Oscar enthusiastically responded with a single

full touch kick to his midsection, which made him crawl on the floor out of breath. I think this person will still remember that carnival very well to date, celebrating in his unfortunate disguise and moves.

My sports was not limited to lifting only. Apart from some martial arts activities, we also played indoor soccer regularly. As students we had free access to an indoor hall, and could thus invite other teams for practice games, who welcomed the free facilities. At a school tournament we even ended up second place. Mostly due to Ton Pennings tactical concept he made us use, a good zone defense, and while being in defense me running around as single free player as an idiot to disturb the attackers. I have always been able to combine good stamina and running with lifting weights. And it of course helped staying lean.

My first real victory associated to working out came with a "strongest student" contest at our school in 1985. Some of my friends urged me to participate. I was hesitating a lot, because I was training all out for the next bodybuilding contest, the "Open Gelderse competition", and thought that such a contest would not fit into my preparation. I ended up going for it anyway, encouraged, pushed and persuaded by my friends. What followed was a weird experience for me. The strength difference with the other students was sort of embarrassing to me. We were asked to do as many dips as possible, hold a weight in front of us with straight arms and strength acts like that. I outright declassified the other students by an order of magnitude, and think the audience did not see much of a contest taking place. I ended up a winning a cake and a cool little trophy, a bent horseshoe, which I still have today. At the following Open Gelderse bodybuilding contest I ended up 5th place – the first open regional completion I placed in the top 5. This was a real motivator of course.



In 1985 (fall and winter) I had to do an apprentice period in Vlissingen for school, and I started to train at Randoori Jigo. The gym in Eindhoven, Essbra allowed me to keep working out at Essbra whenever I was back in town - waving the fees. At Randoori-Jigo the gym atmosphere and owner Peter was real great. Peter ended up even buying more weight plates for me, since for the squat he did not have enough of them. It was like a close family there combined with strict gym discipline. I once did not show up and stood up my training partner. Peter next time immediately reprimanded me for that. I ended up training 4 times a week, Mondays thru Thursday, since I was only during the weekdays in Vlissingen. I worked out with a single partner (whom name I do not remember anymore). I do know that the in those 6 months I gained quite some mass - going from 85kg to 97.5kg bodyweight. My partner there also made real impressive gain – not sure why, but for me stood out that his traps muscles started to develop seriously. We alternated schemes such that we concentrated on each other weaknesses. My gains were pretty impressive, but it did not dawn on my yet then that my previous 6x per week routine might have been just be overdoing it. Peter also let me take care of instructing and coaching some of the wannebee bodybuilders through their first contests periods,

something I really loved. Peter was more fixed and specialized on Judo. I ended up doing a guest pose at the gyms Christmas party. In that period I participated to the Mr Lichtstad a second time.

Coming back from Vlissingen the word was out at Essbra that I was looking for a new training buddy – and was introduced to Henny C. We had a marvelous time in “beating each other up” and becoming real good personal friends as well. When you work out 6x per week together for long period of time you truly get to know each other very well. And yes, I went back to a 6x per week routine. This is also the only time I benefitted from anabolics. Henny started to do an oral anabolics cycle they called "puppy cycle" and I tried desperately to keep up with him as he gained strength. The result was that I ended up a lot stronger, but without the health risks. These were for Henny.

In that period I experienced my so far only monetary pay off of bodybuilding. Essbra was registered as a modeling agency of some sort. I got selected to do an opening act of a fashion show in a fancy hotel. I had to carry Leonie Sazias, a prominent TV personality onstage. She was dressed as an Egyptian farao and me and a fellow bodybuilder, Rob, had to carry her up to stage through the crowd, and strike a few poses for the audience on the catwalk. For us as young students that assignment was like heaven. Free beer, dozens of dressing and undressing beautiful girls running around backstage and on top we got paid for this. In that period I had a few more of those gigs. I remember the one at the university rowing team where we did acts of strength and bodybuilding posing. Some girls at the event told me they would never have to feel afraid when walking next to me down the street. It for sure beat washing dishes in a fish restaurant, which was my other side job.

We needed to move house since the place we lived in got sold to the neighbours cheese shop, who wanted to expand. At our next very much ran down house, we rented from a Greek, we also managed to arrange a training shed. Due to this move to another part of Eindhoven, and also due to the fact that Essbra starting to make genuine hints that with some stimulating substances I could grow bigger faster, the Essbra gym started to turn more into a dating bar vs a real gym and we found a gym that was closer to the new place we lived at on the Willem de Zwijgerstraat, we shifted to train at Percy's.

To our amazement the guys and girls were a lot bigger here vs. Essbra, and working a lot harder. The trainer just did not let you go, or at least gave you grief and humiliation in public if you did not work out according to his standards and intensity. Since he was a huge black Surinam guy, this was difficult to ignore. So visits to girlfriends birthday parties were postponed to late in the even after training. Nearly no “fitness” people were frequenting this gym. It was a pure hardcore bodybuilding mekka. You had to go through a bar to get into the gym, and on Thursday Percy called for rounds of beer and peanuts after workouts in his bar.



In the first day working out there I spotted a person from the back, doing pull downs and was really impressed by the back muscle development. When the person turned around I saw it was a girl. I was just stunned. Even more so when the girl asked me if she could take turns with me at bench-press and she slapped weight on top of what I was using. All this made a new setting to work harder. When Oscar was off on a university apprentice period, I trained with another partner, which gave up on me after a few weeks. This because he said he was just not able to cope with the intensity I was forcing myself and him to train with. With Oscar we had many a session where we went way over the limits of what would be considered normal. I shouted at Oscar when doing dips, as he got grinding, whether he was the boss or his triceps, and he grunted back "me, me, me" – and did a few more reps, nearly crying. After heavy squats Oscar felt nauseous and had to go to the bathroom, but was unable to kneel in front of the toilet to vomit. We counted each other down on number of reps, loosing count on purpose and starting over again. We were calling each other lazy bastard if the other gave up before failure, forcing three more reps as a punishment. After a Saturday afternoon training, we would buy a liter of yoghurt from the local supermarket and just sit outside the gym on the curb, unable to speak, lurking on our yoghurt. We trained very often, lot of volume, lots of exercises, very intense and guess we used all routines we could get our hands on from the magazines. Obviously we were overtraining, I was still making some good gains, but Oscar stalled for periods just under 100kg in bench press. Only some years later, when I was already living in Luxembourg, after 1995, I had a phone call with Oscar, in which he told me that after we broke up as training mates, he started to train less frequent which made him crack the 100 kg bench very soon after. Those are the experiences that made me think about the right combination of intensity, training frequency and training tolerance variations between people.

From there on I continued training, switched to participating in some Natural contests. These were for sure more honest, motivating and open to compete in. The atmosphere at these contests were more relaxed. Huge guys coming in out of the blue clearly full of symptoms of anabolics abuse were not seen or at least less obvious. I won some decent prizes in those days. I always saw a contest as a motivator, as a means to an end to stay motivated and have a target. Nothing more, nothing less.

Also at Percy it was suggested that with some chemical help I could be bigger and better defined in the contests. Luckily Percy's girlfriend told her friend to leave me alone, and let me do what I want to do. Unfortunately I have observed frequent abuse of steroids in that gym. I have seen boys and girls inflate and deflate in a rhythm of a year or so. Training like crazy while being on a cycle, stopping when off it. Getting advice from their doctor to stop using for 6 month due to cysts seen in their liver and starting to use again on the day the 6 month were over. Those are the not so happy sides of the sport.

I graduated in 1986, did my compulsory army duty in 1987/1988 in Arnheim as a G.I., and with that our student days were over, and our student group dissolved, every one going their own way. Henny C. my long term training buddy had a hard time coming to grips with this, as he was the only true local guy from Eindhoven. He was one of the only one from our group to stay there in Eindhoven.

PROGRESS CHART 1980 - 1988

	arm	chest	waist	leg	calf	bodyweight
1980	31	98	69	56	40	68
1982	37	113	73	60	40	75
1983	41,5	120	75	63	43,5	85
1985	47	130,5	78,5	71	46	95
1986	47,7	131	75	70	46,5	98
1987	46,5	131	82	70,5	46	98
1988	49,5	136	85	75	47,5	103



During my army time I did lose some mass of course. There was a gym at the camp, but we were not able to use it regularly. We had to march a lot and spend time in the field digging holes. Training frequency and intensity was low. After my army time, getting back into training, the “memory effect” of my body was clear though.

After my army time, I moved to Dordrecht, near Rotterdam for work. The first months I trained at the famous gym BodyFit in Rotterdam where I saw Berry the Mey and Erika Mes working out. In Dordrecht also had a real tiny basement storage of 2x2 meter where I kept some weights and did workouts but also worked out at the gym of Ad den Otter, which was more powerlifting oriented. There I started on my first real powerlifting schemes. For a work assignment I moved abroad to Germany where I worked out at local gyms in Buxtehude and Stade, near Hamburg. I worked there on site for a chemical company for a year. Returning to the Netherlands, and having met Anke during holidays on Ibiza, we moved to Breda, where we bought our first (small) house. I worked out mainly in my garage, and occasionally at a local gym. We ended up moving to Luxembourg due to an offered career move. During this period we started a family. Training frequency and intensity fluctuated due to the natural young family stress, raising a girl and twins boys. I did my last bodybuilding contest at the Interhiva Natural in 1991, placing second in the 90 kg class. My desire to keep working out continued, but I realized that with kids growing up, going to a gym 4 evenings a week, would not be good for family life - and a sure shortcut to a divorce, so I started to build up a well-equipped home gym. Funny enough I still had some equipment, a barbell and weights, from our original student gym. This approach allowed me to keep a balance between work, family and sports. To get my dose of aerobics and meet people I also engaged in playing soccer with the local veterans team in the village I live in, Mamer, Luxembourg. You just do not meet so many people in your own basement. One drawback of me playing soccer was the issue that the referee usually blamed me for any occurring foul, since my opponent usually bit the dust and bounced off me when they tried to tackle me. My soccer team always had good laughs about this phenomenon.



I also proved to myself that lifting and thus higher bodyweight is not necessary detrimental to other sports achievements. In the years 2009 onwards I started with running full marathons. At the company I worked for we did a charity team run where I had to run a 15 km leg. This was at the local Luxembourg city marathon. Since that went without any problem (I played soccer as well), I decided to keep up running practice a bit and go for a semi-marathon. Since during training sessions I soon ran distances of over 25km, the target was adjusted to the next best alternative - a full marathon. On my first marathon in Echternach I ran under 4 hours. Since then I ran some 8 full marathons, including some off-road trial versions. Due to my weight and stature (and age) I of course will never be super-fast, but so far my personal best is at 3:48. During these years I had to reduce my lifting activities, since training for a marathon is a rather time consuming endeavor. Despite my higher

weight - I still weighed about 98 kg when being at peak condition for a marathon - I never had a serious injury. In discussions with other runners I found out that many of them suffer from lower back, abdominal and shoulder issues, mostly because they never train these, but get stressed a lot while running. Due to my lifting I did not suffer from this. Also my natural running style seems to be quite smooth, not putting a lot of stress on joints and tendons of the legs, feet, hips.

Now in 2013. Loud rock music and the sound of weights hitting the floor in our home gym hollering through our house. My 16 year old twin sons and their friends groaning and yelling at each other "one more rep, it's only one set, only 1 set, come on, come on." I am fully back into heavy lifting. I weigh 110 kg, bench 180, squat 250 and still steadily progressing. We have a small but fully equipped home gym in the basement of my house. We keep adding equipment to it so we will reach the point that we will be forced to expand it. My 17 year old twin boys Timo and Steffen have caught on the iron and working out regularly since over a year – we are all breaking personal lifting records regularly. Their enthusiasm has brought me back to focus on lifting and become stronger than ever before. Mainly because I am applying the training routines I make for them also to myself – and am willing to continue to learn.



Sports is a normal but essential part of our family daily life. Before my boys played soccer for a period of about 8 years, and did a year of tri-athlon training following that. Steffen already ran a semi-marathon. They also picked up Jiu-Jitsu recently. My daughter Tanja is also very sporty, being addicted to dancing and acrobatics since the age of 6. My wife Anke does fitness 4 times per week and goes for the occasional run.

Our well-equipped home gym has been baptized "KSC Groovy" as a tribute to my early gym experiences and have even reintroduced the retro-look t-shirts with the "We Are Growing" slogan" from the original gym.

In the next section I will outline my own empirical “bottom up” knowledge built up over 30 years. I am now conveying to my trainees in the Groovy gym, which is providing them with a serious head start. There are no scientific pretensions here, just the principles and techniques that have worked for me.

