Maximizing the Effectiveness of Training Logs

Several years ago I had the pleasure of listening to past Olympians talk about their development as athletes. As part of the discussion, the Olympians were asked to give advice to aspiring athletes. The one piece of advice that was endorsed by the majority of the Olympians was to be diligent about keeping a training log.

Is that it? These Olympians have reached the pinnacle in their sport and the advice they offer is to keep a training log? “Most athletes already keep some sort of training log, so let’s move on to advice that will give me an edge,” is what you and most athletes are probably thinking. Rather than wondering about specific training advice or other ideas that could have been offered, maybe it is time to take another look at the concept of training logs and figure out how to make it a more useful tool.

Expanding Your Use of a Training Log

A training log is your own personal training and performance “history book.” It can be used to see what does and does not work for you in trying to meet your performance goals.

A majority of athletes use training logs to record what they do in workouts such as the number of repetitions and weight lifted, miles run, laps swam, balls thrown, or putts made. However, limiting a log to this information is only scratching the surface of the potential of training logs. While each athlete should structure a training log to meet individual needs, a good training log should include:

• The facts of the workout such as the number of reps, weight, miles, laps, weather, time of workout, etc.
• Goal(s) for the workout and the extent to which each goal was achieved.
  • How you felt physically.
  • How you felt mentally.
  • Hours of sleep and important aspects of one’s diet.
  • What you need to work on in the future based on today’s training.
  • A success from the training session—what you did well or accomplished.
  • Lessons learned or reminders that can be applied to competition.

Hidden Benefits of Keeping a Training Log

By keeping a more detailed record of your training, you will be able to reap the following benefits:

Increase motivation: Having daily goals and evaluating your performance based on attainment of your goals can serve as a source of motivation. A clear purpose to your training today can
enhance your intensity and drive. Additionally, having a written record of things you need to work on based on past training can likewise increase your motivation.

**Keep you accountable:** Training logs distinguish wishful thinking from reality. That is, it is easy to tell yourself you had a great (or horrible) training session, but writing down what you did, how you felt, goals achieved, etc. will tell the real story. Training logs keep you accountable for what you are doing on a daily basis.

**Build confidence:** As has been discussed in this Mind Games column, “success breeds confidence.” What better way to build confidence than to purposefully acknowledge daily successes? Athletes often take a critical eye towards themselves, always looking for areas that need improvement. Keeping a log of daily successes forces one to recognize progress and builds confidence in the process.

**Allow for self-analysis:** Keeping a detailed training log enables you to better identify reasons for good and poor performances. For example, you may find your performance flattens when you get less than 6 hours sleep, or that you tend to train best when you work out with a partner, or that after a stressful day at work you struggle with your motivation. You can scrutinize what you have done to look for trends or patterns so you can make any needed changes.

There is no single training log template that will meet the needs of all athletes. Instead, you need to take the time to develop a training log and a format that will work for you. Experiment with various pieces of information that you may want to include in your training log. Figure out what information is going to be useful to you, then commit to keeping and referring back to the log.

**About the Author**
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