

My Olympic Experience

I spent a couple of weeks at the Olympic Games stayed in beautiful Park City, Utah, and visited several of our Olympic venues. I enjoyed the historic strength of Soldier Hollow where the cross-country skiing took center of my stage, and the Olympic excellence known as "Olympism" held a great euphoric appeal to me. My time was well allocated, mostly viewing several of the events, skiing, and enjoying one of life's true sport treasures. Coubertin would have been proud, for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) along with the Salt Lake Organizing Committee (SLOC) pulled off a tremendous spectacle of the Games in the midst of a great many issues at hand including potential deficits and heightened security measures.

As fun as it may sound thought, it was not all pleasure; for I spent a great deal of time interacting with several National Olympic Committees (NOC's) as well as their coaches, trainers, and athletes. I met with strength & conditioning coaches, technical coaches, personal trainers, equipment technicians, physical therapists, and event organizers from many different Olympic teams and federations. What has interested me for years has been elite coaches and athletes of other sports and from other countries; particularly how they train, implement sport psychology, manage injuries, carbohydrate and protein load, and prepare for competition. As a professional bowling instructor, I am driven to continually network with other elite coaches outside of bowling in order to learn from their practices and techniques. So, this month you are receiving a dose of my latest work at the 2002 Salt Lake Olympic Games. Read on and find out what I uncovered.

Bowling and the Olympics?????

Bowling was once a medal sport at the Olympic Games; I believe last contested in Berlin, Germany at the 1936 Summer Games. Removed from the Olympic Program in the 1930's, it held exhibition status in recent years (1996 Atlanta Summer Games), but we still strive to revive it back onto the Olympic Program, which are those sports and events elevated into the, now commercially driven, spotlight.....the Olympic Games.

The subject of bowling and the Olympics is one to be forever animated on internet message boards, discussed among our figureheads, and pondered by those of us armchair leaders. Although the governance of Olympic Sport illustrates the institutions that administer international sport, the vast majority of sports are not even included on the Olympic Program. No International Federation (IF) is obligated to keep the sport it governs on the Olympic Program. In fact, I uncovered 14 sports that were once included in the Olympic Games, no longer exist on the program (bowling, cricket, croquet, golf, jeu de paume, Indian clubs, obstacle course, lacrosse, motor boating, polo, rackets, roque, rugby, and tug of war). Tennis was removed from the Olympic Program after the 1924 Games, but returned some 60 years later, in 1984. Motor boating will forever be unable to return to the Olympic Program since current rules forbid sports that depend on mechanical propulsion.

In order for a sport to be included on the summer Olympic Program, it must be practiced by men in at least 75 countries on four continents, and by women in at least 40 countries on three continents. Furthermore, for a sport to be included on the winter Olympic Program, it must be practiced in at least 25 countries on three continents. The enormous size of the Olympic Program has also become a matter of concern. For example, a single day of summer Olympic competition will contest as many as nearly 20 different sports totaling over 100 hours of actual competition.

The number of events has grown with each successive Olympic Games. This growth is further typified by the increasing number of required venues and media sites, along with the necessary size of the Olympic Village, housing most of the athletes. Some argue the Games are becoming way too burdensome and expensive. The initial scandal in Salt Lake uncovered budgetary deficits totaling nearly \$400 million before the SLOC administration turned things around. There has consequently been substantial support for limiting the number of sports on the Olympic Program, although a method or formula for doing so has not been determined. And what does all this mean to you and I? Let's face it... getting bowling onto the Olympic Program will require nearly an act of religious magnitude. Let's move onward.

Olympic Experience

I spent some quality time with a Swedish Olympic Therapist. Boy was she neat to be around. And you know what? She characterized to me the torso, of all things, was one of the primary sources of power in athletics, in her opinion, and it's one of the main sources of concern among all her athletes (Swedish Team). Seems these days torso injuries occur more frequently in winter sport. They were all over it.

I gave it some thought; a lot of thought. I concluded the same, and then I applied that line of thinking to bowling. It kinda goes like this: slip at the foul line and wrench your back (I've done that about 3 or 4 times), grab the ball too fast off the return and torque your hip, sling the double bag over your shoulder and strain your neck, how about that 4 ball box at the pro shop, quite heavy when you bent over to move it. And the end result.... your sciatic may hurt, your legs may tingle, your neck might screech in pain, your shoulders might ache, your low back moves and you dance in pain...hey all these are signs of spinal and torso issues.

These are all examples of acute injuries that could happen to any one of you at any time. A couple have happened to me, and my back even hurts as I sit here writing to you discussing this. I need a sport psychologist for that one. Now folks, I shouldn't have to tell you that if you were to maintain a strong, flexible, and healthy torso, it would reduce the incidence and risk of these and other potential problems. I teach a wellness class at a local college...I end up spending all semester preaching and teaching the students about prevention. Stay young, active, fit, and develop a strong mind; what you end up with is less aches and pains 30 years after college. Same principle applied in a different manner here.

Last month we looked into serious beginner/intermediate lumbar training with the safe and yet quite effective low back extension. Now, let's take an Olympic leap forward and look at the remaining parts of the torso with the midsection and sides of the torso, known as the obliques.

Eastern European Philosophy

The Eastern and European contingencies I spent time with all subscribe to seriously and frequent training the torso, not only to avoid lumbar problem, but also to propel athletic excellence. No kidding, I spent days studying the training techniques of the athletes and the philosophies of the coaches. They were all synonymous. I uncovered a primary emphasis on core-based training (the torso). What they reinforced in my mind over and over again, from the Italians to the French to the Slovenians to the Swedes, was that athletes should constantly condition their core body (torso, midsection, low back) to avoid and prevent injury, but more importantly, to improve overall athletic performance. All firmly purported the core, or center of the body, is the primary influence on sport performance, including power, strength, flexibility, balance, and neuromuscular facilitation (coordination).

Now I've given the low back and abdominals attention over the years. I've studied and written for you articles and sections on developing them for core stability. I even teach some in ***The Bowling-Specific Training Manual***, and to those of you whom I personally train and prepare for the tours, we are into that together. Nonetheless, I never really gave it the consideration and attention as these international programs. I honestly think I missed something along the line. My thinking has shifted a little, surprise, a breakthrough on this end. Other than cardiovascular work, which those international Olympic programs also highly espouse, core-based training was tops on their list. I was shocked, but now I know more why. I've learned, so let's do some ourselves.

Core Training: A Look at the Abdominals and Obliques

The abdominals and obliques can only be conditioned through proper exercise stabilizing the hips, legs, and spinal column. In sport science, we teach the basic abdominal curl and oblique curl to all beginner and intermediate exercisers who want to train their torso.

For decades, spine busting sit-ups and leg raises were the standard exercises used to develop a strong torso. That lasted until millions of people decided that their aching lower back and painful neck were more important than a half-way decent six-pack. So sit-ups and leg raises began to go by the wayside in trade for crunches, curls, and various twists. Hey golfers: Tiger's into torso training. The golf community utilizes core-based training heavily. The Butch Harmon Golf Training Program uses the MedX Rotary Torso machine designed to focus on exercising and strengthening the torso. Great machine and exercise if you can locate it.

Whether you select the following exercises to train like the Olympic athletes, or use your own variations, I encourage you to take the time to really focus on your torso. I'm doing so more for my own personal well being and bowling. It has clearly, in my eyes, become one of the more important areas I've neglected for your bowling and athletic development. Not anymore.

View the Sights

The abdominal wall, a single sheath of muscle, consists of multiple portions of the muscle attached and separated via tendons and other tissues. The Rectus Abdominus originates on the Pubic Crest and to Inguinal Ligament inserting on the Costal Cartilage ribs 5, 6, and 7. The abdominal wall takes the shape of six blocks of muscle aligned in two parallel rows of three. Each contract simultaneously working together in a collaborative effort to flex and bend the trunk forward. Ironically, the rectus abdominus only flex the trunk 30 degrees in a range of motion. This is largely unknown to most beginning and many other exercisers who believe full range sit-ups exclusively work the abdominals. WRONGO.

The abdominals are duly supported by the internal and external obliques. External obliques are most prominent on a well defined mid-section at the sides of the abdomen. The lesser visual and known internal obliques rest inferior (below) to the abdominals. Both set of obliques work to assist the abdominals with trunk flexion, but mainly produces rotation and lateral flexion at the waist.

Train those Abs

Exercising the rectus abdominus and internal and external obliques are actually quite simple, and they require no specific apparatus. Don't have to go to the gym here friends. Try these on your bed at home; great cushioning in the bed. In our case with the abdominals, we will use a combination of gravity and body weight to be the resistance factor stressing the muscles, fatiguing their energy stores, ultimately promoting growth and adaptation. Many sport science experts including myself agree that training the abdominals every other day provides substantial recuperation time. Don't do this everyday!!!! The group consensus is to hit the floor on alternating days exercising the mid-section using only body weight as the resistance factor.

Abdominal Curl - lie in standard bent-knee sit-up position, and while exhaling, very slowly raise the shoulders and upper back off the ground. Keep the lower back in constant contact with the floor throughout the movement. Hold the curl for one or two seconds in the completely contracted position, then slowly return to the floor. Note: keep the arms at the side of the body on the floor completely lifeless while relaxing the neck by viewing the ceiling the entire time.

Rotational Abdominal Curls - lie in the same standard bent-knee sit-up position, and while exhaling, very slowly raise the shoulders and upper back off the ground rotating to one side. Keep the lower back in constant contact with the floor throughout the movement. Hold the rotated curl for one or two seconds in the completely contracted position, then slowly return to the floor. Rotate to the opposite side and count both as a single repetition. Note: keep the arms at the side of the body on the floor completely lifeless while relaxing the neck by viewing the ceiling the entire time.

Slow Down – What's Your Hurry

Olympic athletes have been performing these routines and exercises for years. Their mechanics were flawless, their strength was apparent, their form and flexibility were incredible, and their balance and coordination were impeccable. There were some exercises even I had difficulty performing properly. Yep even little me. You won't see those just yet though, I'm saving them for later. Start subtly with these exercises, before you really dive into them with intensity and motivation. Take your time, learn the motion and movement, be patient to avoid the risk of injury and more importantly to learn the biomechanics of the movement and even the feeling of the lumbar spine working.

It's really that simple. Let the Olympic athletes lead us by their example. Train your torso for explosive power at the line, balance in your finish, and to keep you in our sport that much longer.

Until we meet again.