

# Starting Strength

## Getting Played: Whose Fault is It?

by

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There are two groups of people who are responsible for most of the misunderstanding in modern strength and conditioning. They are the people you least expect to be blamed for this serious problem, because they're perfectly innocent of malicious intent even while they remain the source of the misunderstanding. They are 1.) Elite athletes performing at the highest level, and 2.) untrained novices. They are the problem because *anything* a strength coach or Trainer does with them appears to work, and as a result the general public thinks that all *anybody* has to do to improve their physical performance is the silly bullshit that constitutes essentially the entirety of "Functional Training," the default methodology used across most of the S&C industry in 2017.

Yes, the Functional Training people have won, because of the nature of information distribution in Our Modern World. My hat's off to them – they have beaten us fair and square, even though they're wrong, they're completely full of shit, and we *always* generate an order-of-magnitude better product than they do. But the way in which the vast majority of people make decisions leads them to the wrong conclusions about what works and what doesn't. As a result, we are *narrowcasting* the message of effective barbell strength training to a small segment of the potential market intelligent enough to get past the propaganda. Here's why.

Most people are informed by their reading of the broader internet, by magazines, and by the mainstream media, all of whom have a superficial childlike understanding of quite literally *everything* they cover. If the topic is simple – a guy is dead – they can handle it with at least some level of accuracy. If the topic is complex – the guy is dead, but 3 other people are dead too, there may be others, and it's too early to tell why – they make it simple whether it is or not, because they cannot function at a level any higher than the simple. And when their 30-second piece is done, they're on to the next cursory examination of that which they know and care nothing about, never looking back. This is because of who they are and the constraints of their format. In every case, subtle detail escapes the formula.

When it comes to fitness, physical performance, and athletics, the media is no different. In an attempt to simplify the complex, they devote their attention to the two groups of people who attract the most viewers, clicks, and shares, and who will bring them the greatest return on their information-distribution investment.

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The first group are the shiny objects, the small pieces of glitter in the sand: Elite athletes at the professional or D1 university level operating in the four sports covered by *Sports Illustrated*. Football, baseball, basketball, and hockey players – the men whose names guys that go to sports bars know – are the primary focus of the attention of the media. And weekly exposure to their off-season plans for league dominance always feature the silly shit these guys do in the weight room.

I'm not going to clutter up this article with links to videos of the time-wasting being engaged in – you have the same internet I do, and because you're reading this you're already aware of the problem [if you're going to waste time, [do it here](#)]. So let's jump to the why: freak athletes are born, not bosu-balled into existence. The S&C people at this level are perfectly capable of and quite happy to be hiding behind the talents of their recruiters, the guys that assembled the locker room full of physical magicians with 36+ inch SVJs.

Many of them, both the athletes and the strength coaches, don't know that dancing around with light dumbbells and practicing athletic-looking stuff in a split stance isn't what makes their team win, and most of them don't care to think about it. It's easier to develop a big collection of colorful ways to *demonstrate* the talents of guys recruited because they are talented than it is to learn the methods necessary to *train* these talented guys for demonstrably higher strength. If you don't see the value or understand the process of getting a talented 220-pound linebacker from a 275 squat/150 press/315 deadlift to a 550 squat/300 press/600 deadlift while growing him to 250, well, you're a typical pro-level S&C guy in 2017.

The teams work just fine without it, as long as *everyone* agrees to not get their athletes this strong, which is actually an easily accomplished task with humans of this caliber. And as long as everybody is content that their athletes display a largely undeveloped potential for strength, and its derivative power – as long as Steph Curry is *amazingly* strong with a 405 x 6 trap-bar deadlift, and the media gushes all over a performance that *any* decent strength coach could get of an average male gym member in 9 months – then everybody keeps their job, everybody looks competitive with everybody else, and the viewing audience thinks the S&C people are geniuses.

The second group of people the media love to showcase, albeit far less frequently and not in the sports media per se, are average people who have just started an exercise program. The piece is usually a human-interest story, short, devoid of any questions, illustrated with 3 nice color photos taken from below with some kind of wide lens, and full of hope for the reader who plans to do the same thing starting next week.

The thrust of the story will be that these exercise noobs are working out with a perky young Trainer, and the pictures will be of the Trainer – who always has a “watchful eye” the trainee is always “under” – closely supervising important exercises like 5-pound dumbbell bench presses, something using a very light weight performed while seated on a colorful rubber ball, the balancing-part being the hard part, and the close Trainerly supervision of the trainee on a treadmill.



For any period of time longer than a few weeks, this babysitting does absolutely nothing to enhance physical capacity, because it's not hard enough to provide sufficient stress to force an adaptation to occur. But for the noob, the rank novice, the TV watcher whom Dr. Phil has finally

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convinced to at least *move around a little*, this low level of activity may well produce some improvement – at least for a few weeks.

And this few weeks of exposure to [The Novice Effect](#) [link just in case you missed it earlier] may convince family and friends that what is essentially a very low-level version of the nonsense promulgated at the elite levels will work just fine for everybody. The similarities *are not accidental*. The media has softened up the general public through exposure to functional training at the Elite levels, and the general public – being the general public, with a layman’s understanding of complicated things reinforced by the constant barrage of media influence – swallows the worm and wants another, please. Doing what looks to them like the same stuff the pros are doing *is exactly what they want to do*, having had their carefully crafted impression of effective exercising created for them by people who do not know.

The fault is plentiful enough to spread around. I said earlier that the people responsible for making the impression were the athletes and the noobs. Actually, they are the pawns in this deception, and they are getting played. High-level S&C coaches ought to know better, and they either don’t know or they don’t care. The media ought to be better at communicating ideas that rise above the level of complexity of a guy being dead, but they can’t or don’t or won’t. And the victims of this deception – the athletes who fail to develop to their potential and the general public which remains blissfully ignorant of the tremendous power of an effective barbell strength program – ought to care enough to question authority, to investigate what their options truly are, and to work harder, smarter, and more effectively, because it ought to be important enough to do so.

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