

Choose The Right Angle



A new trend in strength training at the moment is “functional training”. In functional training you try to mimic the activity of the sport being performed using some form of loading.

This sounds like a good idea but the higher the skill level of an activity, the more you can ruin it by loading incorrectly. In the case of sprinting, the worlds’ best coaches have realised through experience that you should never slow down or speed up a sprinter by more than 5%. Anything greater than this 5% and you will destroy their running mechanics and ultimately slow them down.

What you can do to improve performance on the field is mimic angles of force and postures that are similar to your sport. With regards to strength & conditioning for rugby, 2 of the best exercises to improve field performance are the incline bench press and the deadlift.

Most gym regulars will usually perform the flat bench press before the incline press because they can use more weight on the flat bench press. As far as the function of the shoulder is concerned it is better to perform higher incline work before any form of lower incline work (example Incline DB Bench is performed before Flat DB Bench). Also in rugby, you are more likely to apply force along the same angle as you would in an incline bench. Therefore, there will be a greater transfer from strength in the weight room to strength on the rugby field.

Increase motor unit activation

When you train you are looking to increase the motor unit activation of the muscles being trained. In the case of the incline bench, you are training the Pecs, triceps and anterior deltoids. If you use dumbbells instead of a barbell you will be using more

motor units in these targeted muscles.

What benefit is there to activating these extra motor units?

Basically, the more motor units you activate the more of the muscle you will be using.



So if your goal is to add more muscle, than dumbbells are a better option in this exercise. Another benefit of using the dumbbells is that you can balance discrepancies between your left arm and your right arm. Balancing discrepancies anywhere in the body will ultimately lead to higher strength gains.

Deadlift

The deadlift is one of the best and toughest exercises you can perform. People think it is damaging to the lower back but, like many other exercises, if performed correctly it actually helps to build up the strength of the lower back. To make sure your low back gets all the benefits of this exercise with none of the drawbacks always keep an arch in your low back in the bottom position, control the

Above: The deadlift is an excellent exercise for Rugby players

bar while lowering and pause with the bar on the floor. Another great benefit of this exercise is that it teaches you to overcome inertia which is essential for explosive power.

To keep progressing from program to program you must vary your exercise selection. So to keep using these keys exercises and still progress you can make slight variations to them like changing the incline on the bench (use all those little notches on the bench) or changing the grip on the deadlift (mixed grip or snatch grip).