

The Importance of a Training Journal

If you ever were a cub scout, you probably know how it feels to get lost in the forest. I wasn't a scout, but I was in the army and spent a lot of the time running around in the forest too, so I know it too. Sort of.

The main thing about being 'lost' is that you are someplace where you have no clue of where you are, how you got there, and - most importantly - how the hell to get home! You are pretty much doomed to run around in circles, and even though some might get lucky and stumble on the right path again, many don't.

And the gym is the exact same thing. What I'm talking about is the all-important JOURNAL that every serious trainer should keep on their progress! The journal is a map for yourself which you draw as you go, and whenever you seem to be lost you just have to reach for your map - your journal - and follow the trail backwards until you find where you took a wrong turn. That simple.

A proper journal will show you what worked and what didn't. Got an injury? Go back two months and see if you've made any specific changes for that muscle group lately. What did I do to get those terrific gains last spring, and what am I doing now that makes me not having gained diddly for the past three months? What can I do to improve my diet for this summer? I think you get the idea. Again, the journal is the story of your success!!

The journal should be in two parts: One exercise journal, and one nutritional journal.

The exercise journal:

Write down the exercises, the weights and the number of set/reps. Write down your total time for a certain muscle group, and strive to push as much weight in as little time as possible (=intensity!). Also give yourself a grade, A to F, on how you felt vs. how you did. Don't forget to make note of cardio work as well - how long you did, heart rate percentage and amount of calories burned.

The nutritional journal:

Make note of the time you eat, what you eat, the amount you eat and the total amount of calories. Make note of *everything* - lying to yourself won't help you the least, and certainly won't make that Twinkie you had for lunch go away!

Don't forget to write down fluids, such as juices, milk and protein drinks. The advanced bodybuilders might also want to make a few extra columns after 'calories,' in order to put down the Protein/Carbs/Fat percentage of everything, in order to monitor the exact composition of your diet. (I don't use this except for when I'm dieting.)

Tracking progress

It's also an idea to bring out the ol' tape measure and see how you're doing once in a while. Set a standard which you track every couple of months, like:

1. Circumference over the shoulders.
2. Circumference around the waist.
3. Circumference around your right quad.
4. Circumference around your right calf.
5. Circumference around your bicep peak.

...And just for tracking purposes, make note of your bodyweight.

Depending on how anal you are, you can track your progress through various graphs and locate weak spots as they develop early on in the game. This is all optional, but if you want to make *sure* you're not leaving anything to chance, this is definitely the way to go.

Seeing a Personal Trainer

An added benefit of a log is that when you're consulting a PT, you'll get a head-start from having a log handy. That way he or she will be able to start you off right from the start - you'll save both time and money that could be better used for actual PROGRESS than initial monitoring!