

# The Principles of Fitness 1

The sad, and widely unaccepted truth in the fitness industry is that you simply cannot maintain peak performance through strength and conditioning alone. Sure you can perform well, for a short period of time but you won't be able to sustain it as injury, wear and tear and general decline will take its toll.

## Why?

Lets take one example:

Imagine a normal athlete who does a traditional warm up and then goes on to perform his daily workout. The only way he can absorb force is by making the muscles tighter and more dense.

These muscles are then unable to disperse force appropriately for 2 reasons. One they are already contracted, which means they don't have any ability to absorb any excess stress.

Secondly they are working alone rather than part of a whole muscle group which is in itself integrated as part of a larger system.

So any time that particular muscle is used it comes under a huge amount more strain than it should as it has no ability to share the force of any impacts or stresses with the rest of the system. Leading to a much higher chance of injury.

Compare this to the athlete with long, soft muscles. They have redundancy.

Thus the primary muscle is able to absorb force as it is able to contract more but it is also able to share the load of the force with the other muscles in the group. Which are also long and soft so can much better absorb force and resist injury by utilising the entire system.

A working example of this is an athlete with a hamstring injury. All too often it is just seen as a strength problem.

The muscle wasn't strong enough so during rehab they will focus on building that particular up stronger to prevent it being injured again.

What they should be doing instead is asking the question, *"Why have you hurt your hamstring?"*, and *"What you can do to prevent you from hurting it again?"*

By instead working on making that muscle and the muscles directly up and downstream of it longer and softer the athlete will, in the future be better able to absorb force and thus be much more more resistant to injury. Injury which forces them to slow down, to stop moving as much, which is often the first "broken window" on the way to old age, frailty and all that comes with it.

In fact if they make the injured muscle stronger without making it longer and softer they are increasing their chances of re injury because they are making the muscle even tighter and stiffer and less able to absorb force in the future.

What's more, by not lengthening the muscles up and down stream of the injured muscle they are ensuring that this now tighter and denser muscle is held under more tension, constantly.

If they had focussed instead on restoring balance to the injured muscle and its surrounding muscles and then, once that's restored, building strength **through out the system**, they would return from injury stronger and less likely to get injured than they were before.

You don't strain or tear a muscle because it is too weak. You strain or tear it because it's over loaded.

## So why do muscles become overloaded?

There is a common belief in the gym that the only way to improve is to lift heavier, run faster, do more. After all why would I lift 100 kilos when I could be lifting 150? To a great extent this is true and will improve general athleticism but what is not factored in to this is, does it make you better at your job? In this case being the best at your particular sport or just at life as you can be?

Lets use the example of kitesurfing...but you could replace that with any sport.

It's that classic gym bunny question:

*"How much do you bench?"*

It's something I hear a lot on the beach amongst kitesurfers.

### **And it drives me crazy!**

Many kilters seem to believe, by being able to bench press bigger weights they are going to see bigger benefits on the water.

### **This mentality is more than just wrong. It's probably harmful to their kiting.**

Ever see a muscle jacked professional kiter...?

Sure they're ripped but lean rather than massive.

There is a good reason for this.

*Why do footballers not look like rugby players? Why do rugby players not look like gymnasts?*

Because there is an optimal strength for each sport and when you surpass this strength you are actually making your life harder.

### **Think of it this way.**

If you're practicing the bench press in the gym and getting stronger and stronger, that's great, if your goal is simply to bench press more. If you're doing it to improve your kitesurfing you have to ask yourself,

*"ok well what do I actually need this movement for in kitesurfing?"*

The answer for most kilters?

Pushing and pulling the bar.

Does that require you to be able to bench press 300 kilos?

**NO.**

In fact by being able to press 300 kgs you've made you're kiting worse because you've now got redundant muscle. Muscle which makes you heavier (and thus less likely to get out in light wind) probably less flexible, slower and in many cases more likely to get injured (unless you have created that muscle in a balanced way, which practically no one I know does).

In short what I am trying to say is there is often a HUGE difference between maximum strength and optimum strength in any given sport.

### **And once you pass optimal you are by definition becoming sub optimal.**

Now there is also an optimum level of speed, power, endurance and range of motion in any given sport. And that imbalances in one will often upset all the rest.

So as kitesurfers, instead of always looking to train the most or the longest we should be focussing on training our muscles to work appropriately for the actions we ask them to do.

This is the same if we want to build bodies for longevity, for being able to do what we love for a long time. Most athletes at the extreme of their field, marathon runners, body builders etc have several compromised life and more importantly health spans.

If we are chasing longevity...and here I'm talking about a long health span...there's an optimal level of fitness and body composition for that too. (and it's a lot easier to reach and maintain than is being a body builder!)

To summarise our strength workouts should follow the function of our goal. We focus way too much on maximal strength, endurance and flexibility and not enough on optimal.

### **How have we got to this point?**

Well in fairness through out sports history no one has really focussed on how to play for a long time, the focus has only been on playing. To use a football analogy, players just want to make the team today and often do so at the expense of their career longevity.

Now the more/longer model has been in place as long as I can remember and isn't going anywhere fast and that's because it works...short term.

But it won't work if you want sustained performance over a lifetime. (I personally intend to be charging down 20 m wave faces when I'm 120.)

So in the workouts we are giving you we focus on optimal strength, flexibility, speed and endurance to keep doing any sport for a long, long time.

So we not only excel in our chosen sport or just in life in general now, but for the rest of our long lives as well. Without having to worry about injury.