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“For Sport, For Life”

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Community Member of the Month...



This month's CasePerformance's Community Athlete of the Month is Alex Faber, who joins us from Amsterdam, Netherlands. Recently I had the chance to interview Alex and find out more about her experiences as an Olympic Weightlifter....

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How did you ever get involved with strength training? Did you participate in sports or engage in other forms of exercise growing up?

When I grew up, physical exercise was considered something for the "lower classes". The only acceptable sports were expensive ones such as tennis, field hockey and golf. My parents didn't have a lot of money, so I read books and played the piano instead. I didn't join a fitness club until 2008, when I was 42 years old and severely overweight. After six months I'd lost 60 lbs and found a new passion: strength training!

In Amsterdam, is resistance training relatively popular?

Times have changed since my youth and today it's perfectly acceptable to join a fitness club and exercise with machines. Although that has been a definite positive, there is still a bias against getting big and strong. People who work with free weights are quickly suspected of being bodybuilders and are asked to leave. In the whole city of Amsterdam there are only two gyms where you can squat outside a Smith machine. I didn't discover "real" strength training until I did my "homework" (reading & watching videos), which eventually led to me getting coached by Charles Staley and Phil Stevens. These two individuals taught me A LOT!

What led to you getting involved in Olympic Weightlifting?

As much as I enjoyed lifting weights and getting stronger, I missed having a sense of purpose; I wanted to find something specific that I could train for vs. simply exercising. As mentioned above, strength sports are very, very small in this country; especially for middle aged individuals, such as myself, who are just starting up. That said, approximately two years ago, I saw an ad announcing weightlifting classes at the university gym; there were no age restrictions. I ended up training with a bunch of 18 year olds and LOVED every minute of it. Nothing beats the feeling of catching a snatch and then standing up "out of the hole" with a barbell over your head. When the classes were over, the instructor took us to a competition and then I was sold for good. THAT was what I wanted to do.

Following this experience, I hired a coach and started training to be an Olympic Weightlifter. My first competition was the 2010 Dutch Nationals, where I got a silver medal. Nine months later I qualified for the World Masters Weightlifting Championship, which will be held this upcoming October in Cyprus.

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This past June you competed in the European Masters Weightlifting Championship, which was held in Germany. What was that experience like?

It was one of the best experiences of my life. I love competitions. I love training for them, I love being there, and I love giving it my all out there on the platform. This competition was special in more than one respect. I'd had knee surgery a few months before, and there was concern as to if I'd even be able to compete or not. That made it especially gratifying to be there. Additionally it was the largest competition I'd ever been to; more than 600 athletes competed. I got to see a lot of weightlifters that I'd only previously admired from a distance. Everybody was so nice and I even made some new friends.

As an athlete, what has been your most rewarding experience?

Haha, every step of the way has been rewarding. Every competition, every PR, every tiny bit of technique improvement, it's ALL exhilarating. It really is. But yes, there are three particularly rewarding experiences that stand out amongst the others:

1. My 1st competition, Nationals 2010. I was so proud of myself, I almost burst.
2. Qualifying for World Masters. In order to qualify, I had to increase my previous best total by 15%. A lot of hard work went into achieving this feat.
3. Competing at European Masters 2011. I worked hard to recover from my surgery and I succeeded just in time

The next and probably most rewarding experience is going to be World Masters 2011. I had a second knee surgery a couple of weeks ago; thus, a new challenge ahead of me ... But, the bigger the challenge, the better it feels.

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Any advice/thoughts you're willing to share with us at CasePerformance?

Well, people reading this are probably already into physical exercise and chances are they know more about that than I do. Personally I learned two important lessons. It's never too late to start training. Four years ago nothing could have been further from my mind. Now, at 46, I am a competing athlete! The other thing is to surround yourself with people who are really good at what you want to do. Approach them in real life, on the internet, it doesn't matter. Those are the people you want to learn from and use as a role model. If you're genuinely interested and willing to learn, I've found that most people are happy to share their knowledge. They will take you to a higher level.

Well thanks for joining us here today. Keep up the great work and behalf of everyone here at CasePerformance, best of skill at the 2011 World Masters competition!
