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Community Member of the Month...



This month's CasePerformance's Community Member of the Month is Arnav Sarkar, who joins us from Calcutta, India. Recently I had the chance to interview Arnav and find out more about his training experiences

First, tell us a little about your background... How did you get involved with resistance training and/or exercise in general? Did you participate in any sports while growing up?

First of all Sean, thank you very much, for giving me an opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences with the readers of your newsletter via this interview. To begin, my fascination with resistance/strength training began as a kid when I developed an admiration for the strong and muscular physiques of movie stars and action figures;

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I desired to be like them when I grew up. However when it came to participating in sports, I was terrible. As a kid I was strong, but overweight and lazy. This meant that I was always mocked at by my friends with whom I played, and friends/coaches gave me a bigger shouting when I failed, even if the skinny guys performed equally bad. This ensured that I never really tried out at any serious level like school, state, etc, in any sport. In short, I let others instill a deep belief in me that I was not good enough to be a part of, or excel at any physical activity. So basically why even bother trying if I am never going to be good enough at anything.

I finally began training in a gym around the age of 17 (after some months of bodyweight training at home). In those days I admired the WWE wrestlers, and wished to be like them. As time went on, I started reading more about bodybuilding and became a follower. Thus I continued to be strong, and in fact got stronger, but still lacked overall athleticism.

It was finally around 2005 (around age 22) that I believe my training became better rounded when I started training in martial arts. The fast paced kicking, punching and jumping started to make me feel more athletic, and were a great compliment to my strength levels. Now I was strong and relatively more athletic. After one year of training, I entered my first major sporting contest, competing in the state Kung Fu championships. I contested in the heavy weight category, and won 1st place. It was the first time in my life that I won an athletic event, and became confident that I could do what I wanted to. I returned to defend my crown the next year and did so successfully. That was my last title, and thereafter I started working as a gym instructor and could not make time for regular martial arts practice.

The key thing that I learned and wish to share with your readers is that if you really believe in yourself you can do almost anything. As a fat kid I never believed that I could do any event where endurance was needed. My fellow competitors always pointed to my bodyfat and further tried to break my confidence, and unfortunately I let them do so successfully. Yet, once I accepted my strengths and weaknesses, I started to believe more in myself and was willing to try things that I would not have tried earlier. The result was that I did more than what I believed I could do, and still continue to be open to new challenges. The key point is that believe in yourself first and then most things will happen. Also, I will stress on cutting out negative people in your life who constantly keep telling you that you are no good. These people struggle to come to terms with the failures in their own lives, and thus try to bring down others to feel good. Try and surround yourself with people who are successful, and motivate you to work harder, if you wish to better yourself.

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Who have been your greatest influences or role models in this field?

To be honest I admire any athlete who works hard to excel in his or her chosen sport. In general I am more influenced by strength athletes like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Konstantin Konstantinovs, Mariusz Pudzianowski, the older strongmen like Arthur Saxon, George Hackenschmidt, etc. And of late, I have been following the sport of kettlebell lifting a lot, and there are many kettlebell athletes who also inspire me a lot.

As a trainer I admire and learn continuously the various aspects of the trade like program design, form correction, nutrition, business development, etc from people like Tom Furman, Tom Corrigan, Thierry Sanchez, Steve Cotter, and of course you Sean. There are others too, but if I start naming them all it would become a long list, ha ha.

When first starting off, what were the biggest mistakes you found yourself making? In other words, what would you advice people NOT to do when first starting a training program?

You know Sean, even though we are in the information age and everyone is supposed to be “well informed” to do better when it comes to their training, it amazes me to see beginners make the same mistakes today as other beginners did a decade or more earlier when I began myself. In general these are the 5 major mistakes that I have observed:

- **Too desperate-** people must understand that a great athlete is not born, but created...over an extended period of time. Yet, beginners expect to look like an Arnold in 3 short months. Frankly speaking in the first 3 months the primary emphasis must be on two things, first to ensure that you train regularly and develop the habit to eat right and train regularly. The second thing is to learn the form of a few exercises very well, rather than try to push max poundages straight away.

- **Lack of attention to recovery-** I remember when I first joined a gym, for the first few days I went to train there twice a day before the instructor learned about this and explained to me why this was a terrible habit, at least for a beginner. As newbies we tend to be too keen and train too often without paying much attention to recovery. Beginners can afford to do this to some extent as they are mentally and physically fresh as well as free of any training injuries, plus the weights lifter are light too. However, injuries start to appear and the body fails to improve as overtraining sets in. There should be gradual increase in workload.

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- **Fad diets**- as a beginner fad diets seem rather too attractive. Ever heard of the famous lines “let me lose the first 20/30/40 pounds and then I will eat more sensibly”? These folks feel that they can lose fat/build muscle/gain strength rapidly at the beginning with fad diet programs and then later on follow more sensible and well rounded diets. However in reality that does not happen, as either they burn out too soon, or fail to maintain themselves once they decide to change things to follow a “normal” eating plan. Again, remember that the first few months is the time period where you should be focusing on creating good eating and training habits which you can follow in the long term.

- **Poor form**- it is not expected that when one begins that they would know the correct form of an exercise, but they are expected to spend some time to learn it first. However most beginners spend barely 3 weeks trying to learn the form of an exercise or letting their body get used to it, before they start trying to compete with the best trainee in the gym/field.

- **Blind hero worshipping**- we all need to have people who have achieved great heights to inspire us, but we need to be careful when we try to follow them. Many beginners will try to begin with the advanced training programs of their favorite athletes, actors, etc. This ends up causing problems like overtraining, injuries, lack of development, etc. Beginners need to be more sensible when designing their workouts even if their training is going to be inspired by their heroes. This is why whenever I write an article about the training of any major personality, like the one I did of [Bruce Lee](#), the [300 movie actors](#), etc, I ensure that I also include a workout program that is more suitable for the average individual, not only the most advanced and genetically gifted.

What is the current state of exercise (resistance, aerobic, high intensity interval training, etc) like in India?

In India, gyms are starting to gain popularity. The majority still train for goals based on looks rather than for performance. In the major cities, kettlebell, TRX, sandbags and other more currently popular training equipments are starting to become available, whereas in the smaller towns, the more traditional barbells, dumbbell, and bodyweight training is still the way to train.

The major problem for strength and conditioning arises due to the false marketing done by teachers of some other forms of exercise, and yoga in particular. For example people will promote Yoga as a form of training that will take care of all physical needs such as strength, fat loss, aerobic conditioning, etc. However, although Yoga is a great and essential form of training, the fact remains that it does not cover all physical bases. One

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needs to lift weights for maximum strength development, intense cardio for high levels of conditioning, and Yoga for flexibility. Yet, in India for some people the notion is that various disciplines cannot co-exist and that one must choose only one form of training. Thankfully there are some trainers who are helping to break this myth and are promoting a more overall form of training which involves various disciplines for overall development.

Are there any particular goals or events that your training is currently directed at?

In recent times I have fallen in love with kettlebell training, and more specifically the Girevoy Sport (GS). For me it is a new challenge, and a very different one from what I have done till now. I love every aspect of it, the technique, the emphasis of relaxing under a heavy load, the simplicity of the programs, etc. I am also keen to enter a GS contest sometime in 2014 or 2015, and thus currently my training involves more time focusing on the GS lifts. I will also continue to train with bodyweight, barbells and dumbbells, but for now they will be more of assistance work, rather than the main focus.

In the long term, I wish to get back to some heavy barbell work, and maintain an approximate 50-50 focus on strength training and GS, since I really do love the heavy work. But most importantly I wish to remain healthy, strong and be able to help my clients from my own training experiences.

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

Yes, I would like to mention about how we humans as a race are becoming worse physically all the time, and that we must make an effort to change it. For instance, kids and teenagers today, are on an average, much less fit than what my generation was when we were their age. I mean for some physical activity just seems like an alien concept. It's not only the fat ones; even the skinny ones are weak and lack any conditioning. I believe that it is essential that as adults, we lead by example and spend more time on physical activity ourselves; Thus, inspiring the youth to train and be active.

Well thanks for joining us here today. Keep up the great work! For those interested in finding out more about your training philosophies, where can they find you?

Thank you so much Sean for having me, it was an absolute pleasure and honor. Those who would like to know more about me can visit my site- www.sarkartraining.net or email me at sarkartraining@gmail.com.
