

Building Blocks of Strength

By Pete Koeniges

Athletes are always on the lookout for the fastest way to gain the greatest amount of strength, power, and speed. Without a solid strength base, however, advanced exercise protocols can lead to injury. Training injuries usually set the athlete back for weeks. Whatever strength gains achieved prior to the injury, will be lost. To prevent exercise related injuries, building a base of strength is necessary.

Building a large strength base is multifaceted. First off, it has to do with building a strong core. The core consists of the muscles from the armpit to the thighs. Exercises that work the hips, abs and back can be accomplished using a variety of modalities or simply using body weight alone.

The strength base also has to do with education. This is the time to learn different exercises, perfect their technique, and develop confidence in performing them. It is also a time to try new modalities never tried before to stimulate untrained muscle fibers (i.e. medicine balls, kettlebells, club trainers).

Core exercises should remain a part of your program, but you can also stress the stabilizers of the core by performing standing exercises with resistance. The core can be stressed by performing various squats, lunges, or deadlifts.

Once the core musculature is strong, coordinated, and functional, strength exercises can begin for the rest of the body. As a lacrosse athlete, the focus should be on gaining strength in the posterior chain. That would consist of the hamstrings, glutes, low back and upper back. Exercises to accomplish this would consist of various squats, deadlifts, lunges, and back extensions.

Set and rep schemes are an art as well as a science. It is difficult to prescribe these training variables without an evaluation. Generally, however, training for strength requires 6-8 sets of 2-4 reps with 2-5 minutes of rest between sets.

Accessory exercise, although not the focus, are important as well. Exercise such as a close grip bench press and grip work translates very well to improved play. These exercises are usually saved for last during a training session.

The philosophy of building strength is related to a pyramid. The stronger the base of the pyramid, the greater amount of strength can be developed. Our base is core stabilization. A weakness in the core will limit potential strength, but a strong core can enhance the strength of the rest of the body.