

GENERAL PHYSICAL PREPAREDNESS (GPP) FOR THE THROWS

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Through my journeys in the sport of Track and Field, both as a thrower and as a coach, one oddity has always made me stop and ask the question “why?” And that oddity is why do throws coaches make their athletes, male or female, run long distances if they come into the season out of shape? I remember attending a clinic in Massachusetts where one coach blurted out, “If one of my boys comes into the season fat and out of shape, he’s running miles until he gets better.” Does this make sense to anyone? Would a cross country coach make one of his athletes run 100 meter sprint repeats every day, or would a sprint coach make his athletes run 6 miles a day every day for practice. NO! In any sport, especially track and field, you must train your athletes for what they will be doing. So, how do we do this for throwers?

GPP (General Physical Preparedness) has taken off in certain powerlifting circles and in other strength related sports like the Highland Games, Football, and Wrestling. The purpose behind GPP is to still get in cardiovascular shape, but to do so in a way that incorporates general physical strength and speed. Also, it is fun. Running laps is dull and boring. With this form of training you can make it fun by running two people against each other or making contests out of it. Another great aspect of GPP is that the equipment is minimal and pretty inexpensive and it can be kept in the storage shed with the shots, discs, hammers and javelins so you can watch the athletes do the work. No more sending them off on their own. So let’s get into these different pieces of equipment and see what it takes.

(1) **HEAVY SLED DRAGGING.** Sled dragging has many benefits for throwers and many of your throwers may already do this if they play other sports. It will get their heart rate up, provide a cardiovascular work-out, and help improve their leg drive through the circle and their total body strength. Have your throwers line up in two groups and have them race each other over a 50-60 yard course. Sleds can get pretty expensive, but there are alternatives like tires, loading pallets, and homemade alternatives. There are many web sites out there that explain how to build a good, cheap sled. Try varying the difficulty of sled dragging by having them drag up a hill or by adding weight to the sleds as they run.

(2) **CAR/TRUCK PUSHING.** Not just for when you break down! Along the same lines as sled dragging, car or truck pushing will really provide a great total body strength and cardio workout for your throwers. Don’t want to use your car or truck? Well, I’m sure one of your upperclassmen would be happy to provide their car to help your underclassmen have a tough time. Want to make it more difficult? How about pushing the car up a slight incline or applying the brakes little by little. If you have hammer or weight throwers, try attaching ropes to the car and have them pull the car with a rowing type motion. If you make it fun, they will do it and like it.

(3) HEAVY MEDICINE BALL/BOULDER CARRYING. Just like it sounds. Go to your local rock quarry or construction site and get some large, flat boulders. Have your athletes “bear hug” the rocks and walk with them a great distance. This will really test their endurance and give their abs, lower back, legs, and shoulders an incredible workout. Try making them walk in the LJ/TJ pits or on the beach. Have them squat with the rocks every 40 feet or so. Really use your imagination and think of how to make the movements more functional for their specific events.

(4) FARMERS WALKS. As a thrower, the most overlooked and in my opinion, most important type of strength is grip strength. Fingers, wrists, forearms, and hands get punished every day time after time and are really never trained. The farmers walk will really help to improve the grip and hand strength of your throwers. YOU CAN USE ANYTHING to do this movement. Buckets filled with sand, weight plates that have built in handles, hard suitcases filled with cement or rocks, boulders with chains and handles around them, ANYTHING. Just make sure they grab one in each hand and get walking. This movement is also great for their endurance and you can make it fun by rewarding the person who walks the longest.

Before my final comments, I would like to state my theory behind this. I believe that the strongest people who ever lived were born back in the early 1900’s. They were farmers, lumberjacks, miners, and railroad workers. They were strong because of what they did for a living. Back then there was no such thing as Hammer Strength or Cybex equipment. They worked with their hands. Technology was not as big as it is today and convenience was only for the extremely wealthy. People have called this “Functional Strength” and “Grandpa Strength” but what it really shows me is that full body movements create total body strength, like the kind needed to throw. Isolation movements are great for bodybuilders, but you don’t get style points in the throws. All that matters is how far the ball goes.

The thing to remember is this: do not replace your athlete’s workouts with just these movements. Use these movements as a supplement once or twice per week in the off season and early few weeks of the actual meet season. When you stop to think about it, adding these movements makes total sense. When your athletes step into the circle, there will not be a bench. There will be no weights or a squat rack. It will be them and their implement. They will need to rely on their total body strength and endurance, not how much they can bench press on a smith machine. By using your imagination and creating exercises like those listed above, your athletes will build the strength endurance they need to compete at a higher level.