

“The Zone”

As obvious as it sounds, to get the most out of your training you need to maximise your workouts as much as you possibly can. I say that it sounds obvious but in my experience the majority of people don't actually do this. I'm not talking about the ones who just go to the gym and treat it as a social event or the ones that go there and treat it as a chore. I'm not even talking about the ones who go there and look for excuses to not train properly and to leave early or the ones who, for some reason, cannot go for an hour without using their mobile phone for one reason or another.

Whilst it's true that all of those groups of people are largely wasting their time in the gym, that same accusation can actually be levelled at people who consider themselves serious gym goers. Many people go to the gym for years and make no progress for the usual reasons, lack of variety in their training, ego training, poor diet etc. Those people, and many others who do actually make limited progress could all learn a lot and make massive improvements from what I'm about to tell you.

To maximise your workouts to the highest level you need to create and be in what I have referred to for many years as “The Zone”. It's a cliché that we hear in every sport; just about anyone will tell you that to perform at their best they have to get into their “Zone”. In bodybuilding at least, it's not all about that hour that you spend lifting weights, that hour is just the central point; the zone itself is something that you create with your lifestyle, not 5 minutes before you hit the gym. We've all seen people that try to do that. They take a pre workout drink that makes them look like they're about to have a brain haemorrhage, they wear their latest Mr Olympia clothing and stand there telling their friends or training partner about how they are going to “smash” this and that. Then they go and train all wrong and waste half of their workout. Don't get me wrong, psyching up is great, I have no problem with that, in fact I have a catchphrase that I use on the days that I have a training partner, that catchphrase is “let's get into character”. It means what it says; we're here on business so let's get down to business. It's not magic though, it's not as if those words start an adrenaline rush, it's simply the trigger that says that if you're in the zone now is the time to start using that zone.

So where does the zone begin? Well, it begins as soon as the previous zone ends. As soon as you finish a workout on say a Monday you start preparing the zone for the workout on the Tuesday, the key words here are environment and lifestyle, apply what I'm about to tell you and you will be able to create an environment, or zone, of your own with devastating effect.

That key word, environment, was something that came up again when I was doing an infomercial with my old friend Dean Ash on The Active Channel in the days before Coresport, when I was sponsored by LA Muscle. I've always had a lot of time and respect for Ash, as he has always been known by his friends, so when he explained to me in detail about creating the right environment for the body to grow, it became clear to me that that the right environment was an extension and an enhancement to the whole principle of the zone, something that had propelled me from just another 50 year old gym rat to a successful multi title winning bodybuilder in just a few years, at a time of life when most people are slowing down, stopping or even dying.

So, here is how I create and use my environment to grow and improve, what I call my zone, you might not be able to do it in exactly the same way or to the same intensity that I do but as long as you have it in your mind at all times that you need to create the right environment for your physique to improve then your zone will serve its purpose.

My zone creation begins as soon as I finish a training session. I make sure that I've done everything that I need to, I put away my weights and then I take from my gym bag my post workout kit. That kit will consist of everything that I need to give me the fastest possible recovery after my workout. I have a shake that is meticulously prepared the night before; all ingredients are carefully weighed depending on what stage of my training I am at. All I need to do is add water and drink it with my post workout Norateen. This is a good time to start building tomorrow's zone by reviewing the one that you're coming out of. How was today's workout? Did you hit your desired targets? How could today's workout have been improved? Answer those questions and any others honestly and use the answers to start building tomorrow's zone.

I always say that you should let this game become a lifestyle but you shouldn't let it take over your life, except during show prep time of course, you really have no choice then as during those weeks show prep dictates everything. So with that in mind, live the normal bodybuilding lifestyle until the next workout, this is all part of zone creation. Make sure that your food prep is right, that your supplementation is right, never miss a meal and ensure that you get adequate rest, avoid stress and be happy in your personal and social life. Once you have all of these things perfectly under control your zone is constantly recreating itself and the next workout starts from a better position than your competitors so now all you have to do is nail the workout, and that's the best and most rewarding part of the zone if you get it right. To do that just pick up from where you ended the last workout, reviewing what you did and planning out how to make this workout better.

One good example of reviewing is to ask yourself if you wasted too much time in between sets during your last workout. Often the honest answer to this will be yes, maybe through no fault of your own, because someone else in the gym may have wasted some of your time by talking to you in between sets and going on for far too long, this is a common problem. It's something that I've had to address seriously since I've been a gym owner. It's only natural that people using a gym will want to talk to the owner and I always go out of my way to be polite to people but I don't want anyone slowing down my workouts. Fortunately the people that use the gym at the same times that I do are all very nice and are also very focused on their training so they all understand that the best time to talk to me is before or after my workout, why don't you make sure that people know this about you too?

Another good thing to review is what you do when you're not lifting the weights, as this time actually forms the majority of your workout. We've all seen the idiots who do a set and then run to the mirror to look at themselves. If that's you then please stop doing it now, people are not impressed when you do this, they are actually irritated. The mirrors in the gym are merely a tool to help with your workouts, they are there to help you check style and form and, occasionally, to check whether the correct muscles are pumping up from a specific exercise. Although if you need a mirror to confirm a

pump rather than being able to feel it then you're probably doing something wrong in the first place. The mirrors are not there for you to do posing practice in between sets, my gym, like most, has a studio specifically designed for that, there's only one door to it and it can be shut so that you can do your posing practice in private, or with your coach, before or after your workout but not during.

People don't seem to realise that what you do in between sets is important, you need to use the rest time to think about the last set and then focus on making the next one better. Personally I like to walk about in between sets, stalking the weights, building aggression, convincing myself that I can and will meet and beat the challenge of the next set, which will be harder than the last one and therefore more beneficial to me. I actually had an anonymous complaint about the way that I train, someone said that I was "scary" and "gave filthy looks to the weights and my training partner too, like an animal". I took it as a great compliment and my training partner Chris told me to keep on doing it, he liked me "scaring" him because it was making him train so hard that he was getting incredible results!

This is all part of our mental attitude during workouts, it's something that we've done a lot of work on and got great results. The correct mental attitude will make a big difference to any workout. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of attitude, focus and concentration during a workout. Look at any sports person at their best and you will see that they are in the zone that they have specifically created for themselves. My personal favourite is legendary Baltimore Ravens line backer Ray Lewis, his zone is one that I want to be in for every workout. Of course different sports mean different types of zones, the bodybuilding zone is quite simple. Without warm ups and warm downs a typical weight training session should last about one hour, that's really not much time out of your day. So during that hour turn off your phone and suspend niceties with everyone, all that matters during that time is your total focus and dedication, your undivided attention and concentration to what you're doing. Hate the weights, treat them like they owe you money but love what they are doing to your body. Now is your time to prove that you're better than the others, remember that any loser can talk the talk, usually on Facebook, but it's only winners who are walking the walk when their name is in the record books. Be a winner, get into character, get into your zone, and get into the best shape of your life.