

Wilkins, R., 2000, Interview with Ian King – The Strength Coach King, Natural Muscle Magazine, 20 Dec 2000

THE STRENGTH COACH KING

By Rob Wilkins

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In sports there are coaches of legendary proportions. In football there is legendary Green Bay Packer coach Vince Lombardi. In basketball Pat Riley orchestrated the LA Lakers during their championship years. And in baseball New York Yankees manager Joe Torre's teams have captured 3 of the last 4 World Series Titles. What makes each of these coaches so unique is that time and time again they have produced results and contended for championships. They were able to motivate and teach their players how to become winners and achieve success.

For close to two decades when the top athletes in the world were looking for the man with the answers in regard to athletic preparation, Ian King is the person they most sought out. King has developed the training programs for hundreds of elite athletes in over 20 sports and from more than 10 countries. King has prepared athletes for every winter and summer Olympic Games since 1988, and every Commonwealth Games since 1984, as well as World Championships and World Cups in numerous sports. When not instructing athletes on how to reach their maximum physical potential, King is also an educator and contributing writer to a number of magazines which include Men's Health, Mind and Muscle Power, and Testosterone.

The following are questions I recently addressed to King.

RW – Ian thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedule for this interview. Before we get started, please provide the Natural Muscle readers with a brief background on yourself (where you are from, formal education, how you became interested in training?)

KING - I was born on an island in the Pacific Ocean and in the absence of television, consistent with island tradition, we played a lot of sport! I first started weight training at the age of 7 years, and used it to support competing in other sports until my early 20's when I specialized more so in powerlifting. I studied sport science at university simply because of my interest in my own training and this interest turned into a business! I simply met the demand. Athletes like to be trained by people who they respect because they know they have paid their dues in training and competition.

RW - What do you consider 3 of the biggest mistakes "natural bodybuilders" make in their training?

KING - Simple – overtrain, overtrain, and overtrain. They are not the 'lone rangers,' but in the absence of drugs, the price to be paid is greater! Only when full recovery from each training session is achieved do you see the peak of the training effect.

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RW - If you had to choose between volume and intensity which would you choose and why?

KING - No competition – intensity is more important. I sacrifice volume before intensity. I do believe that some can grow on volume alone, but generally speaking, I believe that intensity (in all forms of athletic pursuit) is a more important training variable. The additional reality that has been concluded by those who study multi-year periodisation, is that over time there is a limit to the benefits of increasing volume, whilst pursuit of increased intensity is still possible and valid.

RW - What are the major differences between muscle fiber types (slow and fast-twitch) and do you feel these differences make a major difference in determining one's athletic potential?

KING - This is an over-rated concept and has been a bit of a trend lately. Like any trend it comes and goes. Arthur Jones was popularizing this many years ago so it is a trend that has come back! Yes, there are differences, but it is not the only or dominant variable that should influence training. Training age, maturation rate, chronological age, psychological traits are all examples of things that are equally important, if not more important in influencing program design. I stress this – no matter what your fiber type – strength training aims to shift you functionally to more fast twitch, especially strength training for sport. The concept of training 'like a slow twitch person' for an athlete is ludicrous!

RW - In the Nov 00 issue of Scientific American, an article titled, "*Deconstructing the Taboo*," asked the question, "Is there a genetic difference between the races which allows blacks to dominate certain sports (i.e., sprinting, NBA basketball, NFL football)?" Last year's top 5 IFBB Mr. Olympia contenders (Ronnie Coleman, Flex Wheeler, Chris Cormier, Kevin Levrone, and Shawn Ray) are black.

Do you feel there is a genetic factor in the abilities of Asians, Blacks, and Whites to develop muscle?

KING - Yes, I suspect there are genetic predispositions, but ultimately it was perhaps an adaptation to survival needs, and I think if we train 'white' athletes in similar environments (e.g. remote Africa) from birth, we may get some of these similar adaptations. A few generations in that environment would help. Alternatively, put a 'black' kid in an environment from birth where TV and fast food and computer games dominate, you may get an adaptation towards less athleticism. In summary, the cultural and environmental issues cannot be overlooked.

RW - How effective do you feel ergogenic aids (creatine, amino acids, protein powders, glutamine, etc.) are on a natural athlete's ability to develop muscle?

KING - Simple – if you have a need that is not being met, and a supplement meets that need – it is effective. Generally speaking creatine is the most effective, being what I call the greatest supplement breakthrough in my lifetime. But it can over time lose its impact. At the end of the day, I would be as interested, if not more so in knowing what foods

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were being consumed, so supplements need to be kept in perspective. Speaking from an international perspective, the capitalistic nature of the US has resulted in 2 industries having an incredible influence on attitudes and behaviour in US strength training – the supplement industry and the equipment industry. I appreciate this environment, but the reality from my perspective is that both these tend to be over-rated in America. Training and food are more important than equipment and supplements.

RW - It's quite common for people to train for at least two hours. How long should the typical workout session last?

KING – For the drug free athlete (chronological, training age and dependent upon goal) I would recommend 20-40 minutes, not including warm-up. Short? Sure! Want to grow? Just do it.

RW - There seems to be a lot of confusion on how many days a week a natural athlete should train in order to maximize his/her potential. How many training days per week would you recommend to the average weight-training athlete?

KING – The drug-free athlete should train a maximum of 4 days per week on a 4 day split routine. The so-called 'hard-gainer' and/or the older (over 35 yrs.) should consider 3 days per week. If you have a crazy lifestyle (stress or party), then train 2 days per week. Forget more than 4 days per week no matter what.

RW - Due to time constraints, if you had to choose between weight training and aerobic exercise, which would you choose and why?

KING – Without a doubt strength training. Broader impact on body, greater impact on longevity and quality of life.

RW - When discussing recovery, many articles fail to mention the importance of the central nervous system (CNS). Please explain the role of the CNS and its role in muscle building.

KING - The nerves fire the muscles. When the nerves get low on their fuel, they can't work. So not only do the muscles need to recover, but so does the nervous system. I haven't seen a lot of quantification of this system but experts in the world of athletic preparation commonly quote that the CNS takes 5-6 times longer than the muscles to recover. Because the CNS is common to the whole body, lack of recovery of the CNS is one reason why you should not train more than 2 days consecutively (generally speaking, in strength training). Your CNS is unlikely to recover, despite the fact you are training different muscle groups. This concept is totally overlooked by those training a split routine more than 4 times a week. Not even anabolics can ensure adequate recovery of the CNS. Muscles can be willing, but the lead to the spark plug is off!

RW - In regard to weight training, how important is nutrition and what percentage of proteins, carbs, and fats would you recommend for a person trying to maintain bodyfat levels of 10-15%?

KING - People talk percentages all the time and I find this boring. Unless you regularly count your calories and other nutritional assessment, how do you know what you are using and therefore the cause-effect? Don't bother talking percentages until you do this. It is academic until then! Over and above this, I believe that there is a lot of variation in individual response so I avoid generalizing. But for those who love numbers and generalizations, I lean towards 40/40/20 prot/carb/fat. But that is just a generalization.

RW - As a coach for Olympic athletes, is it now considered the rule for all athletes to incorporate some type of strength training to their training program? Pound for pound what group of athletes do you consider the strongest?

KING - This question is nice, but reinforces a stereotype. For the record, I don't care how strong the athlete is – I just want them to do what they need to win! If this means being super strong, great. If it means being super flexible and weak, great! Unlike some strength coaches, I don't feel the need to focus on strength exclusively or to use strength levels to justify my success. Just look at the scoreboard. I have been in programs where colleagues have said, "But he doesn't make them strong." Good, if they aren't getting strong it was because I didn't want them to work on this component at that time! Realistically, if an athlete has a range of imbalances and you go out and simply make them stronger, you may get a nice warm feeling but you have done nothing but damage the goods. But to answer the question...weightlifters.

RW - There seems to be an endless debate on what is best for optimal muscle growth, training with weight machines or free weights. Please give us the lowdown on this hotly disputed topic.

KING - Both work. I prefer free weights for myself and my clients but there is a time and place for everything. So I don't think machines are bad, and certainly not as bad as being promoted in current paradigms. I just see their role as a smaller player. This is more of an issue for sports training than bodybuilding. Unfortunately the American influence from the supplement and equipment industry has driven a cultural belief that machines and supplements will do it for you. How you train is more important. A training device or piece of equipment will not do it for you.

RW - In your view, why do some people's physiques never change even though they never miss a workout and maintain a well balanced diet?

KING - Probably because they never miss a workout. There is a critical balance between being disciplined and being inflexible. Never missing a workout is usually symptomatic of someone who is training to meet their emotional needs, and when the training decisions are being made for reasons other than what gives the best physical results, you will receive compromised training. It is important to understand your emotional state, and ensure that your training decisions are not being made to meet your emotional needs.

It actually takes a lot of emotional maturity to say – "I feel a bit tired, so I don't think it would be wise to train today," or to take a week's rest. Most suffer from the insecurity "I will shrink if I miss one day let alone a whole week!" These emotional insecurities result in overtraining. Particularly for clean athletes, unless you are prepared to take your rest

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weeks and respect fatigue as it arises, you will always overtrain. This is why I tell clean athletes that athletes using drugs make the same mistake, but the drugs cover up for it to some extent – but even in the latter case, this decision making process based on meeting emotional needs still creates an impediment to progress.

The bodybuilding/fitness industry is a unique phenomenon. Can you imagine a facility called “Joe’s Dental Center” where there are a hundred dentists’ chairs and members of the public paid \$10 per session to operate on themselves? Or “Downtown Legal Center” which provided a row of tables equipped for self-use? Most people hire dentists, doctors, lawyers etc. to provide professional advice to get it right. Yet the majority of gym users feel they can design their own workouts – no wonder there is a low success rate!

If I err when training a client, in either volume, intensity or frequency, I can detect that within a day and make an adjustment to training. If I can make an error on occasion, I can safely say that most lay persons make an error EVERY training session, don’t have the skills to detect the error, and even if they did suspect an error, don’t have the skills to adjust.

RW - In looking at some of your training routines, you prescribe single limb training (for example--single leg extension or single leg press). What is the reason behind this type of training and does it dramatically increase strength after a certain amount of time?

KING – Let me explain the rationale for single leg strength training. Do you like to have muscle imbalances? Do you enjoy the pain and/or injuries that result? Well if you have any kind of significant imbalance, and you do bilateral work, you will only be making it worse! Yes, your training will make the imbalance worse what one day may prevent you from being able to train! Isn’t that something to look forward to?! Of course not – if you have any bilateral deficit – fix it by finding the cause and strengthening the weak side before doing too much more bilateral work. Does it dramatically increase strength after a certain amount of time? A 12 week program like my ‘Limping’ series as posted at www.t-mag.com will give you, after only 12 weeks, leg strength like you will never have had before. Don’t rely on my opinion – go and do it – it’s free and it may be the best 12-week leg program you will ever do. (It is also described in my book “Get Buffed,” available at www.kingsports.net and the other distributors listed on this site in the products page).

RW - How much rest should be taken between sets if one is working as intensely as possible?

KING - Whose intensity? A beginner’s or an elite athlete? The more advanced, the more rest needed. What are the goals? Neural strength or metabolic hypertrophy? A longer rest period is required for neural adaptations. I don’t like stereotyped questions – unless you want to be trained like an average person in an average situation – I don’t recommend being average or receiving average advice!

RW - American TV is full of infomercials prescribing different forms of AB machines such as the AB Pro, AB Roller, AB Master, and the current craze is the Ab wheel (which

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has been around for decades). Do you feel these machines are beneficial or a waste of time?

KING - Nice toys. Provide variety. Not necessary.

RW - At what age would you say children can safely strength train?

KING - Which age? Chronological, maturation or training age? What's "safely?" With me supervising them or with their parents supervising them? I know you may think I am dodging your questions, but I say this – the age of inception to strength training should be influenced by the quality of the advice. My daughter, now 18 months, was being trained from birth, but not yet in any conventional, mainstream exercises – yet she is being strength trained. She can now walk on her hands with me holding her legs, can sumo deadlift a 4 kg med ball, and is fairly competent at using the speed ladder. But she does have the best training environment possible (and nothing to do with equipment)! Get my perspective?

RW - Anything you would like to say to wrap this interview up?

KING - Eat, sleep, and train – see you in the gym!

King is held in such esteem that the editors of Testosterone magazine stated, "In our opinion, the science of getting bigger and stronger can be equally divided into two time periods: Before King (BK) and After King (AK). He's that good."

Many people often become frustrated with their lack of progress in the gym and after months of effort without results they quit working out. Does this sound familiar? If you are tired of not making progress or would like to take your physical ability to the next level, I strongly recommend you go to the premier strength coach in the world—Ian King.

King has just come out with a new book, Get Buffed, a complete guide to getting bigger, stronger, and leaner. In this ground breaking book, King breaks down the science of strength training and provides you with the necessary information to make progress for years to come. To contact King, write to him at:

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You can also visit him on the web at www.kingsports.net, www.peakhealth.com, and www.t-mag.com.

Writer's Note – For a short time King is offering a free online newsletter titled, Between Sets. This newsletter (a \$147 value) is jammed packed with hundreds of training tips and tricks. To sign up, go to www.kingsports.net. King is now in negotiation for a possible seminar in Florida, Feb 2001. Check <http://kingsports.net> for information on upcoming seminars, products, or contact Teresa at kingsports@bigpond.com

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