

## TEMPO—NOT JUST FOR MUSICIANS ANYMORE

By Richard Bell

I recently had the pleasure of training a gifted basketball player. A high school senior, she came to me with concrete goals — my favorite kind. First, she wanted to improve her game performance with the object of playing some college ball. Second, like most women who come to me, she wanted leaner and stronger legs.

As happens all too often with high school athletes, her training had focused on long runs and infrequent weight training, during the season, once every two weeks. In order for her to become a better basketball player, she would have to lose some body fat and become stronger at the same time. How to do this?

Being my typical diplomatic self, I had her cut out all endurance training and replace it with sprint work. This made sense to her once I got her to understand that basketball is played within 74 feet of space. When it came to weights, I talked to her about tempo.

In strength work, tempo refers to the time it takes to perform one repetition of a lift. The lift itself can be divided into four phases. Imagine a simple bench press: first, you press the barbell toward the ceiling; second, you rest at the top of the extension; third, you lower the bar back to your chest; fourth, you rest at the bottom. In tempo training, I tell clients how many seconds I want them to spend on each segment of the lift. So, for the bench press, I might ask for a 2-1-3-0 tempo.

Try it. You'll find yourself moving a lot slower. Your muscles will certainly ache. Results? Depend on it!

Should you always lift slowly? Not at all. Tempo is only one way to vary a strength routine, and as I've said before, variety is key.

How did the tempo routine work out for the high school basketball player? We had only five weeks of training three times a week. Not only did she show an incredible difference in strength, but her legs leaned out dramatically, in part because we'd ditched the running and gone to sprinting, which builds defined muscle instead of depleting it. The body fat percentage on the front of her thighs went from 21 to 14 millimeters, a loss of nearly one third!

She was happy, so was I, and she's having a great college season.

*"If you want something you've never had, you must be willing to do something you've never done."*

—Drina Reed