



BUILDING A BETTER PAM

BY RICHARD BELL

In January 2005, Pam completed her first two-week training cycle. At 49, Pam's a novice at fitness training, and we're working on huge changes. My approach with her is basic, and knowing where to start is often the hardest part of strength training. In fact, those of you who have just starting in the New Year might want to try some of the concepts I'm using with Pam:

Use very few weight-room machines.

Use free weights instead—dumbbells and barbells—so that both sides of the body perform equally.

Keep it simple.

Pam's first circuit consists of exercises like the seated row (targeting back and core muscles), box step-ups (the entire leg), and lateral raises (shoulders). You shouldn't have to think hard to remember how the move is done.

Move quickly.

Proceed from one exercise to the other to get the full aerobic benefit of the circuit, then rest 75 seconds. As Pam's fitness improves, her rest periods will decrease by 15 seconds at a time. She's currently doing three circuits, and I plan to push her to six.

Up the weight amount.

As your strength improves, increase the weight of your equipment. This may sound obvious, but people often prefer to stay comfortable.

End with aerobics.

Weight training should always dominate, but finish up with 20 minutes of aerobic work. Use the stationary bike, the elliptical trainer, the treadmill, whatever—but change the challenge level, change the speed, change the machine.

Periodization is a big part of my plan for Pam, and it should be part of your workouts, too, even if you've been lifting for decades. Simply put, this means organizing your training into a series of phases. How you do it depends on what you want to achieve. Pam's program, for instance, is an elementary version of what I'd do for a model wanting to get in shape for an important shoot. Build muscle and reduce fat—on a deadline.

Serious athletes have different goals and a different schedule. For a high school football lineman, I'd like to see the first four weeks—ideally during the off-season—spent on adaptation workouts, to produce a base level of strength and conditioning. The next six-week period would be dedicated to building muscle mass. The third period would emphasize explosive strength, and so on.

Swimmers and track athletes would allocate their training periods differently. So would marathon runners or adventure racers.

But the point is this: I don't know a single dedicated coach who doesn't use periodization principals with clients, and we'll be exploring periodization more in future columns.

So what's next for Pam?

Smaller rest periods. Followed by longer circuits, and more of them. At this point in the process, Pam needs to be listening to me. Ultimately, I like to educate my clients to the point where they no longer need me, but Pam still needs the discipline provided by the trainer.

Meanwhile, I'm happy to say she's working her butt off. Stay tuned.