Training Throwers and Sprinters with Old School Training Methods

It was a sad story to start with. I was training a high school athlete who was throwing shot, discus and javelin. Practices were held 5 or 6 days a week. The schedule was the standard Monday – Saturday and meets were held once or twice a week. We were making great progress training old school combined with the conjugate method. He began training in February and it was now April. He was getting weaker and feeling more and more exhausted. I’ll tell you exactly why in the next paragraph.

Practices began with a “warm up” which consisted of a 2 mile jog, plus 5 – 10 minutes of stair jogging. When they finished this thirty minute warm up they worked on their throwing events. Now, we all know this is no way to train a power athlete! There were no sprints incorporated for explosive leg power and there were no strength / power training moves done to improve the ability of this athlete to throw further and better!

The exercises outlined in this article are not just for throwers and sprinters, any high school athlete can use these exercises for improvements in their sport. Most of this work is considered GPP (general physical preparedness) but some of the work can be considered SPP (such as when we incorporate sand bag and kettlebell tosses and throws).

Sled work is a must for the sprinter and thrower. We want to get the posterior chain (especially the hams, glutes) extremely strong and powerful. So to remedy this problem, after a thorough warm up (not distance jogging) it’s time to start doing sled dragging
while walking forward. You can do these in various ways: use a weight lifting belt and loop the tow strap through the belt, hold two tow straps with hands behind back, hold the tow straps with hands against chest and elbows in or extend arms fully and drive forward. The forward drag will emphasize the stress on the glutes and hams.

In addition to forward drags you should also do backwards drags as well as walking sideways drags (these work best with the belt and tow strap connected). Each workout should begin or end with 10 – 12 minutes of hard sled dragging. Sleds are great for strength and recuperation! Use them!

And now with the sand bags, let’s keep hitting the posterior chain. Here are the sandbag exercises we will rotate through every 3 workouts:

- Good Morning / RDL Hybrid
- Bent Knee Deadlift
- RDL
Perform the above three exercises twice a week. One day go heavy and shoot for 3 – 5 heavy sets of 4 – 6 reps. Next workout go lighter and shoot for 2 – 3 good sets of 15 reps minimum, all the way up to 40 reps! Each workout try to increase the weight of the sand bag by 5 - 10 % of the bag total. Do this by adding chains, or small sand bags or some other weighted implement that fits in the bag. Every 2 – 3 weeks change this core lift so the body does not adapt to the same movement.

After your core lift which focuses on the posterior, perform one more hard lift, choosing from the following list of sandbag exercises, and done with the same methods above (switching every 2 – 3 weeks and adding weight each time):

- Sand bag squat
- Sand bag Lunges (all variations)
- Step ups with sand bag

Shoot for a solid 3 – 5 sets of 6 – 8 reps here. But, don’t think you’re finished yet! The upper body is just as important, and believe it or not, having a strong upper body contributes to being faster! Aside from the strong man exercises listed, you can also include bodyweight exercises such as pull ups, dips, push ups and all their variations.

For upper body, using the sand bag choose 2 of the following for 3 – 4 sets of 8 – 12 reps.

- Bent over row
- Military press
- Clean and press
- Shouldering
- Rotations onto a barrel or picnic table

Your workouts can be full body or split into upper and lower body workouts. As the coach or the athlete you will have to see what is best for yourself and / or each individual athlete. Some people recover quickly and easily while others thrive on short workouts w/less volume and less frequency.
Now, let’s get into SPP (specialized physical preparation). We will use sand bags and kettlebells for throwing. We can use two handed throws on the sand bag due to their weight, and the kettlebells can be done with two hands as well as one handed if you have a light enough kettlebell.

The sandbag throwing is simply a clean, half squat and chest pass throw. We use the half squat to recruit power from the legs to help with our throw.

above you see the half squat position and below is the release with full extension of the arms.
We throw kettlebells in many ways which is what some of the best throwers do. They use different implements to throw rather than always using the same shot, hammer, discuss, etc. to throw. This helps keep the body fresh and allows for greater progress since the central nervous system is not as exhausted from doing the same exercises.

I always begin the above exercise with a high pull and then I catch the KB in a half squat position. From here I explode forward and release!
below is another variation of a throw, using the one arm snatch throw
and below is a two handed scoop toss

Throwing is all about power, so don’t choose a KB that is too heavy which forces your speed to be entirely too slow. A 12 kg KB is great and a 16 KG KB is pretty good as well. Only an advanced thrower should use the 20 or 24 kilo KB for throwing.
If you are short on budget, you can always mimic these movements with a medicine ball. Not the expensive medicine balls either! Medicine balls were always in the training halls in the early years of the 1900’s and still are found in many hard core gyms. Make your own by cutting a hole in a basketball, and then filling it with pea gravel. This should load your “medicine ball” up to at least 15 or 20 lbs. tape it up with plenty of duct tape and you have a dam strong med ball. Fancy looks doesn’t mean better results. This website is here to prove that!