

EDWARD SARUL'S VIEWS OF THE SHOT PUT

An Interview

Edward Sarul, the 1983 world champion, talks about his training that differs from most top level shot putters, particularly in the development of strength, which in his opinion not the most important factor in the performance. The article appeared originally in Lekkoatletyka, Poland. This translation is based on extracts from Spordileht, Estonian SSR, No. 74, July 1985. Re-printed with permission from Modern Athlete and Coach.

The 1983 world shot put champion, Edward Sarul of Poland, believes that he has been successful because he didn't rush to specialize in the event and began with the development of strength very late in his career. He began planned training at the age of 18 and changed to an intensive preparation even later. The following are extracts from an interview with Sarul that refer to his views on training.

What do you recommend for young shot putters?

"It doesn't pay to start specialized training early. The best would be to begin with running, jumping and games for a good all-round physical development. However, it pays to polish technique. There will be less time left for technique later, when more emphasis is directed towards strength development.

"Intensive strength development, in my opinion, should start at the age of 20. This, of course, doesn't mean that strength training must be completely avoided at a younger age. However, it should be based on restricted repetitions with only small and medium loads.

"Myself, I took up normally accepted strength training at the age of 21 . Unfortunately I can't claim that my strength development exercises are intensive because my strength indicators are below those of other top throwers. My squat is 275 kg and bench press 182 kg. Laut of United States squats with 300 kg and bench presses 250 kg. Similar indicators are achieved by many other shot putters. This allows concluding that strength is not the most important factor in the shot put.

"I follow mostly my coaches' training plan but allow myself to make changes sometimes. I know the reactions of my organism extremely well and can decide when the load has to be reduced or when some exercises should be eliminated. This allows to prevent stress injuries. You must know when to say 'stop, enough for today'.



EDWARD SARUL
"Strength not most important"

"I avoid myself, and recommend it to others, not to employ isometric type exercises, performed with a limited range of movement. Such exercises have negative influence on muscles and increase injury chances when lighter implements are used."

How do you develop strength in different training periods?

"There are four strength development workouts a week in my program during the preparation period. The first two include large loads, the other two reduced loads performed at maximum speed. I perform in winter several sets with medium loads, followed by a few sets with close to a maximum load. Occasionally I do attempt maximum lifts, aiming to improve my previous best."

"The volume and loads are reduced prior to competitions. During the competitive season my strength workouts take place three times a week, one with the maximum load, the other two with resistances 60 to 80% from my personal bests. A control test is included in the program three days before a competition for maximum stimulus. A light workout on the last day prior to a meet completes the preparations. It is preceded by a few shot deliveries."

What do you say about the development of speed capacities?

“At the moment I pay little attention to the development of sprinting speed in training because shot specific speed has been the major factor in my success. Other athletes are amazed when they hear about my approach to concentrate on only light shots, including the 4 kg implement, in training. I use the 7.25 kg shot virtually only in competitions and never employ overweight implements in training.

“The most common implements in my workouts are the 5 kg and 6 kg shots. The 7.25 kg shot is used only for deliveries from different positions during the warm-up. All puts with a glide are performed only with light implements. This is based on my understanding that during hard training, when a little tired, my movements will not be fast enough when using the normal weight shot.

“To assure that the movement velocity in training remains close to the competitive action, I use 5 kg or 6 kg shots according to how I feel. The number of puts in training is considerably reduced in the pre-competition phase. However, these deliveries are much more technical. It must be stressed that whatever the weight of the shot, I always try to use exactly the competitive technique in training.

“My best performances with light shots vary. Three days before the world championships in Helsinki my effort with the 4 kg implement reached 28.40 m and I put the 5 kg shot 25.80 m. However, I managed to put the 6 kg shot only a little further than the 7.25 kg.

How do you develop movement co-ordination?

“This is most important. I used to employ a lot of different exercises but am now concentrating on specific technique co-ordination. This involves the performance of specific technique elements from various starting positions. A lot of time is allocated to the development of the poor and the most important technical elements, often employing invented positions to get the feel of the action.

“As far as my technique is concerned, I know after each put what mistakes I have made. You must have a feel of the shot. Some athletes emphasize strength and believe that the stronger you are, the further will the shot land. I believe in the opposite. It can happen that strength is there but the shot doesn't fly.

“Later, when the strength indicators have somewhat dropped, the feel for the shot returns and with it improves the performance. I believe that the strength required in the shot put is slightly different from that achieved with the barbell”.

What are your views on technique?

“The main problems early in my career were difficulties with the glide, now my major shortcoming is the start of the glide. I begin far too short and fail to apply force to the shot over the longest distance possible after the transfer to the right leg. It could be the lack of leg strength . My other fault is the low elbow position in the delivery phase.

“For young athletes I recommend, above all, to develop technique by using light shots — 4 kg, 5 kg and even 3 kg in weight. I remember well how heavy the 5 kg shot felt at the start of training. Young athletes find it very difficult to change to a heavier shot when they step up to a new age division.

“The change to a heavier implement is often responsible for technique deterioration and the appearance of different faults. In my opinion, it is not advisable to change in training to a heavier shot immediately after moving to a new age group. This must take place gradually as the level of strength improves.”

What do you think about training plans?

“Training plans, while prepared in great detail, must have flexibility. The plan must allow for continual changes and updating, depending on how the athlete feels and the facilities and conditions available for training. The plan must also be designed according to realistic capacities and previous training of an athlete.

“It is important not to follow training plans designed for other athletes or copy plans from textbooks. What is important is to be consistent and from this point of view a training plan must be treated as a law.”