

Watch The Clock

by

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It was four-thirty pm and I just hit the gym for a quick workout. After signing in and chatting for a few minutes with friends at the front desk I went out to the gym floor. It was pretty crowded and I noticed people were hanging around the back equipment; it was my day for back work. I headed for the water fountain to get a quick gulp. Not that I was that thirsty but it beat hanging around looking lost. This gave me some time to evaluate the situation to see if those hanging around were hanging around or actually working out.

I headed over to see if I could work in and just as I got to the lat machine, everyone split. Ah, all to myself. Just then, someone I had never seen before approached me. “Hi, I’m going to be using this machine for my back.” “Fine” I said, “you can work in with me.” “I’m really hitting it today,” he said. “I’m going to get in top shape.” “I’ve been here since eight o’clock this morning and I’ve still got a couple of hours to go.”

After my first warm-up set of lat pulldowns, he jumped in and did his set. I then proceeded to do my five sets uninterrupted. Just as I finished my last rep on my last set he came over and said, “mind if I get my next set?” “Well, no... go right ahead, I’m finished with it.” “Done so fast,” he said. “You’ve got to work it if you want results.” I walked off and left him still talking. Saying something about only heaven knows what.

As I prepared to load the bar for my next exercise, bent over barbell rows, I couldn’t help but look around for the “workout genius.” I spotted him talking to someone

else. Five sets of barbell rows, four sets of deadlifts, four sets of dumbbell shrugs and I was finished with my workout. I noticed our friend standing by the Smith Machine talking to yet some other people. As I walked toward the front desk I ran into the manager. “Hey, what’s with the guy over by the Smith Machine?” I asked. “Oh him,” Tom replied. “He’s been here since early this morning.” “Says he’s going to train and enter some contests this year.” “The entire time he’s been here today he hasn’t done thirty minutes worth of work.” “So I’ve noticed,” I said.

The next day I asked Tom if the “workout genius” had been in and he said he hadn’t seen him... or heard him. Over the next month or so I never saw him again. Sometime later Tom and I were talking and the subject came up and Tom said “workout genius” never came back. “He was here that one day, all day, for hours but never came back.” “Maybe one workout is all it took to get him into shape,” I snapped.

True story and I’ll bet if you’ve been around a gym any time at all you’ve seen someone like the guy I just mentioned. They train their mouths more than their bodies. This is a good lesson for all of us, as we should watch the amount of time taken between sets. Sometimes even without our knowing it our rest intervals will gradually increase. Once it begins it takes hold and the next thing you know you are resting longer and longer. You start adding more weight to each movement to justify the longer rest periods between sets. Not really a good practice unless of course, you are actually in a routine requiring heavier weights and longer rest periods.

It happens to all of us from time to time. The important thing is we realize it and correct it before it gets out of hand. Left unchecked it can sure wreck havoc on an otherwise solid routine. This brings to mind another lesson learned from our talkative friend. You can be friendly but you don’t need to be talkative on the gym floor. It’s a place for work to be done not socializing.

It’s nice to have various methods of increasing intensity of a workout. It’s also good to incorporate each of them as workouts are changed and altered from time to time.

On one end of the scale some require rest periods of three to five minutes between sets while on the other end three to five deep breaths is all that is permitted. In either case, I don't know of one method worth a grain of salt that requires a person to train eight hours a day... even if they were to do a full body workout. I'm certain you don't either.

The old saying: "You can train long or you can train hard but you can't do both" is alive and well and worth putting into practice. Forty-five minutes to an hour is long enough for a great workout. Not many have the genetics to go longer and still be productive. In fact, I don't know of anyone who does have the genetics for training non-stop for hours on end. Years ago my workouts consisted of two hour sessions six days a week and so did a lot of others who trained in the 60's. Experience prevails and I learned from my mistakes of the past. Somewhere down the line I learned working out that long was not as productive as I thought it was.

It's not the length of time you train it's how intense you train that counts. I know some who once they discovered they were taking longer and longer with their workouts decided to start timing their rest breaks by the clock. That way they wouldn't drift longer than they should. I've done this myself from time to time and it will keep you on your toes. Especially in the latter sets when you feel the need for more rest.

Once I was taking longer than normal to move through my workouts. I knew I was lifting heavier but I also recognized I was taking longer than I should between sets. I decided to put the clock into play. For the routine I was following at the time, forty-five seconds was the maximum time I needed between sets. Not only did watching the clock cut the time I spent in the gym way down, it also made my workouts more intense, thus making them more productive.

Watching the clock at school or while on the job may not be a good thing but watching it during your workout may be all you need to spur on new progress.