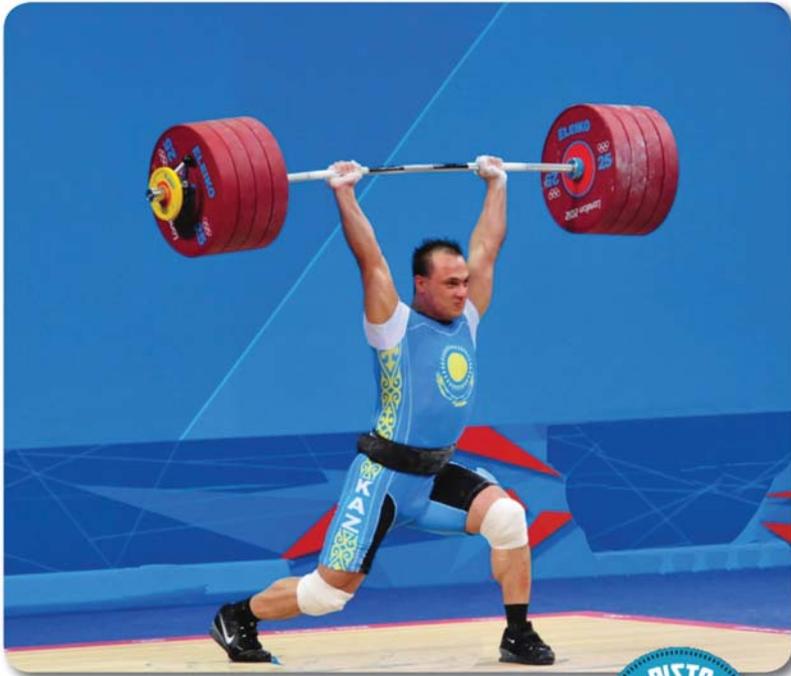


Kazakhstan Weightlifting System for Elite Athletes



Ivan Rojas
Gwendolyn Sisto



Copyright 2015 by the authors of this book:
Ivan Rojas
Gwendolyn Sisto

The book authors retain copyright to
their contributions to this book.

**The contents of this book may not be
reproduced or copied in any way without
the prior written consent of the authors.**

All rights reserved.

Published 2015
Printed in the United States of America.
ISBN 978-1-943650-07-1

Photo credits: Ivan Rojas, Gwendolyn Sisto and Hookgrip

This book was published by BookCrafters
Joe and Jan McDaniel SAN-859-6352
<http://bookcrafters.net>



This book may be ordered by going to:
[http://ristosports.com /conferences/training/books/](http://ristosports.com/conferences/training/books/)





The Olympic Champions and Coaches of Kazakhstan's 2012 Olympic Weightlifting Team, presented to Risto Sports, March 2013

Dedications

This work is dedicated to my mentor **Daniel Nunez**, who taught me how to become a good coach.

Ivan Rojas

I dedicate my writing to the most talented athlete I know, **Gwendolyn Rojas**, and my weightlifting mentor **Ivan Rojas**.

Gwendolyn Sisto

“It is impossible to know absolutely everything. Every time, after the Olympic Games, you learn something new, and for the next Olympic Games you have to do some improvements, some changes.”

Aleksey Ni

Head Coach of Kazakhstan Weightlifting
March 17, 2013 at Risto Sports [1]



Figure 1: Kazakhstan’s National Coaches at Risto Sports. Mendikhan Tapsir, General Secretary of the Kazakhstan Weightlifting Federation; Ivan Rojas, Head Coach of Risto Sports; Viktor Ni, Coach of Olympic Gold Medalists Svetlana Podobedova, Maiya Maneza, and Zulfiya Chinshanlo; Aleksey Ni, Head Coach of Kazakhstan’s National Team which won *four* Gold medals at the 2012 Olympic Games

Introduction

In 2012, Kazakhstan shocked the weightlifting world by winning four Gold medals at the London Olympics. Kazakhstan had competed as an independent country at the Olympics since 1996. Before the 2008 Olympics, Kazakhstan had never won gold in weightlifting. According to Aleksey Ni, “Nobody would have believed my team would bring four gold medals. And only coach of three girls, Viktor [Ni, would win three gold medals]” [1] at the 2012 Olympics. Furthermore, before 2008, there were fewer than 600 weightlifters in Kazakhstan.

According to Ni, the secrets of Kazakhstan’s success lie in four elements: gifted athletes, a big goal, government funding, and a good plan.[1] Certainly, a good plan is one element that any coach can control. As Aleksey Ni points out, we must always keep learning and seeking ways to improve our programming methods. In this book, you will gain new insights to the programming of Master of the Sport level lifters in Kazakhstan. This information will help elite athletes reach new levels of performance.

Background on the country of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is located in Central Asia, south of Siberia and West of China. It became a Soviet Republic in 1937, and later became an independent country on December 16, 1991. It is an interesting country comprised of many different ethnic groups such as Kazakhs, Russians, and Koreans. Much of the ethnic diversity was the result of Stalin era policies towards “problematic ethnic groups.” In 1937, Stalin exiled ethnic Koreans from far east Russia to Kazakhstan. During World War II, again, more than 500,000 Germans, thousands of Ukrainians, Tatars, Poles, and Chechens were “relocated” to Kazakhstan [1].

As an independent republic, Kazakhstan has outpaced economic growth of other former Soviet Republics. Primarily driven by its rich oil reserves, Kazakhstan's economic growth rate has been as high as 10% in the early 2000's. [3] Even with the global economic downturn, Kazakhstan's GDP grew about 5% in 2012 and remains Central Asia's largest economy. Along with oil and natural gas production, it is also a major producer and exporter of industrial metals, grain, and uranium [4].



Figure 2: Map of Kazakhstan [2]

Modern Day Weightlifting in Kazakhstan & the Importance of the Soviet System

Since the Soviet era, Kazakhstan athletes have used the Soviet System. Coaches are formally trained in the system while studying weightlifting programming in universities. Even in modern day Kazakhstan, the Soviet System is still used. Athletes who are not yet Master's of the Sport use the Soviet System.

Until about eight years ago, even weightlifters at Master of the Sport level used the Soviet System in Kazakhstan. After bringing Enver Turkelari to Kazakhstan, the programming of elite, Master of Sports Level lifters changed [1] [6]. When weightlifters win the Kazakh National Championships, regardless of age, they begin training in the Master of the Sport program.



Figure 3: Svetlana Podobedova of Kazakhstan winning the Gold Medal at the 2012 Olympic Games

In most cases, it is anticipated that athletes will reach Master of the Sport by age 18 and have trained, already, for a period of eight years. In some cases, athletes may reach sports mastery prior to 18. For example, Kazakh Olympic Champions like Ilya Ilyin and Zulfiya Chinshanlo began lifting around eight or nine years old, hence, they achieved Master of Sport before 18 years of age and after nearly eight years of training.

In this book, we will briefly touch on the formation and programming of youth lifters as well as the criteria for attaining Master of the Sport status. The second part of this book will be dedicated to programming for athletes who are Masters of the Sport.

Implications for Western Countries

The Master of Sport program contained in this book is intended for athletes with advanced technique who are approaching sports mastery. In other words, just as in Kazakhstan, lifters will reach this level at different age based on when they started or how intensely they trained. Regardless of age, this program should be done only by elite athletes who have had at least eight years of training. Novice weightlifters must start with the Soviet System.

For the reader's convenience, Risto Sports also offers a companion booklet on the Soviet System. It is highly recommended that coaches and athletes complete a Soviet program before venturing to this elite level program.

A brief ethnograph - what it's like being a Westerner in Kazakhstan

When we arrive at Astana, the airport is small and modern. It is incredibly clean and is about the size of Ottawa Canada's airport, another small capital city. Most every sign is in Cyrillic with some signs having English subtitles. Foreigners leaving the airport have to fill out a tiny slip of paper called a "transfer slip," which looks to be simply printed off of a laser jet. The transfer slip is about 4 inches by 2 inches, and you must scrawl answers to simple questions like "purpose of visit," "number of children traveling with you." Fortunately, the wording is in both English, Kazakh, and Russian. I had to re-fill out mine about three times because it was ambiguous as to whether the answers were to be put in the column directly next to the question or in another column off to the right.

You could tell that they don't get many Americans passing through Astana. Almost no one speaks English in the Astana area. The officers knew basic commands in English only related to their job. So, filling out the ambiguously labeled form involved a short cycle of rework.

It was also interesting as my daughter, who is a minor, and my husband, and myself all had to go one at a time to the customs window. It is probably the only country I have been to where families do not go to the customs window together. We were all asked if we had a visa, despite that the visa requirement for Americans had been waived during the time period we traveled.

It is a very short walk from the passport control to the exit of the airport. At the time, Astana was about the same temperature as Boston, maybe even warmer. It seemed Astana was having a slightly warmer winter than normal, and New England was having a colder, snowier winter.

The roads from the airport to Astana's city center are wide and well lit. We enter the city down a wide promenade like highway, lined every few feet with tall highway lamps lighting

the path to the center. The city is clean and organized. As we would find throughout the journey, public spaces are very well taken care of and meticulously cleaned.

Our training hall and the site of the 2015 Kazakhstan National Youth Championships is the Aramay Training Center- a large, clean, somewhat modern public training building. It was about a five minute walk from our hotel. It is in the older section of the city, a few miles from the gleaming downtown.

People walk fast in Kazakhstan, probably because the temperature is in the single digits (deg.F) most of the time. Many people wear fur. Most men, especially Kazakh men, have fur hats. Women often wear full length fur coats with hoods. Most people wore dark colors, especially black pants.

The sidewalks seem to only be covered in a few inches of compacted snow, that became hard and icy. What I later learned is that this few inches was more a like foot and a half of compacted snow in some places.

For the most part, lifters and coaches at the training hall are very friendly and kind. The coaches are respected, and they shake each others' hands every time they enter the training hall for the first time that day. The male athletes also greet the coaches with handshakes. Ivan was included in this fraternity of coaches. There were few female athletes, so not being sure what to do, I did not partake in the hand shaking ritual.

There is a great sense of respect for all ethnicities and religions. People are very curious about culture and ethnicity. In America, people love to ask you what your ethnicity is, especially if you have an trans-ethnic look. In Kazakhstan, people also want to know your religion. Knowing that we are Catholic, it is quickly pointed out to us that there is a Catholic church right in front of the training center, which is serendipitous as Kazakhstan is a primarily Muslim country. About 60% of Kazakhstan citizens are ethnically Kazakh and Muslim, and about 40% are ethnic Russian and Russian orthodox Christians. Catholicism and Judaism are represented in much smaller percentages. It is in style for Kazakh Muslim men to have impeccably trimmed facial hair, such as short beards with mustaches. Russian Orthodox men are typically clean shaven. We find this trend funny as, at

the time in America, the type of facial hair that Kazakh Muslims sport are primarily sported by Christians in America. In effect, most people in Kazakhstan assume Coach Ivan Rojas is a Muslim because of his awesome facial hair.

The Development of Youth lifters

The creation of lifters is a measured and methodical process. Years of planning ensues from the first time athletes are selected for training. In short, the formation of an Olympic Champion starts at the youth stage.



Figure 4: Eight year old Anya training in Temirtau, Kazakhstan. Her brother, Sergei, also trains in this gym.

There are some Youth lifters who start even later than age ten, and, in some cases, lifters will start because their sibling is already a lifter.

Youth lifters go to a special sports school which allows them to fit training into their schedule. Children will train early in the morning, around 7 a.m., then go to class, returning in the afternoon around 5 p.m. to train a second time. Most of the training halls are in multi-sport public training complexes.

Soviet era thinking & infrastructure:

The Soviet culture believed that sport was a human right; that all people should have the right to participate in sports. In effect, many former Soviet Republics have large public sporting complexes where people can train. In effect, this facilitates the ability for governments' Olympic committees to organize sport down to the local youth level. Simply, a country like Kazakhstan already has the infrastructure to support youth talent identification and training in any of its large cities.

In contrast, most weightlifting in the United States is offered by private gyms and crossfits; there are very few non-profit or city run organizations that offer free weightlifting. Up until about 2011, most weightlifting existed in the form of garage gyms in the homes of private citizens. Being able to lift in the United States is a privilege, not a right. To start lifting as a youth you either need financial resources to join a weightlifting gym or a benefactor with a set of weights. Further, this also explains the variation in the professionalism of coaches and their athletes; there is no government system to conduct education and quality control of coaches. Perhaps, because weightlifting is such a difficult sport that requires such unwavering training and dedication and offers a dearth of financial reward, it is less successful for Team USA at the Olympic Level.

Youth Incentivization:

Youth lifters who have achieved successes are paid to train. Their salary is around \$350 per month. Further, youth lifters attend national championships free of charge. The start list and final entries occur up until the technical meeting, the day before lifting starts. In other words, the atmosphere is quite fluid and relaxed for national competitions. For example, Gwendolyn Rojas, Risto Sports athlete and US National Youth Champion, was invited to lift as a special guest lifter at the 2015 Kazakhstan

Youth National Championships; whereas, most other countries with lesser weightlifting programs than Kazakhstan bar any foreign lifters from competing at their nationals. At national competitions, Youth lifters may be selected to international teams, such as the Youth World Championships, based on their performance.

Still, most of the Youth team that will compete at the Youth World Championships were pre-selected and in training camps, even, prior to youth nationals. Most of the Kazakh Youth world team did not compete at the Youth National Championships.



Figure 5: Gwendolyn Rojas, of Risto Sports, competing as a special guest lifter at the 2015 Kazakhstan Youth National Championships

The Training of Youth Lifters

The Kazakhstan system is rooted in the Soviet System. In other words, the foundations are taken from the Soviet science and philosophy of training and altered based on Kazakh empirical studies.

The training of Youth lifters differs significantly from the training of Junior and Senior lifters. Children train with high

volume. The normal repetition range for children is 700 to 720 repetitions. Children train with lower intensity than Junior and Senior lifters. This is to respect the stress of puberty on children.

Sample Load Distribution:

Week 1 720 reps

Week 2 600 reps

Week 3 700 reps

Week 4 500 reps

Much work is done in the 80% range. It is common to see 21 reps at the same weight, such as by doing 7 sets of 3 repetitions.

Like all training systems that are based on Soviet methods, the daily intensity varies systematically. It is important to cycle the intensity for recovery of the athlete.

Below is a sample of daily intensity.

Day	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Intensity	70%	65%	85%	50%	100%**	85%

** The athlete is only permitted to go to 100% on Friday only if they successfully complete 4-5 attempts at 90% with ease. Otherwise, the athlete stops at 90%.

Master of the Sport

The first goal of the Youth athlete is to become a Master of the Sport (Youth Athlete). This means that once one reaches this level, this particular youth will advance to a higher level training center with other lifters that were nationally selected. This distinction is of such importance to the Kazakh training system that at, national competitions, the announcer will announce lifters as “Master of the Sport” or “Candidate to Master of the Sport.”

These are the different Master of the Sport levels:

<i>MASTER OF THE SPORT CHART - MALE LIFTERS</i>									
<i>Weight Class</i>	<i>Junior MOS</i>	<i>Youth MOS</i>	<i>Candidate MOS</i>	<i>13-14 Yrs</i>	<i>12-13 Yrs</i>	<i>11-12 Yrs</i>	<i>10-11 Yrs</i>	<i>9-10 Yrs</i>	<i>8-9 Yrs</i>
30			89 Kg	72 Kg	62 Kg	56 Kg	48 Kg	42 Kg	37 Kg
34			95 Kg	80 Kg	70 Kg	65 Kg	55 Kg	50 Kg	45 Kg
38			110 Kg	95 Kg	85 Kg	75 Kg	65 Kg	55 Kg	48 Kg
42		145 Kg	125 Kg	110 Kg	95 Kg	85 Kg	72 Kg	65 Kg	58 Kg
46		160 Kg	142 Kg	125 Kg	105 Kg	96 Kg	85 Kg	75Kg	67 Kg
50		180 Kg	160 Kg	140 Kg	124 Kg	108 Kg	92 Kg	5 Kg	75 Kg
56	250 kg	202 Kg	175 kg	155 Kg	135 Kg	120 Kg	105 Kg	92 Kg	83 Kg
62	275 Kg	224 Kg	195 kg	172 Kg	150 Kg	130 Kg	116 Kg	102 Kg	93 Kg
69	305 Kg	245 Kg	218 Kg	190 Kg	167 Kg	145 Kg	128 Kg	112 Kg	100 Kg
77	330 KG	265 Kg	232 Kg	206 Kg	184 Kg	160 Kg	140 Kg	123 Kg	107 Kg
85	348 Kg	282 Kg	248 Kg	222 Kg	193 Kg	170 Kg	145 Kg	130 Kg	115 Kg
94	364 Kg	300 Kg	262 Kg	234 Kg	202 Kg	175 Kg	153 Kg	135 Kg	120 Kg
105	382 Kg	307 Kg	274 Kg	240 Kg	212 Kg	185 Kg	160 Kg	140 Kg	125 Kg
105+	395 Kg	318 Kg	280 Kg	245 Kg	218 Kg	190 Kg	165 Kg	145 Kg	130 Kg