

**The Thunder From Down Under**  
**An Interview With Ian King**  
by Nelson Montana, Fri, Jan 29, 1999

Ian King is the antithesis of what you may think a strength coach would be. Other than the proper diction of his Australian accent (which made my New York accent seem all that much more abrasive), Ian is not a pundit of any particular method or secret strategy obtained from scientific calculations. He does not claim to be privy to some "perfect rep range" based on an arcane principle known only to East Romanian Olympic gold medallists. Ian's approach to strength training depends on who is being trained and for what purpose. One size does not fit all.

He may not be well known (yet) outside of his homeland of Australia, but what Ian King has to offer, in terms of bodybuilding expertise, is an invaluable import. Ian states his case in an uncharacteristically soft-spoken manner, but he makes his point clear. Ask most any other powerlifter to speak about his "stats" and he'll jump at the chance, but Ian thought it gauche to recite numbers or to draw attention to himself, even though he has finished no lower than third place in several national powerlifting championships.

At first, I found his reluctance to speak about his accomplishments peculiar, but Ian wasn't trying to be intentionally cryptic. It soon became apparent that he's a humble man and very well aware that his personal accomplishments aren't a factor in how he can help others with their personal strength goals. That alone sets him miles apart from his contemporaries. To so many of the currently popular exercise "authorities," the line of thinking is, "It worked for me, so it'll work for you." More often than not, it seems as if good portions of these "principles" are little more than a marketable gimmick. You'll get no such spin doctoring from Ian King. No shortcuts here. What you will get is a wealth of knowledge and an extensive understanding of effective exercise techniques that can make that elusive quest for physical progress an obtainable reality.

Now, Testosterone has arranged for the bodybuilding community beyond the land of bushman and boomerangs to hear what this sage of strength has to say.

Due to the difference in time (21 hours!), it was after midnight in New York City when I called Ian at his home.

NM: Hello, Ian. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with Testosterone. Where exactly am I calling?

IK: I'm in Brisbane, which is the capital of the state province Queensland. It's called the Sunshine State because it has a tropical environment. I'm outside the city near the coast. Our coastal striping is similar to your California.

NM: Did you grow up and attend school in Australia?

IK: I was born in New Guinea but left because the educational system was limited there. After moving to Australia where my parents are originally from, I went to Unie to study—more because I was interested in training, not so much because I wanted to attend a university!

NM: Is that also when you began taking on clients?

IK: It was at that time that I attracted a lot of other athletes and wound up training many of them in several capacities. It became so much of a demand that I turned it into my business. It was more of a natural evolution than anything else.

NM: Did you have an innate affinity towards athleticism?

EDITOR'S NOTE: You'll have to forgive Nelson. He once sat his butt down real hard on a Webster's dictionary, and it lodged up there.

IK: Whether I liked it or not, athletic preparation was something that came most easily to me. I engaged in powerlifting, played rugby, and was involved in the martial arts. I consider it a gift, but I used my sense of intuition as much as anything else to achieve what I did. For that reason, I don't have alliances with any tertiary institutions. The people that come to me do so because of my reputation, not because of my association with any particular organization. I work wherever my computer and I wind up. And that has been in many gyms around the world.

NM: Do you work mostly on a one-on-one basis?

IK: To be honest, I try to avoid working too hard! When taking on a client, the main criteria I need is to respect the athlete's attitude. It's not so much that I have to like them as a person, but they must be determined and have to really want what I have to give them.

I also work with groups, but if the environment will not lead to success, I want nothing to do with it. In team sports, you have an administrative structure whose faculty may only be interested in keeping their jobs. If I can't influence the bigger picture, then it isn't worth my involvement. I also don't like dealing with the politics.

NM: Do you work with bodybuilders as well?

IK: Yes. In fact, I'm currently working with the Australian champ, Andy Cunningham, but I wouldn't say that I have extensive involvement with many of the top pros. In a nutshell, my approach isn't coming from a model. I see what the athletes need, and then I give it to them. The key is finding their weakest link, and then fixing it.

NM: Can you give an example of that?

IK: Well, you did an interview with Louie Simmons, and I understand that his methods are based on speed. Now, if someone has a deficiency in that area, that approach might help him. But if he's genetically predisposed to be fast, then they're just doing what they're good at. You need to work on the areas that need the work. It's so simple, really.

Bodybuilding training has to be one of the simplest forms of sport from a strength perspective because there is only one goal—gaining more muscle. Bodybuilders don't need to stay with any one type of exercise. There are very few sports which can say that. It seems as though Americans tend to get locked up a little bit with structure...one specific "best" method, and all that. But there are so many variables. For one thing, a person's muscle fiber type will dictate what they'll be best suited for. Even the psychological traits of an individual will be a factor.

When I know these things about an athlete, I can tell them what to do. It doesn't matter what sport someone plays. Fix the weaknesses, and you have an automatic improvement.

NM: Do the athletes realize their weaknesses?

IK: That's an interesting point. They can be smart, in many ways, but also very dumb. Sometimes, all I need to do is attend a press conference and I can see where the player is lacking. In some cases, the athlete's biggest challenge is himself. Look at someone like Mike Tyson. Besides Muhammad Ali, he may have the greatest boxing skills that I've ever seen, but he has no control over his behavior, which translates into a lack of confidence. He's also getting older. You can get by until the age of 22, but after that, you need to get smarter in the way you train or you're going to lose it.

NM: Are your techniques contingent on the age of the athlete?

IK: An older athlete's recuperative ability is much less, but it's determined more by lifestyle than anything else. As far as strength goes, a person can be at his peak very late in life. The greatest factor in the strength of someone after his or her early twenties is elasticity. Stretching is what I consider to be the number-one quality of speed, strength, and endurance. It's what I call the last frontier. In the year 2010, people will wonder why we didn't stretch more.

NM: Most bodybuilders will only stretch for a few minutes as a warm-up.

IK: That's where they go wrong. For every hour of training, you should spend an hour stretching! You'll prevent injury and increase the capability to improve strength and size. Static stretching can make an incredible contribution, but it's been vastly underrated by most individuals. Learning how to breathe while stretching is also imperative.

NM: That sounds very much like yoga technique.

IK: There are similarities. Yoga certainly has a lot to offer, but it's designed more for the health purposes of the average person. What I do is more specific to the athlete.

NM: Are you familiar with the Poliquin techniques?

IK: Yes. In fact, I left my very first Met-Rx all over the streets of Canada after an especially grueling leg workout that Charles and I shared! We're in agreement on a lot of points. We're both very anti-aerobics. As an effective form of exercise, it's rubbish.

NM: I'm with you there! Any other similarities with your techniques and Charles'?

IK: Well, Charles is a much better self-promoter than I am! I'm happy just to do my thing. Charles has popularized my speed timing mechanism, but he has graciously credited me for its development. Tempo training is vital, even the length of the pauses. But as far as the timing of an exercise, with a bodybuilder, the concentric movement is not that important. With most other athletes, the concentric phase should be explosive, but it's time under tension that matters to the bodybuilder. Slow, controlled, concentric movement would be a mistake for other athletes.

NM: So much of bodybuilding is making the muscle work as hard as possible, not as efficiently as possible.

IK: Exactly! One of the biggest mistakes a bodybuilder makes is over-focusing on the load that they're using. The prime regard seems to be to impress the person standing beside them! They should be working on recruiting the most amount of muscle fiber with the least amount of weight! Learn to make a light load feel heavy, perfect your form, then progress from there.

NM: Do you feel, then, that there is validity in achieving a pump?

IK: That's an interesting point. It isn't the single determinant, but it certainly is a factor. The pump is a reflection of the fluid in the muscle, so if you don't experience a pump at all, you probably should not be in the gym. The pump is a great indication of recovery. If you can't get a pump, you're probably over trained. It can be misused in that many people try to "over-pump." That also leads to over-training. Some guys are afraid to take their shirt off unless they're "pumped up." That's because they are only developing the capillaries by training exclusively for the pump and ignoring all of the other techniques necessary for adequate muscle growth. You should always vary and periodize your training to achieve both.

NM: Do you employ forced or assisted reps?

IK: That depends greatly on the person's recovery ability. Most bodybuilders who use those methods will quickly overtrain, and 95 percent of them do so. I take a leaf out of Charlie Francis' book when I say that my goal isn't to see how much I can do in training. It's to know how little I need.

NM: That sounds similar to Arthur Jones' principle.

IK: It is, but he takes it too far when he says that all you need is one or two sets to failure.

NM: In your opinion, how long should a workout last?

IK: If a bodybuilder has a nine-to-five job, then it is doubtful that he can train more than 40 to 50 minutes, three times a week, and continue to progress.

NM: What if long rests between sets are utilized?

IK: True, that may make some difference, but total time is still a factor. If you take long rest periods, you may be able to stretch it to an hour. But after that, there is a critical drop off point irrespective of the amount of sets that you've done. How long it's been since your last meal is also a factor. The more food you can train on, the better.

NM: Do you use partial reps?

IK: There is a place for it, like everything else. Partial reps are beneficial maybe 10% of the time. It helps with sticking points by exposing the central nervous system to greater loads. It also adds variety. At any rate, recovery is essential, unless you're assisted.

NM: Speaking of assistance, I understand that the drug scene in Australia is a lot looser than in the states.

IK: The customs are very keen on doing their job, and the penalties are the same. But the main difference is that, in your country, there is a very heavily guarded coastline in the areas where the drugs come in, whereas we have a very big coastline. It comes in from all over.

I firmly believe that drug use should be a personal decision as long as it doesn't interfere with the freedoms of other people. The majority of athletes that I work with are clean. I'm not sure if you know this, but the Australian Sports Agency is amongst the most powerful drug-testing bodies in the world. They test professional athletes up to ten times a year. The drug-using people in Australia are mostly the "body beautiful" types and the homosexual community.

We had one Australian rugby player who admitted to using DHEA. He wasn't aware that it was on the banned list, but even when he stopped, they wanted to fine him.

NM: That's amazing. DHEA is so benign. You can buy it in candy stores here.

IK: That's exactly right. I, myself, have been subject to one sporting body that was trying to get rid of me because I knew too much about training. They didn't like athletes doing things in a way that differed from what these organizations wanted. They went to the media, which ended up going national in Australia, claiming that I was supplying a new drug called HMB to the athletes. All I said was that it was a supplement which was gaining popularity in the states. I don't even know if it works!

NM: Take it from me, you're not missing anything. Are there any supplements that you would recommend?

IK: Well, creatine has to be the greatest breakthrough we've ever had. What many people disregard is that the fluid retention must be maintained for six weeks in order to obtain optimum strength gains. That's why, in my writings, I'm critical of the traditional method of loading and then maintaining. The level must be kept much higher than the recommended five grams a day.

NM: Do you train as hard at this point in your life [Ian is 37 years old] as you did as a younger man?

IK: My strength level is the same. I could bring it up, but that would require further commitment. Let's just say that I have other interests in my life now.

NM: I understand that you've written some books on a variety of strength-related topics.

IK: Yes, the majority of my work now is writing. Educational material can be quite a leverage in getting your message out to many people.

NM: What is the best way to order or get a listing of the books available?

IK: Go to [www.kingsports.net](http://www.kingsports.net) or email us at [question@kingsports.net](mailto:question@kingsports.net).

NM: Ian, we've certainly covered a lot of ground and given our readers plenty to think about. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with us.

IK: Thank you for your time. I'll look forward to speaking with you in the future.

By the time I hung up with Ian King, it was almost 2am New York time. It may have been late, but it was well worth staying up for.

America has become a society of quick fixes. So much of our culture is designed to be disposable. Whatever you don't immediately like, throw it away! Something will replace it soon enough. Our "instant everything," microwavable, give-it-to-me-yesterday mentality has led to a search for the easy answer. The consequence of this thinking (or lack thereof)—besides a shortened attention span—is a growing deficiency in acquiring the necessary tools to truly excel.

I'd recommend to anyone looking to expand their knowledge of training principles and strength-building techniques to investigate some of Ian King's writings. Knowledge is power. And Ian King is a man who has a lot of both.

EDITOR'S NOTE: With any luck, Ian King will be regular contributor to the printed version of Testosterone magazine.

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