

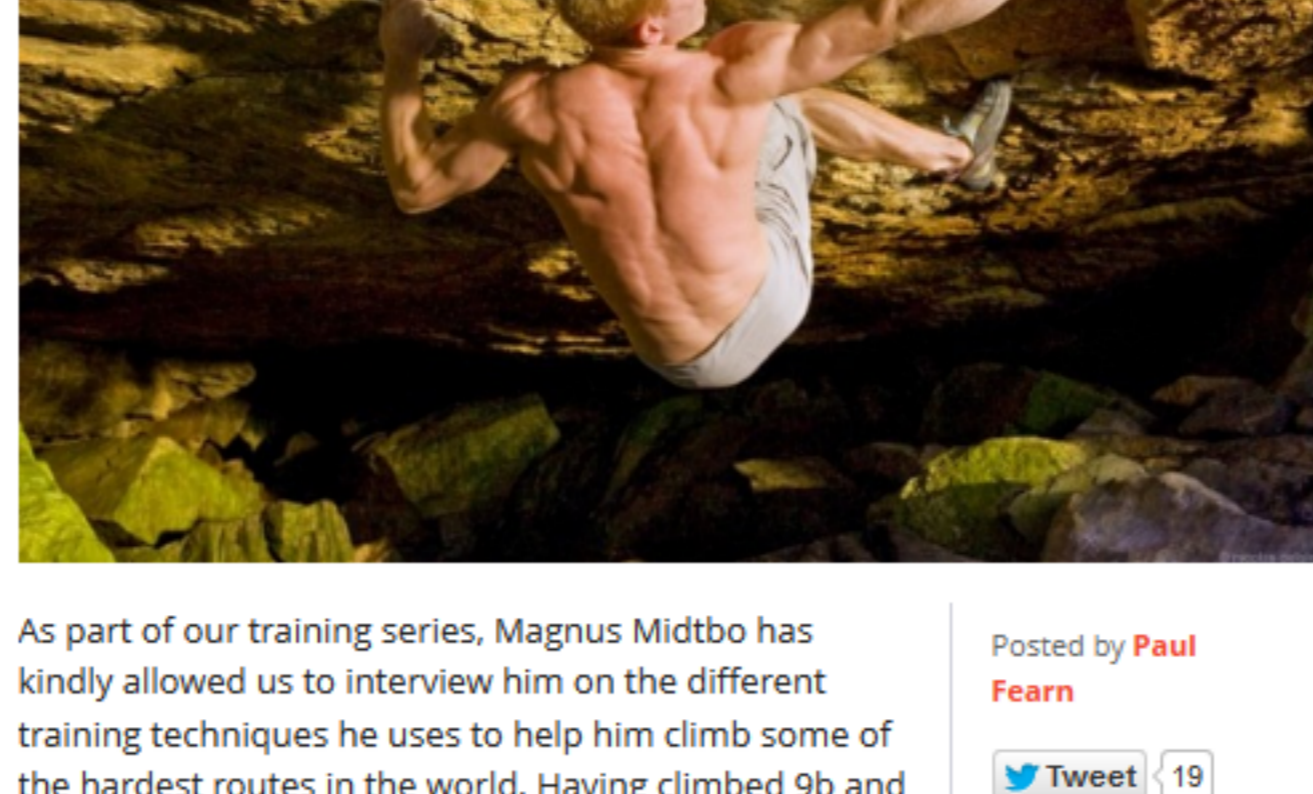
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Interviews

February 24, 2012

Magnus Midtbo on Climbing Training



As part of our training series, Magnus Midtbo has kindly allowed us to interview him on the different training techniques he uses to help him climb some of the hardest routes in the world. Having climbed 5b and consistently placed in the top 3 in international competitions, Magnus is no stranger to training hard. Recently he has become a [YouTube sensation](#), with some of his videos attracting nearly half a million hits. Hopefully this interview will help displace some of the myths and provide our readers with a useful insight into what it takes to climb the world's hardest routes and succeed in competitions.

Header image: Magnus Midtbo on the FA of Blood redemption. Photo copyright Nicolas Delaite

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What training do you feel is most beneficial for your climbing? Can you provide details of the sorts of sessions you do?

Let me first start off by saying that unlike many climbers I enjoy training. The word training has been frowned upon long enough. For climbing to progress I think it's important for everyone to be open to share methods and thoughts.

Periodic training has been really important to me. There is a time for everything. Unfortunately at a high level you can't be in top shape all year around, so you have to make priorities for when and what you want to be in shape for. Over the years I have experimented with a lot of different methods. Coming from Norway has been both a blessing and a curse, as I was forced to travel to find out how to train for climbing. The most logical place for a competition climber to progress is Innsbruck, so that is where I went. The thing though was that after spending time in Austria I couldn't really explain why the Austrians would be so much better than everyone (when it comes to competitions). The only reasonable explanation would be their gym Tivoli. The gym has a higher concentration of hard sport routes than I have ever seen. It would make no reason to set such hard routes at any gym in Norway, since only a handful of climbers would have a chance at them.

Although I wanted to move permanently to Innsbruck I couldn't, due to obligations at home. When I no longer had Tivoli to train at, I was left to figure out new ways for me to progress. And I think that is why I'm doing so much "weird" training.

Since then I have put together something that works for me. We are all different, so it comes down to finding something that works for you. I can't stress that point enough. How I train will not work for everyone, but hopefully people can learn a thing or two.

My main focus right now is hard sport climbing. For that most of my training happens indoors. Some months before I need to be in shape I try to do some weight training, as well as a lot of exercises with my own body weight. Being all over strong has a lot of benefits. I think that is the reason I have never been injured. I try to do hard periods of 10 days, then 10 days of normal training. With two days rest in between. During those hard 10 days I will get weaker every day, almost to the point of being overtrained. But after a hard period I will get fitter and fitter every day during the easy period.

An example of how a hard day of training can look like:

Morning:

- Warm up. Light running 15 minutes
- Weight training. Try to include as many muscles in your upper body as possible. Do 10 different exercises with 8 reps x 2. Try to focus on antagonist strength (opposite of climbing). However you can incorporate a couple of exercises that are directly related to climbing. Together with an instructor you will be able to find something that suits you.

Evening:

- Warm up 15 minutes
- Moderate bouldering 15 minutes (always do power before endurance)
- 10 circuits X 30 moves (endurance) Rest between circuits equals climbing time. So you rest just as long as it takes you to complete a circuit. Or your climbing partner can climb in-between if he takes about the same time as you. Have a guy pointing out holds for you, while counting out loud.

An easy session will be an hour of bouldering, playing around on different problems. Or an hour and a half of lead climbing. Same thing, just climb whatever catches your eye.

Has there been any advice given to you, which made the biggest difference to your training / climbing abilities?

Peter Bosma, a Swedish coach who used to coach the Norwegian team told me not to stress about climbing and training. I later found it to be a really good advice. Before, during and after training you need to be fully aware of what you are doing and be able to analyse the signals your body is trying to give you. Most of us, including myself just want to rush off to whatever is next on the days schedule. Never rush training. Make the gym your home while your there

Your strength/power training looks very intensive, with many days on, how do you structure the training to avoid injury?

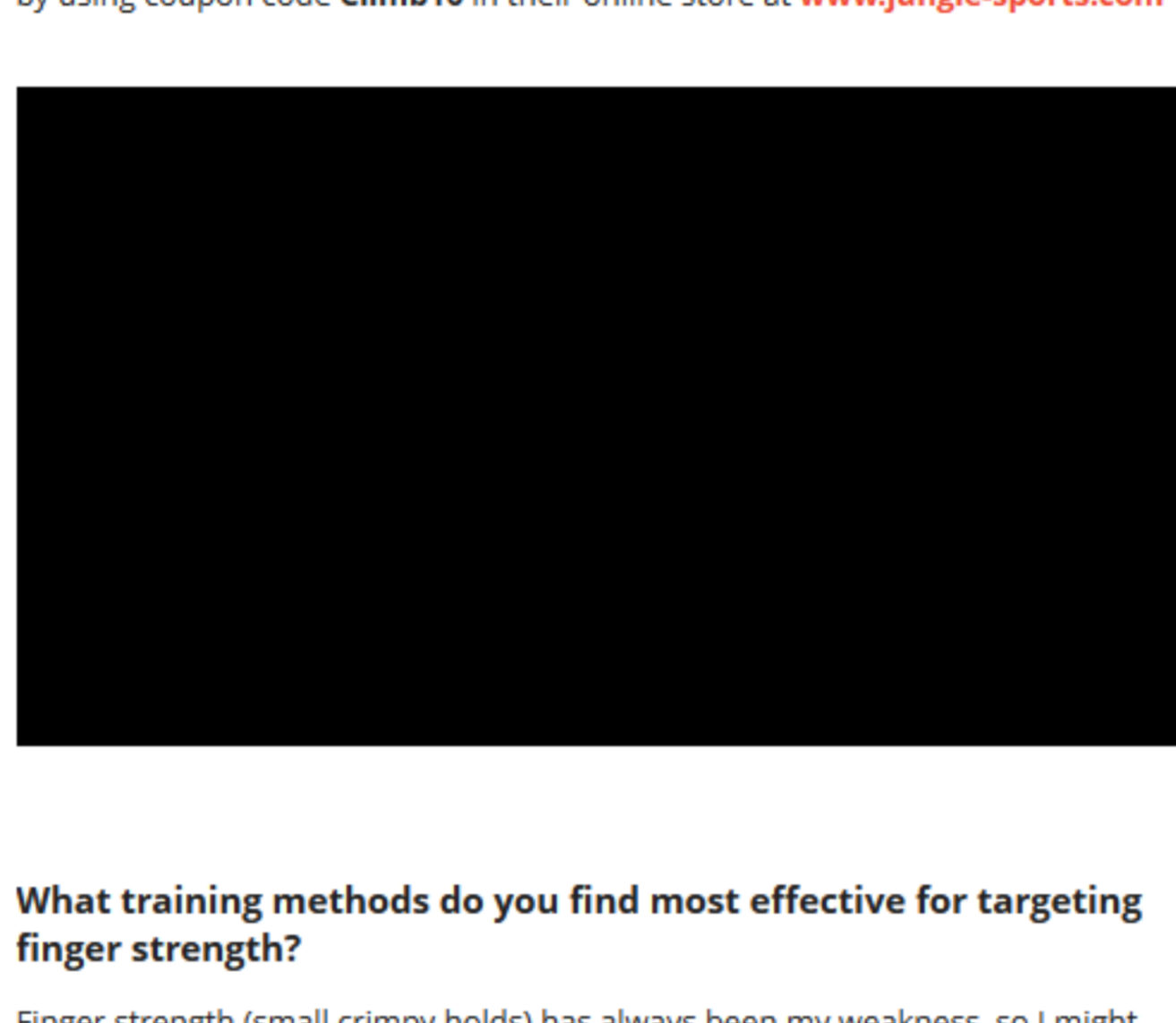
Periodic training has been the key for me to avoid injuries. I think most climbers stick to the same routine all year around, which after a certain point will lose effect. The body will adapt to the routine and improving will be hard. Diversity is important to avoid injuries. Try to shock the body as often as you can with new exercises. During the periods I do weights, I gain muscle weight. It's very individual how fast you gain muscle weight. I gain weight really easy. The muscles you gain won't really help your climbing. But after going back to only climbing you will lose the muscles without trying. Though you have lost muscle mass you will still be stronger in ways climbing does not cover. Personally I think that has helped me a lot. I have never been injured, so something I must do right.

How do you combine this training into the other training aspects of the sport such as power endurance and stamina?

Endurance (Stamina) it is easy to bring back once you have had it. Most of the climbers I know having started at a young age with endurance training have an easier time bringing it back. For some it can take as little as a week. Therefore I like to focus on getting physically stronger and do more endurance just in front of an important comp or trip. Ideally I spend a week or two in Innsbruck before an important competition. Even climbing outside in Spain can be good preparation for a competition, especially if I have a lot of on-sights left to try. For instance after spending more than a month in Rodellar I felt the strongest I have ever felt.

I believe you also do specific training for the muscles that you don't generally train during your climbing sessions. What do you do and why do you consider these exercises important?

I consider alternative training very important, because it prevents injuries. I train with slings almost every day to target specific muscles that I either don't use when climbing, or if I need to get stronger at something very specific in order to send a climb. Jungle Sports is a Norwegian based company, and I have been a big fan of their products for a long time. Recently I got them to Sponsor me, and give all followers of [my website](#), [Facebook](#) and [twitter](#) 10% off on all their products, by using coupon code **Climb10** in their online store at [www.jungle-sports.com](#)



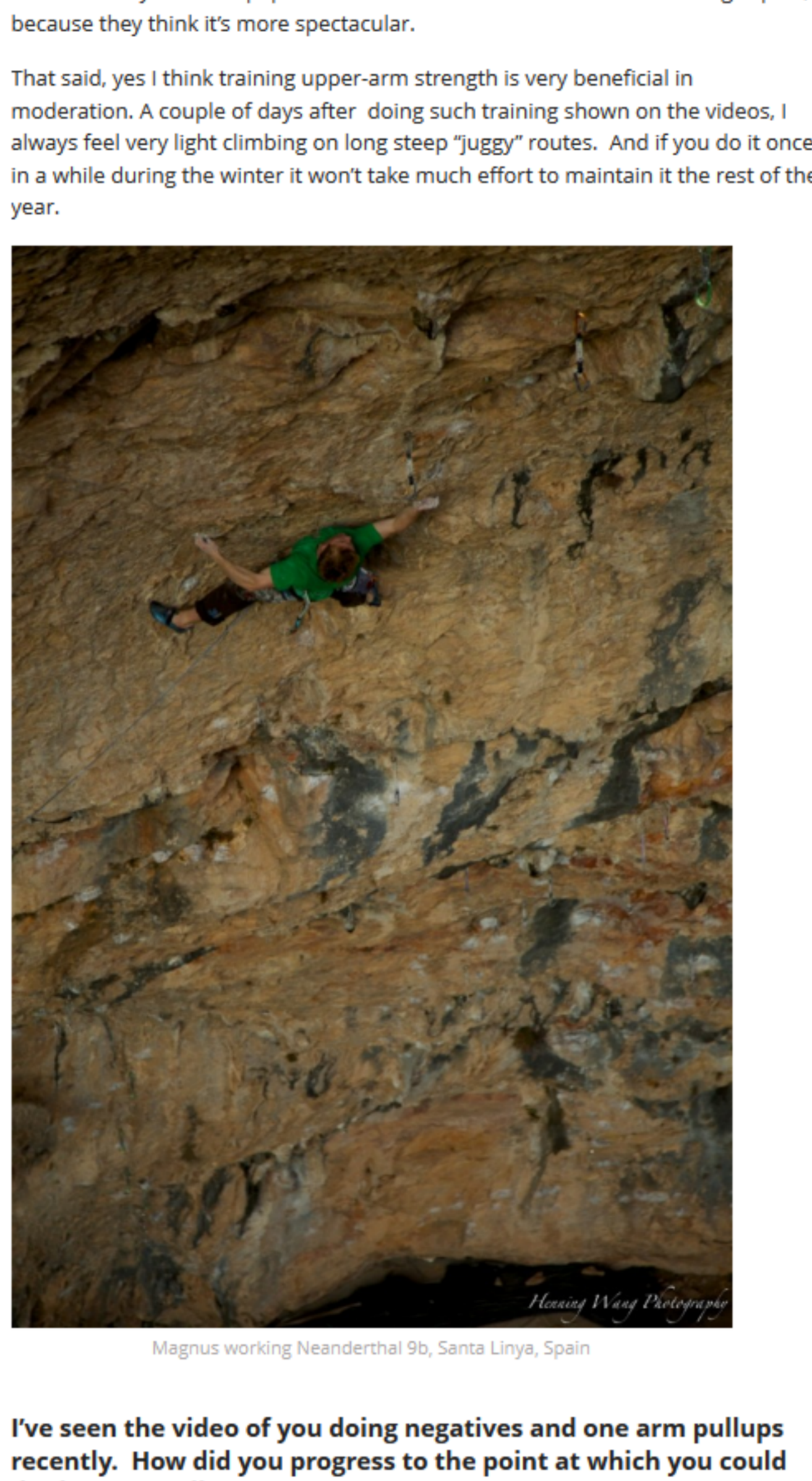
What training methods do you find most effective for targeting finger strength?

Finger strength (small crimp holds) has always been my weakness, so I might not be the right person to answer that question, but I have always felt my fingers being the strongest after bouldering a lot outside. The holds are usually smaller, and I think most people are able to push themselves further when motivated to send something. To gain finger strength on plastic I find way harder. My advice is to climb on holds with less friction, so that you have to pull harder in order to stay on. From what I have seen it seems like finger strength is a lot about inheritance. Some people seem to be born with strong fingers, while others have to work hard for it. Generally lighter climbers have relatively stronger fingers. Especially in the beginning, since finger strength takes a long time to build up. I feel like my finger strength increases every year, without training specifically for it.

You do a lot of double hand work, such as plyometric rebounds and footless bouldering. Can you describe the sessions you do and how they benefit you?

Usually I just do 15 minutes of such training after bouldering. I have always been good at it, and that is probably why I enjoy it so much. I think the videos of me training on youtube are a little misunderstood. I had a couple of interviews for different newspapers, and a documentary targeting none climbers. They thought it was important to show a lot of different exercises that people generally have an easier time relating to, such as one-finger pull-ups. For a none climber the difference between a video of a guy climbing 8a and 9a is barely noticeable. Unfortunately the newspapers etc. wanted to focus more on the training aspect, because they think it's more spectacular.

That said, yes I think training upper-arm strength is very beneficial in moderation. A couple of days after doing such training shown on the videos, I always feel very light climbing on long steep "juggo" routes. And if you do it once in a while during the winter it won't take much effort to maintain it the rest of the year.



I've seen the video of you doing negatives and one arm pullups recently. How did you progress to the point at which you could do them so well?

For a bigger climber such as myself it's important to have strong arms, to give us a benefit in one area. Ever since I was able to lock off for 10 seconds on one arm I have put on weight to make the exercise harder. I find doing negative one arm pullups to be the best way to improve on doing one arm pullups. Usually when I'm strong enough to do 10 reps of an exercise I put on weight or find a way to make it even harder.

Climbing is a sport which requires strength and coordination between the bodies different muscle groups. What techniques or equipment do you use to help you improve in this area?

Doing alternative training has helped me understand my body better. When climbing I rarely think much about what my body is doing. Everything goes automatically, and I believe that is how it should be. However, when I do alternative training I really have to focus on doing the exercise right. Hold the right posture, and use only the muscles needed. Might sound weird, but in a way I think it has helped me in competitions. Everyone competing gets nervous, and that is something you just have to deal with. Some climbers get too nervous and over grip holds, which will lead to them falling earlier than they normally would. While other climbers will use the adrenalin to their advantage. Obviously that's the difference between a good and bad competition climber. Same thing with hard on-sights, and sometimes even red points outside. Being able to let go of the nervousness and use only the muscles needed I think has been improved by all the alternative training I have done - A better understanding of the body.

Our thanks go to Magnus for sparing his time for this excellent interview. We wish him every success in his climbing and competitions during 2012.

Tags: Magnus Midtbo, Magnus Midtbo training, training for climbing

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