The High/Low Training System

Francis's Revolutionary Approach to Athletic Development

Introduction: The Problem with Traditional Training

Before Charlie Francis introduced his High/Low Training System, the training world operated on a fundamentally flawed assumption: more work equals better results. Coaches believed in pushing athletes hard every single day. The prevailing mentality was that "hard work" meant intensity, volume, and relentless effort across every training session. This approach produced inconsistent results, burnt-out athletes, and a constant parade of injuries.

What Francis recognized, and what most coaches overlooked, was that the human nervous system—the central nervous system in particular—has finite recovery capacity. You cannot fully recover from high-intensity work while simultaneously performing more high-intensity work. The body needs contrast. It needs rhythm. It needs strategic variation.

This insight became the foundation of one of modern sports training's most important contributions: the High/Low system.

The Core Philosophy: Complete Separation of Intensities

Francis's breakthrough was deceptively simple: never mix high-intensity and low-intensity work on the same day. This wasn't about doing less training. It was about doing the right training at the right time, separated clearly and deliberately.

The system recognizes that different training stimuli require different recovery mechanisms. High-intensity work (sprinting, jumping, heavy lifting) demands maximum central nervous system engagement and leaves the athlete depleted at a neurological level. Low-intensity work serves an entirely different purpose: it facilitates recovery, builds aerobic capacity, and maintains training volume without additional nervous system stress.

By keeping these two categories completely separate, Francis created a system where athletes could train harder on hard days and recover more effectively on easy days.

High-Intensity Days: Central Nervous System Activation