

The Westside System of Powerlifting: Applications for Athletes

Eric Cressey, MA Candidate, CSCS
Assistant Editor, *Rugged Magazine*

The Westside System of Powerlifting

- Created by Louie Simmons
- Constantly being refined
 - Updated by Simmons and his disciples
 - Adapted by strength coaches
- Conjugated Periodization avoids some flaws of traditional periodization schemes
- Train it all together!



Source: www.t-mag.com

Westside Principles

- The Maximal Effort Method
 - Builds strength speed and absolute strength
 - Improves neuromuscular coordination by increasing motor unit recruitment, rate coding, and motor unit synchronization
- The Dynamic Effort Method
 - Builds explosiveness (ability to achieve maximum force ASAP after a muscular stretch), rate of force development, and speed strength (50-60% 1RM)
 - Lifting submaximal weights at highest possible speed
- The Repetition Method
 - Promotes strength endurance and hypertrophy, strengthens neural/muscular deficiencies, and increases work capacity
 - Lifting a non-maximal load to failure or near-failure

Westside Principles: Sample Split

- Monday: Max Effort Squat/Deadlift Day
 - Wednesday: Max Effort Bench Day
 - Friday: Dynamic Effort Squat/Deadlift Day
 - Saturday: Dynamic Effort Bench Day
- *Other variations (e.g. MWF) have also been implemented successfully. The split is also influenced by prioritization of weaknesses.

A Typical Max Effort Squat/Deadlift Day

- 1) One Max Effort Exercise: Good Mornings (~70%), Low Box squat (~20%), Deadlift (~10%). Work up to 3RM, and then a 1RM. Exercise choice is governed by lifter's weakness.
- 2) Supplemental Exercise for the Posterior Chain: GHRs, SLDLs, RDLs, Pull-throughs (6-20 reps)
- 3) Accessory #1 - Posterior Chain: Reverse Hypers, Hyperextensions (6-20 reps)
- 4) Accessory #2 – Core: Pulldown Abs, Straight Leg Raises, Weighted Side Bends, Weighted Decline Sit-ups (6-20 reps)

Max Effort Squat/Deadlift Exercises



Source: www.bsu.edu/webapps/strengthlab/Home.htm

A Typical Max Effort Bench Day

- 1) One Max Effort Exercise: Bench Press, Board (1-5) Press, Floor Press, Close Grip Bench Press, Incline Press, High Rep Stability Ball DB Presses (every 10 weeks). Work up to 3RM, and then a 1RM.
- 2) Supplemental Triceps Exercise: Lying Extension and Press variations (6-20 reps)
- 3) Accessory #1 – Back: Rows emphasized, although vertical pulling is utilized occasionally (6-20 reps)
- 4) Accessory #2 – Shoulders or Extra Triceps: Presses and raises, extensions and presses, respectively (6-20 reps)

A Typical Dynamic Effort Squat/Deadlift Day

- 1) Box Squats: 8-12 sets x 2 reps at 50-60% 1RM as fast as possible, 45-60 seconds between sets
- 2) Supplemental Exercise for the Posterior Chain: GHRs, SLDLs, RDLs, Pull-throughs (3-20 reps)
- 3) Accessory #1 - Posterior Chain: Reverse Hypers, Hyperextensions (6-20 reps)
- 4) Accessory #2 – Core: Pulldown Abs, Straight Leg Raises, Weighted Side Bends, Weighted Decline Sit-ups (6-20 reps)

Max Effort Bench Exercises



Source: www.bsu.edu/webapps/strengthlab/Home.htm

A Typical Dynamic Effort Bench Day

- 1) Speed Bench, three separate grips: 8-10 sets x 3 reps at 50-60% 1RM as fast as possible, 45-60 seconds between sets
- 2) Supplemental Triceps Exercise: Lying Extension and Press variations (3-20 reps)
- 3) Accessory #1 – Back: Rows emphasized, although vertical pulling is utilized occasionally (6-20 reps)
- 4) Accessory #2 – Shoulders or Extra Triceps: Presses and raises, extensions and presses, respectively (6-20 reps)

Important Notes

- The max effort exercises should be changed every 1-3 weeks (more often for experienced lifters). Training at 90% 1RM or more for 3+ weeks with the same exercise is associated with stagnation; switching exercises enables one to continue training at 100% and above 1RM without burnout.
- Accessory exercises are changed every 2-3 weeks.
- Some individuals perform more exercises with fewer sets of each on assistance exercises.
- Some individuals train back with lower body sessions, and some split back training into horizontal and vertical pushing and pulling (train back 4x/week).

Extra Workouts

- May be actual training sessions aimed at bringing up weaknesses (not full sessions) performed on off-days or several hours after a ME or DE session.
- May be General Physical Preparedness (GPP): sled dragging, strongman implements, tubing/light weight exercises specific to lifts and involved joints, Javorek complexes, body weight circuits of short duration

Westside GPP

GPP training has many functions:

- 1) fostering, strengthening or restoring habits (skills) that play a role in sports performance
- 2) Increasing or preserving the general work capacity or preserving it
- 3) Assisting the restoration process (active rest)
- 4) Reducing the likelihood of injury
- 5) Preventing the onset of monotony in training

As an athlete's GPP improves, so too does his/her ability to adapt to new training stimuli and sport demands. From a powerlifting standpoint, GPP is important because one must be conditioned physically and mentally to perform nine maximal lifts in a period of 6-9 hours.

Important Notes

- The beauty of Westside is its versatility as a template; exercise selection and loading parameters on supplemental and accessory exercises are dictated by the individual's weaknesses and access to equipment.
- May include lunges, cleans, pullups/pulldowns, single-leg squats, etc.
- Scapular Stability/Rotator Cuff work can be incorporated at the end of both benching sessions. Some individuals perform specific grip and neck training as well.

Important Notes

- Volume Manipulation is not as black and white as in traditional periodization schemes.
- A lifter's attention to recovery, GPP, and overall work capacity dictates frequency of down weeks.
- Typical beginner programs have been designed in 9-week mesocycles consisting of 3-week microcycles. Week 9 serves as testing only (or competition). These results are used as the basis for the next mesocycle.

Accommodating Resistances

- Bands and Chains
- Can be used on both max and dynamic effort exercises
- Useful for a variety of assistance exercises, too
- Goals
 - On dynamic effort days, maintain original weight (50-60% 1RM), which is required to yield explosive training benefits
 - Overload the top portion of the lift (undertrained due to increased body leverage at this position)
 - Foster a neurological explosive strength pattern that doesn't allow one to “get lazy” at the top.
 - Learning to “outrun the bands” teaches you to develop the fast start needed to lock out a heavier weight.
 - Effectively train the start and lockout simultaneously

Can Westside be used with athletes?

“The other day I got off the phone with a friend of mine who coaches college football. I told him that I had recently consulted with Dave Tate about applying the Westside principles for a college football player. He asked if these ideas were applicable for athletes, since Westside is a powerlifting gym. I responded by asking him what was wrong with having explosive athletes with a strong posterior chain, setting and breaking records every week, keeping a high intensity level in the gym and competition amongst players.”

-Jim Wendler

www.elitefts.com

Benefits for Athletes

- Overwhelming emphasis on posterior chain



Source: www.bsu.edu/webapps/strengthlab/Home.htm

Benefits for Athletes

- A 1-3 RM is attempted nearly every week for both the upper and lower body
 - Provides strength coach with constant feedback on athletes' progress
 - Provides athletes with proof that hard work is paying off
 - Appropriate cycling of max effort exercises decreases likelihood of failure
 - Serves as a means of testing within each week
 - Avoids having to always put limit strength behind power – establishes static-spring proficiency

Benefits for Athletes

- Utilization of accommodating resistances teaches athletes to not get lazy in easiest portions of ROM
- Pays specific attention to commonly neglected muscle groups
 - Importance of back in bench press
 - Grip work (direct and indirect)
 - Major emphasis on core, triceps, hamstrings, scapular stabilizers

Benefits for Athletes

- Avoids traditional pitfalls of linear periodization by addressing all types of strength in the same training period
 - Absolute Strength
 - Strength Endurance
 - Speed-Strength
 - Explosive Strength
 - Accelerating Strength

The Types of Strength

Explosive Strength: ability to achieve maximal force as quickly as possible, usually after a pre-stretch

Speed-strength: ability to execute a movement quickly against little or no external resistance - most important with lighter loads

Starting-strength: ability to develop force at beginning of contraction before external movement occurs

Accelerating Strength: ability to accumulate working force once contraction has begun

The Types of Strength

Four components of explosive strength:

- Absolute strength
 - Acceleration-strength
 - Starting-strength
 - Absolute speed
- Former two contribute most with larger external resistances; the latter two contribute more with smaller external resistances.
 - These components do NOT work independently of one another; starting-strength is a crucial forerunner to acceleration strength.

Important Modifications for Athletes

- Integrate O-lifts with box squats and speed pulls as dynamic effort exercises for lower body
- Integrate Push Jerks, Push Presses, Hang Snatches, Overspeed Chins, and Medicine Ball throws with dynamic effort bench pressing



Source: www.bsu.edu/webapps/strengthlab/Home.htm

Important Modifications for Athletes

- Substitute max effort exercises that are specific to the sport (e.g. weighted chins for tennis, baseball, volleyball)
- Include traditional “quad-squatting” to ensure optimal knee extensor contributions
- Incorporate deeper-squats/lunges to work often-neglected VMO



Source: www.bsu.edu/webapps/strengthlab/Home.htm

Important Modifications for Athletes

- Traditional Westside GPP and extra workouts are replaced by:
 - Sport-specific practices
 - Agility work
 - Conditioning
 - Subsystems (may also be included in GPP-like warm-ups)

Important Modifications for Athletes

- Include single leg/split stance exercise in each lower body session
 - May be performed as an O-lift variation or assistance exercise, but **MUST** ensure significant loading (e.g. lateral movements that compromise weight are better placed in GPP sessions)
- Ensure appropriate balance of horizontal and vertical pushing and pulling exercises



Source: www.bsu.edu/webapps/strengthlab/Home.htm

Important Modification for Athletes

- Some younger athletes – especially those for whom hypertrophy is a foremost goal – may be better off with a repetition day instead of a dynamic effort day. This is especially important if they are not strong enough to train with considerable resistance on their dynamic effort days.
- During the competitive season or periods when outside conditioning (e.g. sprinting) volume is quite high, it may be appropriate to eliminate the dynamic effort lower body session altogether.
- In essence, the speed demands of participation in the sport are allowed to take care of themselves in these situations.

Potential Problems

- Inattentiveness of strength coach in manipulating volume and monitoring progress (coach must recognize when sessions should be missed or volume/intensity should remain unchanged)
- Lack of athlete motivation
- Poor exercise economy
- Missed Training Sessions
- Too much, too soon (a base level of fitness – especially core stability – must precede a Westside-influenced program)

References & Further Reading

- www.elitefts.com
- www.deepsquatter.com
- www.defrancostraining.com
- www.t-mag.com
- [The Coach's Strength Training Playbook](#), by Joe Kenn
- [Supertraining](#), by Mel Siff and Yuri Verkoshansky
- [The Science and Practice of Strength Training](#), by Vladimir Zatsiorsky

A Final Note

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www.bsu.edu/webapps/strengthlab/Home.htm

About the Presenter

Eric Cressey, CSCS, assistant editor of Rugged Magazine (www.ruggedmag.com), is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Kinesiology with a concentration in Exercise Science at the University of Connecticut. He graduated from the University of New England with a double major in Exercise Science and Sports and Fitness Management. Although prepared in a variety of bodies of knowledge, Eric specializes in applied kinesiology and biomechanics as they relate to program design and injury rehabilitation. As a freelance writer, Eric has had over two dozen publications among *Rugged Magazine*, *Testosterone Magazine*, johnberardi.com. A competitive powerlifter, Eric has experience in athletic performance, rehabilitation, and general conditioning settings with a variety of populations. He's also one hell of a nice guy, so feel free to contact him at eric_cressey@ruggedmag.com!