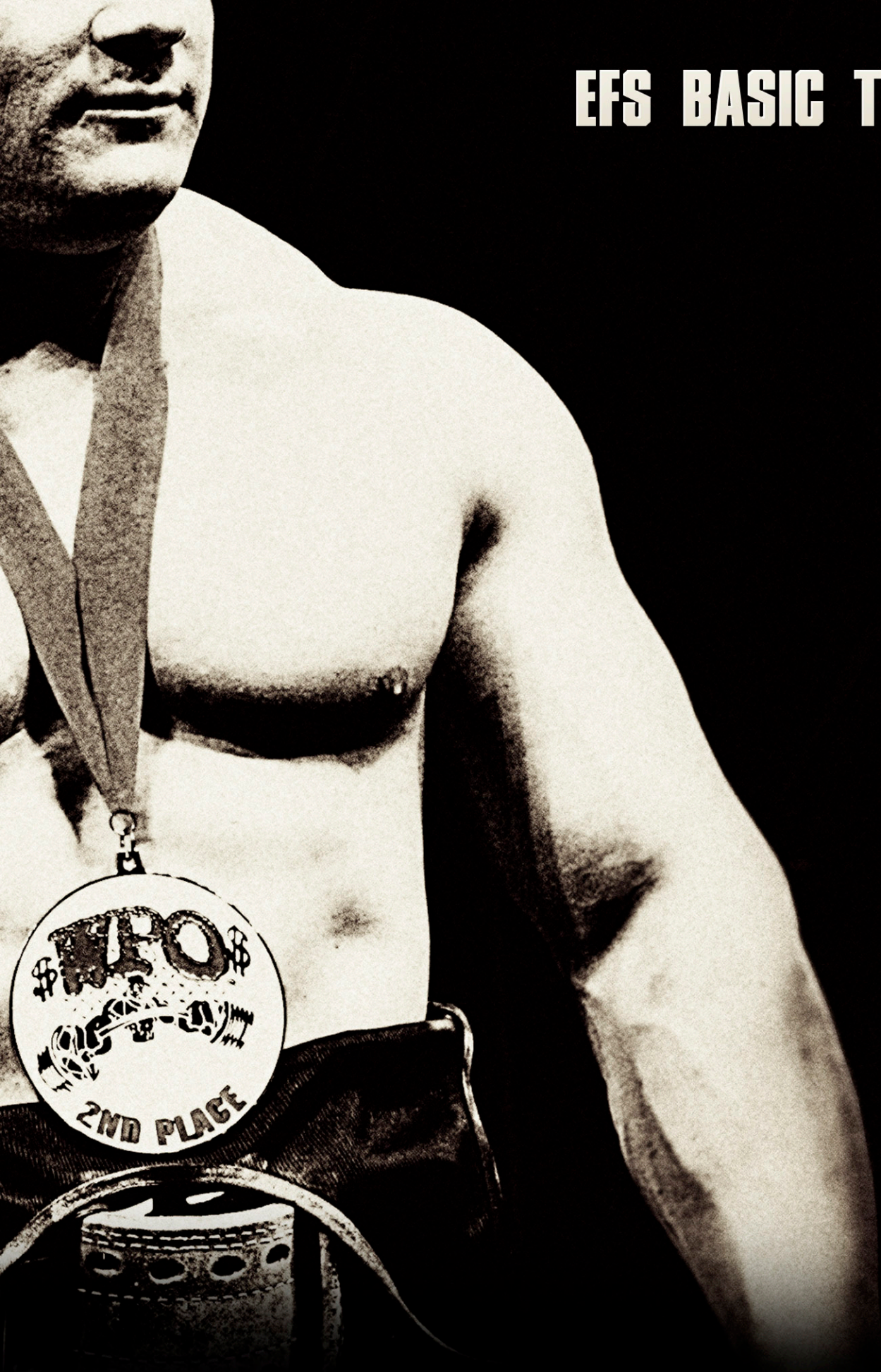


EFS BASIC TRAINING



Before you embark on any physical fitness program, please consult a doctor.

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In putting together the material for this book, Dave and I spent hours discussing and debating what would be most beneficial to the reader. Did we want to put together a basic template and ignore the science? Or did we want to bore you with endless textbook-style references that add up to a headache and a lot of confusion? What we came up with is a book that gives you the textbook information in a very easy to read format with a lot of practical information. It's very popular these days to talk above and beyond the heads of the average lifter. While this may sell books and an idea, at least for awhile, it does nothing for the lifter. After some discussion, we took a step back and finally realized why we wanted to write this book. We wanted results—both in the weight room and on the platform. It is as simple as that.

What we've discovered after answering countless questions on the Q & A and at dozens of seminars is that the concepts and the "why" need to be understood. Once a person masters the reasons why, the program truly becomes his own. Everyone has their own learning curve, and it may take awhile. Everyone trains differently, but the concepts will remain the same. I promise you that once you get it, success and strength will be yours forever.

A very special thank you goes to Louie Simmons. His creativity, boldness, and dedication to strength training are extraordinary. Without him, none of this would have been possible. Also, thanks to all of the lifters, coaches, trainers, and doctors who have helped us out over the years.

Dave Tate and Jim Wendler
Elite Fitness Systems

Developing a Quality Training System

There are six qualities that set a great system apart from the rest. These include:

- speed
- strength
- coaching
- teamwork
- attitude
- recovery

Too many times, lifters and coaches focus on the exercises, sets, and reps of a program, not on coaching, teamwork, attitude, and recovery. Each of the six qualities listed above must be addressed in order for a program to be successful. If you leave one of these qualities out, you are shortchanging yourself, your teammates, and/or your athletes.

To illustrate this, ask someone who squats 500 lbs what he thinks would happen if he trained at Westside Barbell Club. Would his squat go up? Invariably, he will say yes. Why? The program has been talked about in detail on Elite Fitness Systems and by Louie Simmons in Powerlifting USA. There are no secrets to what kind of exercises, sets, and reps are done during a week. There are seminars, videos, and plenty of other opportunities to learn about the program and how it is set up.

Recovery has also been written about, and there are numerous sport physicians, chiropractors, massage therapists, and others in every city. Thus, the other variables (teamwork, attitude, and coaching) are the limiting factor to this lifter's success. It is imperative that you take these three things seriously. Unfortunately, most programs completely ignore these things and will do everything they can to blame the program. They don't examine the other aspects—namely their training environment—that have such a large impact on their success.

Coaching/Teamwork

Every great system has to have a great coach. In the case of Westside Barbell, this man is Louie Simmons. Simmons sets a great example in the weight room by being an incredible strength athlete. He never asks a member to do something that he has not done himself. Because of his extensive background, he has the respect of every member of Westside Barbell. This is essential in a great coach. Many times a coach with little experience under the bar will try to instruct an athlete on how to squat correctly. Not only does he lack the experience, but the athlete will doubt the coach because the coach hasn't walked in the same shoes as the athlete. Bottom line—if you are going to call yourself a strength coach, you had better display some strength. Otherwise, you are doing a disservice to your athletes and the profession.

A great coach is also a great motivator. There are several different ways to be a good motivator. Athletes respond differently to criticism and praise, and it is the coach's duty to find what makes each athlete succeed. At the same time, you must be realistic with the athlete. For example, let's say you have a very weak athlete, and after a year of training, he has increased his squat to 400 lbs. While this may be a personal record for the athlete, if you do not feel this is adequate for his sport, position, or potential, it must be brought to his attention. This does not mean that you criticize his effort. Rather, congratulate him, but let it be known that there is more work to be done. When someone bench presses 600 lbs, Louie will be the first person to congratulate him. But he will also be the first person to let him know that the gym is full of lifters who can bench 600 lbs. A great motivator will see athletes for what they WILL be, not what they currently are.

A great coach is also a great educator. You must educate the athlete in order for the training program to be successful. This does not mean that athletes need to be as educated as the strength coach, but they should understand what they are

doing and why they are doing it. They should be given reasons that they can understand and that transfer to their sport and thoughts. For example, if a coach instructs a college running back to perform box squats explosively, the athlete may perform them with little effort. Now, if that same coach tells the running back that if he stands up off of the box with as much force as possible, he will be able to reach the hole a step faster, the athlete will most likely put more effort into the movement. Being a step faster may mean two or three extra yards or even the difference between a touchdown and a fourth down. The coach can then tell him that all of those extra yards will add up, and he will have a great shot at being drafted. I guarantee that if you give athletes scenarios that they can understand, their effort and performance in the weight room will improve.

A good teammate will always push you to achieve your goals and exceed your expectations. He is not jealous of your success or afraid of making someone better than himself. The best example of this is the team work at Westside Barbell. Dave Tate has seen many lifters come into the club who had smaller totals, and he has helped them to excel farther than he has. It is now up to these lifters to help others go even further. This is what makes great teamwork.

You must have enough respect for your training partners and team to push them to the limits and expect to be pushed in return. This respect has to come with trust. You have to trust what your team tells you and do what you are told. Your progress must be a high priority to your team just as their progress must be a high priority to you. Sometimes the truth can hurt. Learn how to deal with it!

The Training Program

Conjugate Training

When training for maximal strength, one must use the three methods of increasing muscle tension—the maximal effort method, the dynamic effort method, and the repetition method.

- **Maximal effort method: Training at or above 90 percent of your one rep max (RM).**
- **Dynamic effort method: Lifting a sub-maximal weight at the fastest speed possible.**
- **Repetition method: Lifting a sub-maximal weight to failure or near failure.**

Conjugate training is a method that brings together all aspects of training at the same time. Most training programs have separate phases throughout the training cycle. One of the biggest problems with this kind of program is that after you stop the phase, you lose the benefits that accompany it. Conjugate training combines all of these phases allowing for an athlete to maximize his potential.

The Western method of periodization is probably the most popular way for strength athletes to train in the United States. This method involves a 12- to 16-week training cycle that begins with high repetitions and ends with singles. In the first phase, commonly known as the hypertrophy phase, three sets of ten repetitions at 60 percent of your 1RM are performed. After two or three weeks, the percentages increase and the repetitions decrease. This will continue throughout the cycle until you reach 100 plus percent.

While this looks good on paper, there are many downfalls. First, the dynamic effort method is completely ignored. While the percentages are correct, the repetitions are too high to produce force. Because of the high amount of repetitions, a lifter will conserve his energy throughout the set in order to complete it. Second, the max effort method is completely ignored until the last few weeks. So the repetition method is primarily used. Does it make sense to leave out two of the three ways to achieve maximal strength? This is what makes

conjugate training so effective. By using all three methods simultaneously, you have a better chance at reaching your strength goals.

Program Overview

Monday	Wednesday	Friday	Sunday
Max effort squat/ deadlift Warm up	Max effort bench press Warm-up	Dynamic effort squat/deadlift Warm-up	Dynamic effort bench press Warm-up
1. Max effort movement	1. Max effort movement	1. Box squat	1. Bench press
2. Supplemental	2. Supplemental	2. Supplemental	2. Supplemental
3. Supplemental	3. Supplemental	3. Supplemental	3. Supplemental
4. Accessory	4. Accessory	4. Accessory	4. Accessory

General Physical Preparedness/ Warm up

Before you begin any training program, your body must be prepared to handle the stress. This is where general physical preparedness (GPP) comes into play.

The easiest way to sum up GPP is with the phrase, “Get in shape to train. Don’t train to get into shape.” Your conditioning level must be at such a level that you are getting the most from your workouts. If it takes you two hours to get through a workout, you are either doing too many exercises or you are simply out of shape. If your conditioning level is inhibiting your ability to handle big weights in the gym or keeping you from completing your workouts, then you must increase your GPP.

So how does one go about increasing GPP? One way is to perform a warm up that consists of exercises that not only get your body ready for the training

session but work on your weak points. The warm up does not count as part of your training session and should not be included in your training time.

One of the best ways to start your warm up is by dragging a weighted sled. Sled dragging is an excellent way to build your hips, hamstrings, glutes, and quads.



Forward sled dragging is a great way to increase your GPP as well as strengthen your hamstrings and glutes.

For a warm up, the dragging does not need to be heavy. Remember, you are performing a warm up, not a workout. The weight on the sled is dependent on the individual and his strength and present conditioning

levels. The three best ways to drag a sled for a warm up

are walking forward, walking backward, and doing a variety of face pulls and rows. The latter movements will work your upper back and lats—two areas that are generally considered weak points in most athletes. Start with six trips of around 200 feet. Take 30 seconds rest between trips.

After the sled dragging, glute ham raises, some kind of abdominal work, and an exercise for the lower back are usually performed. You can also perform some kind of lat exercise or push-ups. Start with one set of each, taking approximately 45–60 seconds rest between sets. Perform about 8–15 repetitions. Once you are able to perform this with minimal rest, add in one set for each exercise. You

should be able to perform three sets of each exercise with about 30 seconds rest in between exercises. You can perform these in a circuit.

Example of a warm up

Sled dragging: six trips

Glute ham raises: 3 X 8

Hanging leg raises: 3 X 12

Push-ups: 3 X 15

The exercises chosen for a warm up must be either body weight exercises (such as abdominal work and the glute ham raise) or exercises that do not require placing a barbell on your back or in your hands. This is done for several reasons. First, these exercises will not make you sore. The best example of this is basic training in the military. The recruits perform hundreds of push-ups every day. They continually get stronger and have little soreness after the first few days. Second, these exercises do not tax your central nervous system. This is because there is no barbell in the hands or on the back. This will ensure that you are able to perform the warm up every training day without fatiguing your main workout or recovery.

One of the most asked questions about a general warm up is whether or not it will interfere with the training session. This is very simple. If it does, you are out of shape.

Even if your training is going well and your conditioning is up to par, a warm up is still advised. Have you ever noticed that few people ever perform a warm up before they start their training session? A warm up can serve several purposes. It can increase body temperature, increase mental awareness, and strengthen weak points.

It is very important to remember that your GPP needs to be specific to your sport. A football player, powerlifter, or volleyball player all have different conditioning needs. There is no need to increase your GPP to above your specific needs. Find your level and maintain it. If you increase it to above your sporting needs, you are probably neglecting other areas of your training.

Warm-up exercises

- Sled dragging (forward/backward)
- Body weight step-ups
- Body weight lunges
- Body weight squats
- Glute ham raises
- Reverse hyperextensions
- Back raises
- 45-degree back raises
- Good mornings with jump stretch bands
- Lat pull-down (any grip/bar)
- Pull-ups
- Chest supported rows
- Push-ups
- Pull-throughs
- Any abdominal movement

Conditioning for Powerlifters

Treadmill/walking

How: This is pretty easy. I recommend 3–7 days a week for 20–40 minutes a day. If you have a dog, this makes your walk at least have a purpose. If a neighbor stops you, you don't have to tell them, "I'm just conditioning." For those of you who train in commercial gyms and have access to a treadmill, this is good to do after you train so that you don't have to make separate trips to the gym on the off days. You don't have to kill yourself when walking. On a treadmill, start at whatever pace you feel comfortable. You don't need to be a speed walker, but 3.0 mph is a very easy pace.

This is especially good for heavier lifters and those that are very out of shape. If you find yourself out of breath when walking through the buffet line, then this is probably something you'll want to do.

Positives: Walking is very low stress on the knees and lower back, both of which bother many lifters. In fact, walking is very therapeutic for your lower back. If you work inside all day, spending 30 minutes outside will do wonders for your mood. Plus, it's some good time alone.

Negatives: It's boring, especially the treadmill.

Walking with a weight vest

How: This is pretty much the same as the above (treadmill/walking). If you choose this option, I recommend doing so for a shorter period of time (20 minutes) to see how you do. I use a 75 lb weight vest when doing this.

Positives: This is much manlier than walking alone. You actually feel like you're doing something.

Negatives: Again, it's boring.

Bicycle

How: Like walking, you can do this 3–7 days a week for 20–40 minutes a day. You can use a stationary bike at the gym or at home, or you can invest in a bike (or use your old Huffy) and ride around the neighborhood. If you do have an old bike, be careful of popping wheelies. When I was in college, my bike (which was made during the Nixon administration) was my main mode of transportation, but it didn't quite have the structural integrity that I desired. So, as I was attempting to show off for some girls on campus, my 'wheelie popping' quickly turned into 'handlebar breaking.'

Positives: Riding a bike is pretty low stress on the knees and back. If you do this outside, you can get a little sun and relax.

Negatives: While it is low stress on the knees, I noticed that it can make tight hip flexors even tighter. Plus, it can be a little rough on the 'taint-n-balls.' And to make matters worse, you have to contend with cars and pedestrians. If you're a heavier individual, riding a bike isn't going to help your single life. So if you fall into this category, be sure that you are married before putting on the Lycra and helmet.

Dragging a sled

How: There are about a million different ways to pull the sled for conditioning. I'm going to clear up a few things first for everyone. If the sled is used for conditioning—and conditioning only—then the weight has to be light enough so it does NOT take away from your strength training. The biggest mistake people make when using the sled is to combine strength training and conditioning.

So, how do you know if it's light enough or heavy enough? It's simple. If you find yourself getting weaker in the weight room (and this doesn't mean in just one

workout), or if you're getting sore after your conditioning, then you're probably going too heavy. I recommend starting very light and working up slowly from there. You'll know when it's too heavy. Try starting with a 45 lb plate on the sled.

For conditioning purposes, I recommend doing this for time instead of distance. Since we all have different spaces in which to drag (some may have an open field while others may have a parking lot), I suggest that you start with a light weight and attempt 10–15 minutes of dragging. I have worked up to 20 minutes with 135 lbs. This was done with no stopping and at a very brisk pace. For some variety, I also recommend pulling forwards and backwards.

I recommend dragging the sled 3–5 times per week.

Positives: Because of the added resistance, sled dragging is a little harder than walking. Plus, it is easy on the low back and knees.

Negatives: There are two negatives with sled dragging. First, it's a seasonal activity. If you live in a climate that has snow and ice, it's obviously not a great thing. Second, the sled is still weight training, and some people need a break from the weight room. These people do NOT need to see a weight between workouts.

Prowler

How: Pushing a car around is a good time. However, you need a car and another driver, and it's almost impossible to vary the load. The Prowler is very similar to pushing a car, except that you're a little lower.

Because it's stressful, the Prowler is best used on your training days, not during your off days. You can walk or run with the Prowler. I prefer to run with it. Much of what you do with the Prowler is going to depend on where you can push it. When I'm at the compound, we have a nice 50-yard area to push it around. When using it at the high school, I have unlimited space.

I have never done the Prowler for time, as this would probably kill me. I generally do ten or more sprints of 30–50 yards each.

Positives: The Prowler is fun to do and a welcome change. It's the #1 conditioning tool on the testosterone meter.

Negatives: Like the sled, you need to do this outside. So this is not a great option if you share space with polar bears.



Medicine ball

How: I got this from Bob Youngs. So if you don't like it, you can blame him. It's pretty simple to do. Take a medicine ball, throw it, walk to it, pick it up, and throw it again. Do this for 20–30 minutes. You can use whatever kinds of throws you want—forward overhead, backward overhead, chest pass, side throws, underhand, etc. The point is to be creative and keep moving. I used a 25 lb ball, but I think a much lighter ball could work as well.

Positives: This is a hell of a workout and is usually done outside. In the first couple of minutes, it's fun to see how explosive you can be. This comes to a halt after 7–8 minutes.

Negatives: If you've never had the incredibly uncomfortable lower back pump, then you'll know how it feels after about ten minutes of this. I wouldn't recommend doing this before a big bench workout either. While not as boring as

walking, the phrases “med ball conditioning” and “this is super exciting” will never appear in the same sentence.

Notes

- Walking can be done every day. If this is your form of conditioning then I recommend a minimum of three days a week. These days can be training days or off days, whatever works best for you.
- If you choose to use a bicycle, stationary or real, it can be done every day. I think this is a good choice for those who are very heavy or are using many drugs. This is especially true for those who use many orals, as the lower back pump that one gets is insane. Walking may not be an option. If you must, use a recumbent bike. The important thing is to simply do something.
- If you choose to pull the sled, I recommend doing this on your training days, even if it's an upper body day. The same goes for the Prowler. Do this after your training session, but don't cut out your exercises.
- The med ball conditioning should also be done on your training days.
- The most important thing to remember is that when you condition, you don't have to be gasping for air, although some of you might. Powerlifters and athletes have an on/off switch and nothing in between. You have to learn how to idle. Conditioning work should not be mentally and physically taxing so you don't have to turn this into a workout.
- Remember that conditioning is not strength training. Strength training is for the weight room. You need to condition for your health and recovery, and for the ability to increase workload in the gym. After I began walking, I noticed a huge difference in all of these areas.

The Maximal Effort Method

The maximal effort method is considered by many coaches and athletes to be the superior method of strength development. It places great demands on both intramuscular and intermuscular coordination and stimulates the muscular and central nervous system. These demands force the body into greater adaptation. This adaptation is responsible for great strength gains. When training using the maximal effort method, the inhibition of the central nervous system is reduced. Thus, the maximum number of motor units is activated with optimal discharge frequency.

The one drawback to using this method is that you can't train with weights above 90 percent for much longer than 1–3 weeks before the nervous system begins to weaken. When this happens, your strength will begin to diminish. This is one of the major reasons why progressive overload training will only work for so long. With this in mind and knowing that this method is great for the development of strength, you have to find a way around this three-week barrier. The way to overcome it is to switch the exercise used for the maximal effort method every 1–3 weeks, thus allowing the body to recover. This keeps the body fresh so the method can be used year round.

This method is used to develop the muscular system. The basic application of this method is to choose one multi-joint movement for the first movement of the day and work up to a 1RM. Two days are devoted to max effort training. One day is for the bench press and the other for the squat/deadlift. We group the squat and deadlift on the same day because the muscles used in these lifts are the same. Once you choose your movement, you will start with the bar and begin adding weight. Generally, your warm-up sets should consist of 3–5 repetitions. Do not move up in weight until you are warmed up. Many times we will take a weight numerous times before advancing. This ensures that you do not get injured. Take small jumps (30 lbs for average strength and 45–50 lbs for above

average). As you work up, you will need to decide if you want to attempt to break your 1RM or your 3RM. This is up to you but use your body as a guide. If you feel good, go for the 1RM. If you do not feel good, stay with the 3RM. When attempting a 1RM, three sets should be over 90 percent.

With the max effort method, switch the movement being used every 1–3 weeks. This timeframe depends on the skill level, coordination, and motor control of the athlete using the method. The more advanced the lifter, the less time he will spend with an exercise. A beginner can use a max effort movement for up to three weeks. The best way to determine this is by sticking with a max effort movement for two weeks. If you can't consistently break your record in the second week, it is time to start switching exercises every week. If you are training a beginner, it is best for them to learn the movement with proper form. Once form begins to break, the beginner has reached his max.

Why the Max Effort Method?

- It teaches you to strain. You need to learn to strain for 3–4 seconds. This is the timeframe in which a max lift can take in competition. By training for the same time under tension, you can increase the competitive strength on the platform.
- It is training courage and aggression with the big weight.
- It develops the muscular system for the feel of heavier weight.
- It is a form of chaos training. When performing an exercise such as a box squat with the safety squat bar, the bar is trying to dump you forward. This is a very common problem when performing a squat, and by doing this max effort exercise, it forces the lifter to fight to stay upright.
- It allows you to test your strength on a weekly basis.

Max Effort Squat/Deadlift Movements

On Monday, we perform our max effort squat/deadlift workout. All lower body max effort movements stem from three movements.

1. **The box squat:** This is used for the same reason as the box squat (discussed later). The high box work is great for overloading the lower body and getting the torso used to heavy weight. The low box is used to increase the distance the bar has to travel and increase the time under tension. All of our max effort squatting is done with a close stance. This provides variation from our wide stance squatting on dynamic effort day and helps keep our hips healthy.
2. **The good morning:** The good morning is used for several reasons. First, it is great for the development of the lower back, hamstrings, and glutes. Second, it throws you forward so you learn to keep the bar in the groove. It also gets you strong enough to keep it from happening in the first place. Most of our good mornings are done while the bar is suspended in chains. By suspending the bar in chains, you eliminate the eccentric portion of the good morning. This closely resembles the deadlift because it is a concentric only lift. The bar should be around waist height when it is suspended in the chains. A 3/8-inch chain with a strong carabineer will be needed. The chains are hung from the top of the power rack, and the bar is placed inside the chains. If you do not have access to chains, placing the bar on pins in a power rack will suffice.
3. **The deadlift:** We very rarely pull a competitive deadlift in the gym, but we will pull a variety of other ways to strengthen the groove of the pull as well as the muscles of the glutes, lower back, and hamstrings. You can perform any of the deadlift variations with either a conventional or sumo stance.

The choice of movements from week to week is not dictated by a written training program but how you feel and what you feel you need to do. If you are having trouble deciding what to do, you can rotate the movements every week.

- Week 1: Deadlift variation
- Week 2: Squat variation
- Week 3: Good morning variation
- Week 4: Deadlift variation (different than in week 1)
- And so on...

Most Popular ME Lower Body Movements

- Good mornings
- Low and high box squats
- Cambered bar good mornings
- Cambered bar suspended good mornings
- Cambered bar low and high box squats
- Safety squat bar suspended Good Mornings
- Safety squat bar low and high box squats
- Reverse band deadlifts
- Deadlifts off of pins (done in power rack)
- Deadlifts standing on elevated platform
- Box squats with Manta Ray
- Box squats with front squat harness

For a description of these movements, see the Exercise Index.



Cambered bar good morning



Deadlifts against bands



Deadlifts off pins



Reverse band deadlift



*Good mornings with safety
squat bar (suspended in chains)*



*Box squat with safety squat
bar*

You will notice that the use of a regular bar is not used in most of the movements above. This is done for several reasons. First, we are looking to change the leverages off the lift to stress the muscles harder than the main lifts would. For example, the safety squat bar keeps the bar positioned high on the neck and is in the constant process of trying to throw you forward. To keep this from happening, the muscles of your lower traps come into play more than they would without the bar. This relates to the squat and deadlift. In these movements, most lifters miss the lift because their shoulders fall forward or their chest drops. In other words, they fall forward. Second, the cambered bar and the safety squat bar put less stress on the shoulders. Because of the added stress on the shoulders during bench press workouts, using these bars is a great way to keep your shoulders fresh. If you do not have access to either of these bars, try using a Manta Ray or front squat harness or place a rolled up towel around the bar. All of these items will change how the bar sits on your back, thus changing the leverage during the lift.

A common problem that comes up with beginners is that they often feel like they have not done enough work on max effort day. This is because they progress from set to set much too quickly. Here is a sample max effort progression that many beginners do.

Sample Max Effort Progression (the wrong way!)

Good mornings: Previous personal record, 225 X 1

Set	Repetitions	Weight	This workout is a typical example of how a beginner may perform a max effort day. Most beginners will refuse to put anything less than 135 lbs of weight on the bar. Notice that there are few warm-up sets and also a very low volume. The total amount of weight lifted is 1,030 lbs.
1	3	135	
1	1	185	
1	1	205	
1	1	235	

Sample Max Effort Progression (the right way!)

Good mornings: Previous personal record, 225 X 1

Set	Repetitions	Weight	Notice how many more sets are done as well as the increase in volume. This is a great way to increase strength, avoid injury, and increase work capacity. The total amount lifted is 3,720 lbs. This is over three times the total amount lifted in the first example.
1	5	45	
1	5	95	
1	5	115	
1	3	135	
1	3	155	
1	3	175	
1	2	195	
1	1	205	
1	1	220	
1	1	235	

Summary of Max Effort Squat/Deadlift

- Perform one max effort squat/deadlift workout per week.
- Perform only one max effort exercise per workout.
- Warm up using sets of 3–5 reps and work up to a new 1RM.

- Three sets should be at or above 90 percent.
- Change the exercises every 1–3 weeks, depending on training level.
- Keep track of your records in order to monitor progress.

Max Effort Squat/Deadlift FAQ

Question: Do you ever wear a squat suit or groove briefs on max effort day?

Answer: Yes, but not always. Many times, if our hips are sore, we will wear some supportive equipment on this day.

Question: Do you ever wear a belt on max effort day?

Answer: Yes, but not always. If our lower back is sore, we will wear a belt for our last couple of sets.

Question: Do you still perform Zercher squats on max effort day?

Answer: No. We have found that the limiting factor of the Zercher squat was how much weight we could hold. It is better used as an accessory exercise.

Question: Do you still perform kneeling squats as a max effort exercise?

Answer: No. Because of the amount of weight that was being handled, it is better used as an accessory exercise for higher reps (10–20 reps).

Question: Do you ever wear wrist straps when doing max effort deadlift movements?

Answer: Yes. Don't let your grip be the limiting factor when training for max effort. If your grip is weak, train it separately.

Question: What kind of stance do you take when performing max effort squats?

Answer: We always take a close stance. This allows for variety because we always use a wide stance on dynamic effort squat day. Also, this mimics the stance taken when performing a conventional deadlift. This stance allows us to give our hips a break from wide squatting.

Question: What height is used for a low box and a high box?

Answer: A low box is about 1–2 inches below parallel. A high box is 1–2 inches above parallel.

Question: When performing rack pulls, how high should you place the bar?

Answer: Rack pulls should always be done with the bar below the knee. A good rack should be made so that there are four or five different pin settings that will put the bar below your knees.

Question: When using the safety squat bar, do you hold on to the rack?

Answer: No. Keep your hands at your side or on the padded yolk.

Question: How long should max effort workouts last?

Answer: After the warm up, the workout should last about 60–90 minutes.

Question: When performing good mornings, do I go for a 3RM or a 1RM?

Answer: Always make sure that your form is correct on any exercise before performing a max attempt. Once your form is correct on the good morning, you can perform either a 1RM or a 3RM. Many people like to perform 5–8 repetitions on the good morning.

Question: Do you ever use bands and chains on this day?

Answer: If we use bands, it is done when performing the reverse band deadlift or while pulling on a jump stretch platform against bands. Chains are used on some of the squat and good morning movements. For the most part, chains and bands are used primarily on dynamic effort day and are rarely used on max effort day.

Question: When doing suspended good mornings, how high is the bar that is suspended in chains?

Answer: The bar is about 36 inches off of the ground. No matter what the height of the lifter, the bar stays at that level. This makes things easier so that you don't have to constantly change the bar during the sets. Whatever height you set the bar at, be sure you keep track of it. This way you have an easy way to track your progress and your personal records.

Question: My grip sucks! What do I do?

Answer: There are many gadgets out there that are supposed to help your grip, but here are some simple, inexpensive ways to improve your grip.

- Do all warm-up deadlift sets with a pronated grip.
- Do high rep shrugs with a pronated grip. Go as heavy as possible for sets of 15–30 reps.
- Do high repetition dumbbell rows. Go as heavy as possible for sets of 15–30 reps.
- Do fat bar benches, chins, rows, and pull-downs. Use a fat bar whenever possible.

Max Effort Movements Upper Body Movements

- Floor press (can be done with or without chains)
- 2-Board press
- 3-Board press
- 4-Board press
- Incline press
- Reverse band press
- Rack lockouts (can be done from varying heights)
- Cambered bar bench press
- Illegal wide grip benches (6–10RM instead of 1RM)
- Bench press with chains
- High rep dumbbell presses (incline or flat bench)



Reverse band bench press



Board press



Floor press with chains

Note: Mini-bands or chains can be added to any of the above max effort bench press movements to provide variation. For a description of exercises, see the Exercise Index.

Example of Max Effort Bench Press Progression

Floor press: Previous best on floor press, 405 X 1

Sets	Repetitions	Weight
1	5	45
1	5	95
1	5	135
1	3	185
1	3	225
1	3	275
1	1	315
1	1	350
1	1	375
1	1	395
1	1	415

Notice that there are three sets at or above 90 percent.

Max Effort Bench Press FAQ

Question: What kind of grip do you take when doing max effort bench training?

Answer: For the most part, most of the max effort work is done with a close to medium grip. You can set personal records on a given exercise with several different grips (but don't do this in the same workout). The grip is not set in stone.

Question: What equipment do you wear on this day?

Answer: We will often wear wrist wraps and a belt.

Question: How are the boards for board presses built?

Answer: The boards are 2 X 6 pieces cut about 18 inches in length and then nailed or glued together. We use everything from a 1-board to a 5-board.

Question: Do you pause on the boards during board presses?

Answer: Yes. The pause is slight, but you don't want to touch and go.

Question: Do you pause when doing floor presses?

Answer: Yes. Pause your elbows/triceps on the floor for about a second and then press back up.

Question: Do you ever wear your bench shirt on max effort day?

Answer: Yes. There is no set regimen on how we train with our bench shirts. There are many different ways that people use their bench shirts on this day, and it is up to you to find out how much time you need in your shirt in order to feel comfortable in it.

Question: How often do you use bands and chains on max effort day?

Answer: With the bands, we try not to use them every workout. If you are using bands a lot on dynamic effort bench day, be careful on how much you use them on max effort day. We use the chains a lot during floor presses. This is done by

draping the chains over the sleeve of the barbell. The lead chain is not used when using chains and floor presses.

Question: I've seen people perform high rep dumbbell presses on max effort bench press day. How is this done?

Answer: High rep dumbbell presses can be done on a flat bench or an incline bench. The best way to do these is to pick a set dumbbell weight and perform three sets to failure. Take about five minutes rest between these three sets. Make sure to perform a warm up before your three work sets. The high rep dumbbell work is done every 4–5 weeks in place of the max effort movement.

Summary of Max Effort Bench Press

- * Perform one max effort bench press workout per week.
- * Perform only one max effort exercise per workout.
- * Warm up using sets of 3–5 reps and work up to a new 1RM.
- * Three sets should be at or above 90 percent.
- * Change the exercises every 1–3 weeks, depending on your training level.
- * Keep track of your records in order to monitor progress.
- * The grip should be close to medium.

Max Effort Methods

Multiple Exertion Method

This method involves multiple sets of 1 or 2 reps with strict rest periods. Much like the dynamic effort method this method uses the same load for multiple sets. If you all follow Jim Wendler's training log you will see he was employing this method a several years ago in the training of his bench press and dead lift. Jim would work up to 70-80% and perform 10-15 singles with 2 minutes rest. This is a great method when you feel you need to get away from weights in the 90%

range. While the weight is lighter it is important to note that when the sets increase so does the tension. As you get tired the weights get much harder to complete. That is why this becomes ranked as a Maximal Effort Method.

You may already be using this method without knowing it. Many people get this method confused with the dynamic effort method. I talk to many people who say they are doing speed dead lifts and then find out they are using 90 second rest periods training with loads between 80-90% for singles. When the tempo becomes very slow and the strain very high you leave the dynamic method and cross over to maximal methods.

Many have found when they use these high exertion methods for their so called “speed squats” that they are no longer doing dynamic method work but max effort work. When this is the case, there is a very strong need to make alterations to the max effort work you are also doing during the week.

Maximal Concentric Method

This method is just as it sounds. You lift the weight and do not lower it. This is pretty much how most Olympic lifts are completed. As powerlifters we can also use this method for various movements such as; deadlifts, pin pulls, pin presses, Zercher squats, pin squats, suspended squats, suspended good mornings, and suspended bench presses. While your gym owner will hate your guts for doing this, it does have a purpose. The negative phase of the lift is what causes the greatest muscle soreness and damage. If you speak to many lifters they will also tell you that this is where most injuries happen. By cycling in more maximal concentric movements you build in a way to allow more recovery. Let me explain. Say you have a hard time recovering from Max Effort Training. You may choose to do a 4 week phase of max effort work such as:

Week 1 – Board Presses – work up to 1 RM

Week 2 – Close Grip Bench Press with maximal exertion method

Week 3 – Chain Suspended Lockouts (concentric only)

Week 4 – Rest

With this example you have one week of partial range eccentrics (board presses), One week full range eccentric contraction (close grip bench presses), then one deload eccentric week (chain suspended lockouts), and one week off. Out of 4 weeks you have only stressed the eccentric phase maximally for 2 weeks (and one of them was a partial range). This will allow for great recovery while still allowing maximal effort training.

You could then add more eccentric loading into the next phase of training. Eccentric loading is very important and should not be taken out of the training for extended periods of time.

Maximal Isometric Method

Okay, I admit it. Isometrics suck and have limited value but I did say “limited” value. This means there is value in certain circumstances. Before we get into the method lets examine when this could be used and why. I strongly feel that a lift is raised by bringing up those muscles that do the work of the lift. I feel you can increase your bench press without benching, your squat without squatting and your deadlift without deadlifting. This is not how I always felt but after being around Louie Simmons for so many years and see that this is the main factor behind all of his training. The proof is always in the results and I have seen the results. Now with that being said I would be stupid to not look at all angles when addressing a sticking point. The best way to do this is by using an example of what I am trying to say.

Lifter A has a bench press of 465 pounds and always gets stuck about 5 inches off his chest. This would represent the half way point in his bench press. While it is not my intention to make this a bench press sticking point article, it is important to point out that I feel all sticking points are some combination of mental, physical and technical. We determine that this lifter has some technical problem right at

his sticking point. He presses into this position very strong and then stalls, after a split second he flares his elbows out as he keeps pressing. The bar does not go up, but his elbows flare out.

There are always multiple solutions but one would be to increase the strength of his rotator cuff muscles and lats. This would keep his body position tighter and allow him to push through the sticking point. He should also increase his overall body strength as this has a great effect on all lifts. Finally, he should increase his bar speed going into the sticking point. This will allow him to bust through this barrier.

There is one other thing we could have him do and this involves the Maximal Isometric Method. To do this we would set the pins up in a power rack with one set of pins 1 inch below his sticking point and one set right off the chest. The lifter would press an empty bar into the top pin and press and hold as hard as he can for 3-5 seconds (or whatever his average max lift takes). This is a very demanding method that can sneak up to kill you. You need to keep it to only a few sets and no more than 1-2 times per 4 week phase. I would also suggest no more than 3 pin positions per session.

Here are some other ways to use this method:

1. 9 sets with empty bar for 3-5 second holds with 30 sec rest all same pin
2. Same as 1 but use three pin settings for 3 sets each
3. Instead of empty bar load on 50% of 1 RM. You will know the weight is too heavy when you find you are holding the bar against the pins, not pressing it. It is important to press against the pins.

This method will accomplish a couple different things. First it will develop position specific strength within a 10-15% degree range. This may give him the edge he needs to break through the sticking point. Second, it will allow a “check” for technical positioning during a time of crisis. In other words, he will be able to see what his body does when it strains and be able to make the required corrections

needed to finish the lift. Third and I feel this could be the most important, sticking points are very mental. If you always fail at the same point you will begin to program yourself for this and will not drive past it. You will press into this point knowing you will miss. Without knowing it you are programming yourself to give up too soon. You may press for a split second and say “Shit, there it is again”. With the pin press you will be able to reprogram yourself to strain for that extra split second past where you would normally say “screw it”. One split second is the difference between a missed lift and a lifetime PR.

Maximal Eccentrics Method

I should call this the “High School” Method because this is when we used it most.

Why?

We were all too stupid to know better.

You can call it maximal eccentrics, negatives, droppers or whatever you want. The results are still the same: pain, injuries and soreness. The bar is loaded to 130 – 140% of our best one rep max and then lowered slowly. After it touched our chest, the spotter would pull the bar off us and we would either rack the bar or do another one. (It’s all you!!!)

There are valid reasons to do this but in its purest form the risk/benefit ratio is too high for the intermediate and advanced lifter. We can get much of the same effect with weight releasers and bands while not having to take the barbell weight up to 140%. The more advanced lifter has a harder time lowering 140% than a beginner.

I have seen this work very well for a lifter trying to break in his bench shirt. These sets are doing more than they think. The supported eccentric loading is building the muscles and tendons to handle heavy loads. The shirt helps protect the body from the abuse and is also the reason why many lifters complain of sore elbows

and forearms with heavy shirt work. The lifters do not feel the effects in the supported muscles (chest, shoulders, lats) because of the shirt.

I have also seen this work very well with top-down dead lifts. To do this the lifter loads the bar in a rack at the top position. He then stands up with the weight and does an eccentric dead lift to the floor.

Maximal Forced Repetitions

I am sure you all remember forced reps from high school. There are several ways to utilize this method for many different applications. Leaving bodybuilding aside we will focus on the pure strength aspect.

One way to use this method is also one way I do not suggest. I will still include it because there are many others who think this application has great strength training properties. This is a very simple application composed of one or two assisted reps after failure has been reached. Since this is Max Effort Training you will still need to keep your percentage over 90% with 1-5 reps being performed.

One other way to use forced reps is by using a method many have been using over the past few years. This method has also become known as the Lightened Method or Reverse Bands. To use this method you simply hang your barbell from bands so the bands help to lift the weight. This is used on the squat, deadlift and bench press. Unlike the above application this method provides help from the beginning of the set. I feel this makes this a much safer method. This is also a great method for those who are looking to increase the mid to end point of a lift.

The Maximal Restricted Range Method

This is another one that has been HOT for quite awhile. Some examples of this method include:

- Rack presses
- Pin pulls

- Board presses
- High box squats
- Squatting off pins
- Partial leg presses
- Arch back good mornings
- Over head pin presses
- Pulling off stands

This method allows for maximal overload of very restricted ranges of motion. This method has been very popular over the past 30 years for one reason. It works very well. If you are looking to get strong then you need to include this method in your training.

Cheating

While I am also not a big proponent of cheating, I do feel there are certain movements where cheating can make a huge difference. One of these includes a chain suspended good morning. This movement is performed by hanging a barbell from strong chains at a mid waist position. The lifter will then duck under the barbell and arch the bar to the top position. With this movement the “strain” is the most important thing. Just getting the bar up is more important then if you are doing a good morning or squat. I also feel a slight sink and drive on board presses can do wonders for those who need extra work at the top; it will however hurt those who are weak at the mid or lower position because they are cheating where they need the work. This cheat will, however, allow the weak lock out lifter the opportunity to train with heavier weight. Once again, it is very important to know your weaknesses.

Circa-Maximal Method

This method has many cross over applications. It has been used as a 3 week wave in place of straight Dynamic Method Training for some time with great results. While this method can be viewed as Dynamic or Max Effort, it really depends on how it is used. Here are a few examples of the Max Effort Circa-Maximal Method:

- Squats with multiple bands for a 1-3 rep max
- Deadlifts against multiple bands for a 1 rep max
- Bench press with chains and bands for a 1 rep max

The key thing to understand with this method (regardless of application) is to make sure the weight at the top of the movement exceeds 90% of your one rep max. This is what makes this circa-maximal.

The best way to accomplish this while avoiding over-training and acute training injuries is to use chains and/or bands with your barbell weight. There is not a magic percent of weight to bands or weight to chains with this method (This is very different when used as a dynamic method) so all you really need to do is load the bar up to around 50-60% barbell weight and add bands or chains. Here is one example of what I mean for a 500 pound bencher.

Close Grip Bench Press

45 pounds for 3 reps

45 pounds for 3 reps with double light band

95 for 3 with double light band

135 for 3 with double light band

185 for 3 with double light band

185 for 3 with double light band and add one chain per side

The lifter will now keep adding one chain per side and work up to a 1RM.

There are several other examples and combinations of how this method can be applied. Don't be afraid to experiment and see what works best for you.

Maximal Holding Method

This is one that you see from time to time. I am also not a big fan of this one, but it is also very popular with a very large number of lifters. This method is great for what I call strength stabilization. Strength stabilization is how well you can stabilize maximal loads. It really does not mean shit if you can stand on a stability ball if you can't stabilize maximal weights. Many of you have heard of (or have done) walkouts for the squat. This is exactly what this method is. Many lifters who do walkouts or stand ups will set up the weight and hold it for a certain count. This may be 3, 5, or 10 seconds. I feel the best time would be 1-2 seconds more than the exact amount of time it takes the lifter to finish a maximal lift with the same lift being trained. For example, if it takes you 6 seconds to perform a 1RM squat then you will hold your walkout for 7-8 seconds. Remember to keep your body tight! Here are a few other examples of the Maximal Holding Method;

- High pin deadlift holds
- Very high pin squats
- Very high rack lockouts
- Bench press holds
- Very high board presses

If the exercise has more movement than the set up and hold (very high board presses), then you will do one rep by holding for a couple seconds at the top, lower and press the bar, and then hold for 2-3 seconds at the top again.

The Dynamic Effort Method

The dynamic effort method is used to train the squat, bench press, and deadlift. It is defined as lifting a non-maximal load with the fastest speed possible. This is often called compensatory acceleration. This means you must apply as much force as possible to the barbell. The best way to explain this is to lower the barbell quickly (but under control) and press with as much force as possible.

The weight used should be around 50–70 percent of your max. In the book, *Supertraining*, authors Siff and Verkeshonsky state that the best range for developing explosive strength in the barbell squat is two-thirds of your best 1RM. For example, if you squat 700 lbs and are training with 400 lbs, you should be able to apply 700 lbs of force to the barbell if you press as fast and as hard as possible. Because of the light load, the dynamic effort method is a great way to learn technique and practice form.

Remember, the percentages prescribed are not written in stone. It's the bar speed that is most important. Everybody has different motor learning skills, and the advanced strength athlete will activate these more than a novice athlete. This is why the more advanced the lifter, the harder the work. For example, if both athletes performed a set of ten reps in the barbell squat with 80 percent, the novice would walk away like it was no big deal while the advanced athlete would not be walking anywhere because he would be on the floor. If you have followed Louie Simmons' articles over the years, you will notice how the percentages he writes about for the squat and bench press have been reduced. This is because the gym as a whole has become so much stronger and more experienced. The percentage for the bench press used to be around 70 percent. Now, it is around 45–55 percent. Why the reduction? The lifters at Westside are more experienced and are recruiting more motor units. Therefore, fewer percentages are needed to produce the desired results. The best way to determine what your training percentage should be if you are a beginner, intermediate, or advanced strength athlete is to begin with 50 percent and have someone watch or film your bar

speed. If you can maintain this bar speed, increase the percentage. When the bar begins to slow down, decrease the weight. If you are having trouble recognizing what bar speed should look like, watch the “Reactive Method” video or “The Bench Press Secrets” video. Both are available at www.EliteFTS.com.

The dynamic effort days are done 72 hours after the max effort day to allow for proper recovery.

Dynamic Effort Bench Press

On Sunday, we perform the dynamic bench press workout. The purpose of this day is to develop force and perfect form on the bench press. For the dynamic effort bench press workout, you will perform the bench press for eight sets of three repetitions with a given percentage. Most of the grips used are close grip or medium grip. Generally, we use a close grip (index finger just outside the smooth part of the bar), medium grip (thumbs length from smooth part of bar), and wide grip (pinky on the power ring). These are the three grips used most often, but they are not set in stone.



Pinky on the power ring.



Index finger just outside the smooth.



Thumbs length from smooth.

Bench Press Technique (3)

In order to press correctly on dynamic effort day, follow these guidelines. Every repetition of every set should be perfect. Because the bar weight is relatively light, it is easy to practice good form.

- Keep your shoulder blades pulled together, TIGHT. This is a very important and often overlooked aspect of great bench pressing. While pressing, you have to create the most stable environment possible. This can't be done if most of your shoulder blade is off the bench. The bench is only so wide, and we can't change this. However, we can change how we position ourselves on the bench. When you pull your shoulder blades together, you are creating a tighter, more stable surface to press from. This is because more of your body is in contact with the bench and your upper back is tight. This also changes the distance the bar will have to travel. The key to pressing big weight is to press the shortest distance possible.
- Keep the pressure on your upper back and traps. This is another misunderstood aspect of pressing. You want the pressure around the supporting muscles. This is accomplished by driving your feet into the floor and driving your body into the bench. To test this, lay on the bench and line up so that your eyes are four inches from the bar toward your feet. Now, use your legs and drive yourself into the bench so that you slide back. Your eyes should now be directly under the bar. This is the same pressure that needs to be applied while pushing the barbell.
- Keep the elbows tucked and the bar directly over the wrists and elbows. This is probably the most important aspect of great pressing technique. The elbows must remain tucked to keep the bar in a straight line as explained above. Keeping the elbows tucked will also allow the lifter to use the lats to drive the bar off the chest. Football players are taught to drive their opponents with their elbows tucked and then explode through. This is the same for bench pressing. Bench pressing is all about generating force. You can generate far more force with your elbows in a tucked position than in an elbow out position. The most important aspect of this is to keep the barbell in a direct line with the elbow. If the barbell is behind the elbow

- Bring the bar low on your chest or upper abdominals. This is the only way you can maintain the barbell to elbow position as described above. You will hear “Bring it low!” at almost every powerlifting competition. This is the reason why.
- Fill your belly with air and hold it. For maximum attempts and sets under three reps, you must try to hold your air. Everyone must learn how to breathe from their belly, not their chest. If you stand in front of the mirror and take a deep breath, your shoulders should not rise. If they do, you are breathing the air into your chest, not your belly. Greater stability can be achieved in all the lifts when you learn how to pull air into the belly. Try to expand and fill the belly with as much air as possible and hold it. If you breathe out during a maximum attempt, the body structure will change slightly, thus changing the groove the barbell is traveling.
- Squeeze the barbell and try to pull the bar apart. Regardless of the lift, you have to keep the body as tight as possible. You will never lift big weights if you are in a relaxed physical state while under the barbell. The best way to get the body tight is by squeezing the bar. We have also found that if you try to pull the bar apart or “break the bar,” the triceps seem to become more activated.

Keep Your Butt on the Bench! (6)

If you are having trouble keeping your butt on the bench, try these tips.

1) **Know your bench.** This is probably the biggest reason why most powerlifters miss a lift at a meet. They train on a bench that’s somewhat higher than the one they use in competition. So, in training, they know how to position their bodies

and stay tight on the bench, but when they go to a meet, they find that their asses are one inch off the bench. In this case, there are several solutions.

First, get on the bench before the meet and see if it feels lower. If it does, tell your coach to remind you to get your feet out in front of you more. This way, when you go to drive the bar with your legs, most of the drive stays lower. If you find that this happens at every meet you attend, you may also want to find another bench on which to train. Another solution is to place a one-inch rubber mat under your feet when you train.

2) **Know your position.** You want to make sure you keep your body tight throughout the motion. Some people like to use a tight arch with their feet tucked back. You need to be tight and squeeze your inner thighs into the bench as hard as possible. This creates an anchor to lock you down.

If you bench with your legs out in front of you, you want to make sure you're driving your upper back and traps into the bench. Drive off your heels and through your shoulders. This will give you more power. If you're only driving into your mid-back, much of the force will be lost in the hip when you press, thus your ass comes up.

3) **Get the rope.** This is a great trick I borrowed from Bill Gillespie. Bill is the head strength and conditioning coach for the Washington Huskies, who also happens to have a 635-lb bench. He found that many of his athletes couldn't keep their asses on the bench so he had to find an easy and quick way to fix it. He came up with one of the best ideas I've seen in a long time. Bill attaches a five- or 10-lb plate to a rope. He has the lifter position himself on the bench and then sticks the rope under the lifter's butt so the plate is suspended in the air under the bench. If the lifter comes up, the plate falls to the floor. This is a great feedback device that's worked very well for many athletes. Give it a shot!

Getting Stuck at the Bottom of the Bench Press (2)

This is really one of the best problems to have and the easiest to fix. When you're dealing with sticking points in the bench press, remember that there are several ways to correct the problem but most won't work for you. So don't beat a dead horse! In other words, if what you've been doing isn't working, try something else. You have plenty of ammo. I've had this same problem with my bench and sometimes it takes years to stumble upon the right movement to fix the problem. Other times I hit the right movement the first time out.

1) Get your head right. This is true with all sticking points, regardless of the point at which you stall out. If you believe that you will always miss at the top, you'll always miss at the top! Your mind has a lot to do with your sticking points. I try to teach all the athletes that I work with to visualize their sticking point at a higher position and focus very hard on driving the bar through it. In other words, when you bench, you must focus on pushing the bar very fast through your sticking point. Focus will make a big difference.

2) Learn to use your triceps. This is done by keeping your body tight and focusing on pulling the bar apart. This will involve your triceps more throughout the movement and keep the bar moving in a straight line. A good trick to teach you to do this is to use a mini-band from Jump Stretch, Inc. Double the band up and wrap it around your wrists while you bench. This forces you to pull the bar apart and grasp the barbell tightly. If not, your hands will be shot together. Pull the bar apart and watch that sticking point disappear!

3) Start the bar with the weight in your lats. This is a very simple concept but it's very seldom practiced. Most lifters will unrack the bar and lower it to the chest without setting the bar first. You need to unrack the bar and then "set it" in your lats and upper back.

4) Move the bar fast. You need to make sure you're pressing as fast as possible to bust through your sticking point. A slow press won't build enough momentum to bust past your sticking point. If you were trying to open a stuck door, would you try to open it slowly or would you bust into it as hard as possible? Speed is key!

5) Pick one of the following exercises and perform 4–6 sets of 10–15 reps. All of these have given lifters the strength they needed to drive off of their chest.

- Dumbbell bench press
- Dumbbell incline press
- Incline press
- Dumbbell floor press
- Floor press
- Military press
- Dumbbell military press
- Illegal wide bench press
- Bradford press
- Dips (weighted)

Dynamic Effort Bench Press Cycles

There are three types of cycles when performing the dynamic effort bench press. These cycles are done with straight weight (no chains or bands), chains, and bands.

Straight Weight/Chains

Beginner: A beginner should train the bench at 60 percent for eight sets of three reps with 45–60 seconds rest. It may be a good idea for a beginner to perform 10–12 sets to work on better motor control and technique. If you are going to do more sets, you may want to lower the percentage to 55 percent.

Intermediate: The intermediate should train the bench at 55 percent for eight sets of three reps with 45–60 seconds rest.

Advanced: The advanced should train the bench at 50 percent for eight sets of three reps with 45–60 seconds rest. I have even seen advanced lifters do very well training with 40–45 percent.

Bench Training with Chains

Training the bench with chains is still one of our most effective ways to push up the bench press. After warm ups, you will train your bench at your given percentage (see above) for eight sets of three repetitions. This means you will drop the weight quickly (under control) and explode back up as quickly as possible. When using chains, you will generally use the same bar weight as if you were using straight weight. This is true some of the time. Of course, the only way to accurately get the number is to perform a 1RM with the exercise. You can do this on max effort day or simply guess and estimate where you might fall.

While the bar is in the rack, one half of the training chain should be on the floor. This will allow for a total deload at the bottom. On a side note, if you were to



attach the training chain to the bar sleeve without the support chain, as some manufactures are producing, you will get very little deload. This is because most of the chain will remain off the floor while very little chain will actually end up on the floor. This is why those who don't know how to use a product should never try to sell it. To any of those manufacturers who may be reading this, if you are going to steal one of our ideas, at least get it right!

Benching with Bands

Benching with bands is much harder on your body than benching with chains. For this reason, I don't recommend training with the bands for longer than 3–4 weeks at a time. It's best to cycle a four-week wave with the bands followed by a four-week wave with the chains. When you cycle with the bands, deduct the added tension that the bands create at the bottom off the barbell for the training. The training sets and reps stay the same as with the dynamic day with chains. Place the bands on the inside part of the bar sleeve and begin adding the plates.

The other end of the band will need to be anchored around the bottom of the power rack or a set of dumbbells. To adjust the tension, make the anchor bigger. For example, to create more tension, wrap the band under two dumbbells rather than one.

In order to figure out what weight to use when bench pressing with bands on dynamic effort day, subtract approximately 30 lbs from your usual bar weight. So, if you've been using 185 lbs with chains, use 155 lbs with one mini-band per side. If you feel that this is too light, simply increase the bar weight. If you feel it's too heavy, decrease the bar weight. Just make sure that you set up the bands correctly and that there is tension at the bottom of the bench press. There are approximately 30 lbs of tension at the bottom and around 80 lbs of tension at the top. Do not get wrapped up in the exact amount of tension that the bands are applying to the barbell. Because bar speed is the most important variable on this day, it is not important to know the tension.

A mini-band is always used on dynamic bench press day. This applies whether you bench press 400 lbs or 700 lbs.



Notice that the band is attached to the sleeve of the bar, wrapped under the power rack (or dumbbell), and placed back onto the sleeve.

Summary of Dynamic Effort Bench

- Perform eight sets of three repetitions.
- Take 45–60 seconds rest between sets.
- All sets are done at the given percentage.
- Use 50 percent for advanced, 55 percent for intermediate, and 60 percent for beginner.
- Percentages are just guidelines. Bar weight should be determined by bar speed.
- Use three different grips. All should be inside the power rings.
- Use perfect form on all sets and reps.
- Use speed!

Dynamic Effort Bench FAQ

Question: Do you always change your grips on this day?

Answer: The grips you use should almost always be inside the power ring. However, if one grip tends to aggravate your shoulder or wrist, take the grip that allows you to train.

Question: How long do you use bands/chains on this day?

Answer: For most, three weeks with the bands is enough. Here are some training cycles using chains, bands, and straight weight.

1. Three weeks bands, three weeks chains
2. Three weeks bands, three weeks straight weight
3. One week bands, one week straight weight
4. One week chains, one week bands
5. One week chains, one week straight weight

Remember, there is no magic formula. Experiment and find out what works best for you.

Question: How many chains are used when dynamic bench pressing?

Answer: Start with one chain per side and see if your speed is desirable. If it is, add one chain per side and evaluate again. If it slows down, take a chain off or reduce the bar weight. Remember the purpose of the day! Rarely does anyone use more than three chains per side.

Question: Do you ever use any other movement other than the bench press for dynamic bench training?

Answer: We use the bench press 99.9 percent of the time. Some like to perform the floor press on dynamic effort bench press day.

Question: What equipment, if any, do you use on this day?

Answer: We often use a weightlifting belt and wrist wraps.

Question: I have read that a set of dynamic effort bench presses should take three seconds. Is this true?

Answer: Don't be worried about the time it takes to complete a set. Just make sure that the concentric (raising of the bar) speed is fast.

Question: What kind of bands do I need for dynamic effort bench pressing?

Answer: No matter how strong (or weak) you are, a mini-band is always used.

Question: What is ballistic bench pressing?

Answer: Ballistic pressing is done by lowering the barbell very fast and catching it 1–3 inches off of your chest and pressing it back up. This is done sparingly because of the stress on the elbows. This is a great way to improve your strength off of your chest. Do this only when you are feeling healthy and capable. This is NOT recommended for the beginner.

Question: I have read many times that you need to work up in weight on dynamic bench press day. How is this done?

Answer: After your eight sets, simply work up in weight to about 80 percent of your 1RM. This is not done for every workout, but it should happen when you are feeling strong and fast. For example, if you are a 400-lb bench presser and perform your eight sets at 200 lbs, this is what it would look like:

Bench press: 8 X 3 at 200 lbs, 1 X 1 at 225 lbs, 1 X 1 at 275 lbs, 1 X 1 at 315 lbs

Question: For the past couple months, my elbows and shoulders seem to hurt so much that I can barely lift without taking a tub full of ibuprofen. I know this is unhealthy so I can't do this forever. I have scheduled an appointment with an active release therapy (ART) specialist, but is there anything else I can do, especially with my training, that can help cure this problem? Please help because the pain is really limiting my training and my progress.

Answer: Having sore elbows and/or shoulders seems to be a recurring theme among all strength athletes. Besides the usual therapy of seeing a chiropractor or using ice, traction, an ART specialist, or ibuprofen, there are a number of things that you can do in your training that can help alleviate elbow and shoulder pain.

The first thing is to monitor your form on your lifts. This goes for everything—your dynamic, max effort, and accessory/supplementary training. I hear from many people that their elbows bother them when doing dynamic bench training. There are several ways to combat the pain. One easy way is to make sure you are not

using bands every week. Cycling them is the best way to avoid the pain. Do not use them for more than three weeks at a time. Also, when performing your benches on this day, make sure to separate the repetitions. What I mean by this is concentrate on performing each rep perfectly. Don't rush through the set just to do it. Pause at the top for a second or more and do another perfect rep. I have found that when I do this, my elbow pain goes away, and my bench form gets better. Too many times people are so concerned with trying to get their set done in three seconds that their form is awful. This does not mean that the set is done slowly. It means the set is done explosively and with good form.

The same concept can be used when doing your accessory and supplemental lifts. I've watched many people perform their triceps extensions and rows with sloppy, fast form. These lifts, especially the extensions, seem to give people the worst elbow pain. However, if you watch them lift, they rarely perform them with strict form. They use momentum and their body to move the bar/dumbbells. When using better form, you will initially use less weight, but you will build up to your former weights in time. Also, because you will be using less weight, it should give your body a chance to heal. Having said that, use common sense. If a certain exercise does give you pain, stop doing it and find an alternative. Remember, there are countless exercises that you can do, and it is up to you to find out which ones work. Obviously, if what you are doing is causing you pain, it probably isn't working for you.

I've also found that using the safety squat bar and the cambered bar for my max effort squat/deadlift workouts have done wonders for my shoulder health. By using these bars, you are not putting your shoulders into a position of a static external rotation. This is what happens when you are squatting or doing good mornings with a straight bar. I have not done any max effort squatting or good mornings with a straight bar for almost a year and my shoulders and elbows have thanked me. If you have any questions on what exercises these bars are used for, visit the Exercise Index at www.EliteFTS.com.

For dynamic squat work, I've found that the eight-foot squat bar is the best solution. Because of the extra foot of the bar, one is able to take a wider grip on the bar. This is great for the larger lifter or someone who has very poor shoulder flexibility. Also, by taking a wider grip, this will eliminate biceps tendonitis, which plagues many lifters. If this does not work for you, you can always perform several weeks of dynamic squat work with the safety squat bar and/or the cambered squat bar to help take your shoulders out of the lift entirely. I don't know if you can do this throughout an entire squat cycle. The jury is still out on that. However, if you are not able to squat with a straight bar, at least you will be able to train effectively and optimally on this day. This is much better than doing nothing and going backward. Both of these bars can be purchased at www.EliteFTS.com.

I would also like to point out that I believe having proper sleep and a (somewhat) nutritional diet can help your pain. I have found that using essential fatty acids and getting enough rest has helped my body recover.

Dynamic Bench Pressing Mistakes

1. Training too heavy

This is probably the biggest mistake that lifters make. Most of it has to do with ego and gym machismo. Let your competition bench do the talking, and let the critics laugh during your workout. If your max effort work is not going well, you are training too heavy on dynamic day. This does not mean that you should immediately change your bar weight once you have had one or two bad max effort days. But if it becomes a trend, it may be time to back off. Another great way to see how fast a bar should move is to watch Westside Barbell's "Reactive Method" video. It has great footage of a dynamic bench workout, and you will have a better idea of the kind of bar speed that is needed.

2. Back comes off the bench

I hear this all the time. It's almost like people are bragging, "Look how explosive I am! I can lift myself off the bench." Unfortunately, this just means that your form is terrible. You should push yourself through the bench, not push the bar away from you. Your upper back and lats must be driven into the bench. You can't do this if you are constantly throwing yourself off of the bench.

3. Improper set up/use of chains and bands

The new wave of "geniuses" in the strength training world have finally embraced using chains. Unfortunately, they know nothing about lifting, why the chains are supposed to work, and the whole concept of accommodating resistance. If they did, they could easily see that the set up they sell is—and I am putting this kindly—retarded. There must be a total deload at the bottom portion of the lift. This can only be done if all or most of the 5/8-inch chain is on the floor. Simply attaching the large chain to the bar ensures that about five links (probably 5 lbs) is being deloaded.

When using bands, the set up must also be done correctly. There must be tension at the bottom of the lift, and mini-bands should be used. Again, see the exercise index for information and pictures on how to correctly set up the bands. Unlike with chains, you must account for the tension at the bottom of the lift when using bands. Remember, when using chains, there is a deload at the bottom of the lift. Thus, the bar weight should remain the same. With bands, you can save yourself some time and headaches by not measuring the tension but by performing some simple math and coaching. If you loop the mini-band correctly around one dumbbell, you can estimate that there is 30 lbs of tension at the bottom of the lift. Take your bar weight and subtract 30 lbs. This is the weight you should use for your sets. If the weight is moving too slowly, take some weight off of the bar. It's that simple.

Another big mistake that I see and read about is the use of bands and chains on

this day. Many times people want to use bands during every workout. This can be tough on the shoulders, chest, and elbows. There are many ways to use bands. Here are a few examples:

- three weeks bands/ three weeks chains
- three weeks bands/ three weeks straight weight (this means no chains or bands on the bar)
- one week bands/ one week chains or straight weight

There are numerous combinations. Those listed above are some of the most popular. You have to decide what is best for you.

4. Using time as your guideline

Too many times, people use the "three-second rule" as if it were written in stone. For those who don't know, Louie Simmons timed competition bench presses and they were all about three seconds or slightly above. Louie knew that explosive strength is best developed at about 60 percent of one's max. He timed his lifters at 60 percent and found out that they could perform three repetitions in about three seconds. This is why three repetitions are used on this day. Unfortunately, too many lifters want to rush their reps to fall within this timeframe. This leads to reps that are not locked out, have sloppy form, and are a complete waste of time. Remember, time, like the percentages, is a guideline. If I feel I am rushing through my reps, I remind myself to perform each rep independently. I also make sure to tell my training partners to remind me as I prepare to do my set as well as during my set. This always leads to better form and better speed.

5. Lack of understanding and importance

Of all the days in the training template, I feel that this day is the most overlooked. I have told the following story several times, but I feel that it is worth mentioning again. One Sunday, I was lifting with Dave in London, Ohio, and after our dynamic bench presses, we moved into lockouts. For the record, Dave's best

bench press is 605 lbs and mine is 575 lbs. We moved to high pin lockouts and started with 315 lbs. After my set, we moved to 365 lbs, and Dave started to psyche himself up. At first I thought he was joking, and I laughed at him. He stared back at me, grabbed the bar, and proceeded to grind out three reps. I think he ended up doing 455 lbs for two reps and burst every blood vessel in his face in the process. I moved on to doing 500 lbs for two easy sets of three reps. So how did he bench 605 lbs when he could barely lockout 450 lbs? It has to do with bar speed. Without that component, Dave would have never come close to bench pressing over 600 lbs.

Before you start each workout, whether it's a max effort workout, a dynamic workout, or an extra workout, ask yourself why you are doing it. Have a clear understanding of why you are doing what you are doing. If you can't answer the question, do some reading. You'd be surprised at how much better your training will become.

Dynamic vs. Repetition

Replacing dynamic bench with repetition work first came to light when Joe DeFranco wrote the article "Westside for Skinny Bastards." He had been using this template for years and with great success. The response that Joe has received from his athletes and athletes who have used a similar system, has been outstanding. What has also been outstanding is the barrage of emails and calls that Joe gets about the article. That always makes me laugh.

Anyway, because of my respect for Joe and the possibility of his involvement with the Italian Mafia, I'm going to reprint Joe's thoughts on the repetition method. Also, this makes my article longer and makes me look smarter.

Here is a direct quote from Joe's article:

Repetition upper body day. *I've substituted dynamic-effort days with repetition days for the upper body. This may be the biggest change from the traditional*

Westside template. I've also found it to be one of the keys to success for muscular growth in my younger athletes. Simply put, dynamic days just aren't that productive for weak, skinny bastards!

Remember that this modified program was put together for athletes who lack muscle mass. Well, the repetition method is an incredible way to elicit muscular hypertrophy. Compared to a smaller muscle, a bigger muscle has a better chance of becoming a stronger muscle. Packing on some muscle mass by means of the repetition method lays a great foundation for the more advanced dynamic days to come.

I even substitute dynamic days with repetition days for my NFL football players during the initial stages of the off-season. This is because repetition work is easier on the joints following a grueling season, and it's a great way to pack on any muscle that was lost during the season.

And here is a sample template from his article:

Repetition lift. *Work up to three sets of max reps, and rest 60 seconds between sets.*

Choose one of the following exercises:

- *Barbell bench press (max reps on 95 lbs, 135 lbs, 185 lbs, or 225 lbs)*
- *Regular push-ups, bar push-ups, or suspended chain push-ups*
- *Bodyweight dips*
- *Dumbbell benches on Swiss ball, flat bench, or incline bench*

What this all comes down to is this—instead of doing a dynamic effort workout, you are going to replace it with high rep work. Listed above are some of the exercises that Joe uses with his athletes. I'm going to give you a few more that I've used on myself and with other lifters. Plus, I am going to give you some parameters to help guide you in picking weights, sets, reps, and rest periods.

Barbell bench press

Workout #1: Pick a weight (approximately 50–60 percent of your max) and perform three sets of as many reps as possible.

- For your first set, you should go all out.
- For the second set, expect about a 20 percent drop off in terms of reps. (I got this from James Smith and Mark McLaughlin, and they got it from Supertraining.)
- On your third set, expect another 20 percent drop off from the second set.
- Rest for five minutes between sets.

Workout #2: Pick a weight (approximately 50–60 percent of your max) and perform three sets with the last set to failure.

- For your first set, you should get 15 reps.
- Your second set should be around 12–15 reps.
- For your third set, go all out and try to get 20–25 reps.
- The first two sets should not be done to failure so try to leave two reps in the tank.
- Rest for 34 minutes between sets.

Workout #3: Instead of doing eight sets of three reps, simply switch the set and rep parameters to three sets of eight reps.

- Use the same weight, chains, and bands set up that you would normally use.
- Rest for 2–3 minutes or whenever you feel ready.
- Use whatever grip you want.

Workout #4: The Old School—three sets of 10 reps with 60 percent of your max.

- Between sets, talk about your loose Z-suit (sorry Ed!)

Workout #5: The 5 x 5—there are many different interpretations of how to do a 5 x 5 program so do whatever you want.

- Straight loading: pick one weight and perform five sets of five reps at that weight.
- Pyramid: making even jumps in weight, progress to a heavy set of five reps.

Dumbbell bench press/incline press/floor press

Workout #1: Warm up and choose a dumbbell weight so that you can get approximately 15–20 reps.

- For the first set, all out!
- For the second set, all out!
- For the third set, all out!
- Rest for five minutes between sets.
- Note: Add up the total amount of reps that you did for that particular weight and try to beat that record next time you perform the exercise.

Workout #2: Do a 3–5 set of 10–15 reps.

- This is nothing fancy, and nothing is to failure.
- You can do straight sets or pyramid up.
- This is perfect for those who want to take a little break but still train.

2-board, 3-board, floor press, reverse bench press (any max effort movement)

Workout #1: You can do any of the barbell bench press workouts that were listed above with any max effort movement.

Workout #2: Take your latest max from one of these movements and perform 3–4 sets of 8–10 reps with 60 percent.

Others

Workout #1: Bodyweight dips

- Perform three sets to failure, resting 3–5 minutes between sets. Add up the total amount of reps done and try to beat it the next time.

Workout #2: Weighted dips

- Perform progressively heavier sets with a dip belt. Work up to a max set of 8–12 reps.

Workout #3: Bodyweight push-ups

- Use the same protocol as with bodyweight dips.

Workout #4: Weighted push-ups

- There are many ways to do this using chains, plates, bands, a weight vest, or a partner on your back. Just do some reps and figure out a way to track the loading!

Workout #5: Board press combo—try to use the same weight for all sets.

- Set 1: regular bench press for 15 reps
- Set 2: 2-board press for 15 reps
- Set 3: 3-board press for 15 reps

- Set 4: 4-board press for 15 reps
- Set 5: 5-board press for 15 reps

So now that we've brought together the dynamic bench press and the repetition method, let us hope that they can coexist. Here are some main points that I wish everyone takes home and puts in their hope chest.

- Cycle for three weeks. Do some kind of dynamic training for the bench press for three weeks and then switch to the repetition method for three weeks.
- Be careful with the repetition method and going to failure. Don't try to kill yourself and be sure to evaluate your recovery.
- Enjoy the pump.
- Be creative with both methods.
- Don't get caught up with rest periods. Just lift the weight.

Dynamic Effort Squat

On Fridays, we perform our dynamic squatting workout. This is done by using the box squat. The box height is such that when you squat onto it, you are at about parallel. The purpose of this day is to develop force and perfect form.

The Box Squat (5)

Technique is the most important factor in squatting big weights. If you're training with bad technique, it doesn't matter what supplemental exercises you use or how many sets or reps you perform. Your squat will only go so far and then get stuck. The box squat is the best way to train the squat. The form is the same as the regular squat but with the added bonus of being able to develop explosive strength. The box squat also places all the stress directly on all the squatting muscles. Every member of Westside Barbell performs box squats year-round and only performs the regular "free squat" in competition. We check each other's form on a constant basis. The things we look for are detailed below.

Now, you may have heard from some coaches, trainers, or athletes that the box squat is dangerous. When someone talks about the dangers of box squatting, it's apparent that they simply don't know how to perform the lift correctly. If you're trying to bounce off the box or you're using more weight than you can handle, there are definitely dangers to the spine. However, when performed correctly, box squats are safe and extremely effective.

Advantages of Box Squatting

1. Training on a box will allow you to sit back on to the box to a point where your shins are past perpendicular to the floor. This places all the stress on the squatting muscles (hips, glutes, lower back, and hamstrings). When you can increase the stress on these muscles and lower the stress on the quads, you'll see your squat poundage move up.
2. Restoration is another major advantage of box squatting. You can train more often on a box in comparison to free squatting. According to Louie Simmons, the original members of Westside Barbell in Culver City, California, used to perform box squats three times a week. Currently, at Westside, we train the box squat every Friday for our dynamic workout and occasionally on Monday's maximal effort workouts. If you're new to box squats, I suggest you do them once per week.
3. When performing box squats, you never have to guess how low you're squatting. It'll always be the same. Think about it. When most people start adding weight to the bar, their squats get higher and higher. This is evident in almost any gym. Their form looks good with the lighter weights, but they begin quarter squatting once more weight is added to the bar. With box squats, you'll always go low enough.

4. The last reason to box squat is to reinforce good squat technique. Many times the hamstrings aren't developed yet in the intermediate or beginner squatter. "Sitting back" into a squat is impossible without falling over backward. Teaching these athletes how to free squat properly would take months. The squat wouldn't look right until the hamstrings and glute strength increased. Why wait two or three months? Put them on the box and you'll have them squatting properly within five minutes. Within one month, the hamstrings will begin to kick in because of the added stress of sitting back on the box.

Proper Box Squatting Technique

Phase I: The first thing to check for is proper body position at the beginning of the lift. Keep in mind you must keep the entire body tight. If any body part is held loose, it will become your weak link and your form will break down. Before setting up under the bar, grasp the barbell and duck under it with your feet about shoulder width apart or slightly wider. While under the bar, start to really tighten up. Grasp the bar with your hands, and start to squeeze it as if you were trying to bend the bar across your back. Next, pull your shoulder blades together as tight as possible while pulling your elbows forward. This is to keep the upper back locked in this position during the lift. If your elbows are flaring out, this will cause the barbell to travel forward at some point during the lift. The key to squatting big weights is to keep the barbell path traveling in the shortest line as possible. Any deviation from this line will cause a missed lift.

Now that your upper back is tight, tighten your midsection. First, expand your abdomen as much as possible. When you pull air into your body, it should be into the diaphragm, not the chest. Expand your belly and push it out against your belt. This will stabilize and support the lower back, not elongate the spine. If you're having a hard time figuring this out, wear your weight belt one notch looser and push into it with your belly so that it becomes tight. Pushing your belly out goes against what many believe because they feel training this way will cause injuries to the lower back.

The circumference of the waist line is another aspect to keep in mind. If I suck



my belly in, my waist line measures 42 inches. If I pull air into my belly and push it out, it measures 48 inches. The wider the base, the stronger the lifter. This is why lifters with a bigger waist squat more. The pyramids in Egypt are also built with a wide base, and they

have been standing for centuries. As the car commercials used to say, wider is better.

Many lifters don't know how to use their core to set up a squat. Some do nothing at all while others try to suck in their stomachs. This is probably fine for those who strive to squat 400 lbs, but if you're looking to squat maximal weights in the 700–900-lb range, you'd better learn how to use your core. All the power of the lower body is transferred through your core to the barbell. If your core isn't tight, the power will "get lost" and never travel to the bar.

Phase II: Now that you have your upper back and belly tight, arch the bar out of the rack. When you take a barbell out of the rack, it should never hit the front supports. This shifts the weight to the toes and will cause you to lose your tightness (as well as set the bar in a position to use your quads instead of your hips and hamstrings).

Arch the bar out and then push with your legs to get the bar off the rack. Keep the arch. Step back with one leg and then the other. You want to maintain your tightness and set your stance as wide as possible. I believe in using a wide stance when squatting because it shortens the distance that the bar will have to travel and places the stress more on the glutes, hips, hamstrings, and back. I've figured out over time that the quads aren't that important for squatting maximal weights. Instead, it's the hips, back, and hamstrings. If your quads were really doing all the work, you'd be able to squat as much as you can leg press. So, set up in a wide stance.

From this position, pull all the air back into your belly and try to make your back and abs tighter than before. You should also be forcing your knees out to the sides. You'll know you're doing this right if your hips feel tight. This will place the stress on the hips as well as increase the leverage in the bottom of the squat. The closer you can keep your knee, ankle, shoulder, and hip joints in a straight line, the greater the mechanical advantage. This is why you can quarter squat much more than you can full squat.

You also want to be pushing *out* on the sides of your shoes. Never push down. Act as if you're trying to spread the floor apart. This is to further activate the hips. By the way, the best shoes to wear while squatting are Converse Chuck Taylor All Stars. They're built with a flat bottom and strong canvas sides. Most other tennis shoes will cause your foot to move around too much or you'll push out over the side of the shoe.

Your butt should also be sticking out with your back arched as hard as possible. Head position is vital to keeping the barbell in the proper path for squatting. You must drive your head into the bar. This doesn't mean look up. You should actually be looking forward. If you're looking down, you're more likely to fall forward about halfway up and miss the lift. The act of pushing your head back into the neck should be the same action as if you were to lie on the floor and push your head against the ground. As for toe position, lighter guys should point their toes straight ahead. Heavier guys, often because of a lack of flexibility, may want to point their toes out slightly. Now, you're ready to begin the squat.

Phase III: To start the squat, your hips should begin the motion, not your knees. When your knees bend first, the load is shifted downward. You need the load to go backward. Remember, you want the bar to travel in a straight line. Keep pushing the hips back as you squat down. The key is to "sit back." Most people sit down on a toilet with better form than they squat because they have to sit back. As you sit back, you want to feel tension in the hamstrings. Act like they're springs that you're trying to compact before they rebound back. This will cause a great stretch reflex out of the bottom of the squat. An explosive start is another key to squatting maximal weights.

Keep sitting back until you sit on the box. The box should be one inch lower than parallel for most people, although I sometimes recommend that less experienced lifters find a box that puts them at one inch above parallel. When selecting a box, most people need one about 12–14 inches high. Also, pick one that's big enough to fit your butt. Some people use a flat bench for box squats. I've found that these are seldom set at the proper height and may be too narrow for some.

As far as the definition of "parallel," it's defined as when the crease of the hip is in line with the top of the knee. Remember, most people have very poor hamstring and hip strength to squat properly in the first place. If they tried to squat without the box, they'd fall over backward. The box is the best way to teach proper squat

form while bringing up weak points. The box squat also breaks the eccentric/concentric chain. This is one of the best ways to build explosive strength. The box squat also causes you to squat from a static contraction to a dynamic concentric contraction, which is another very effective way to build explosive strength.

When you reach the box, sit down and relax the hip flexors while keeping every other muscle tight. Don't fall down on the box and try to bounce off of it. Sit back with the same speed that you squat. Pause on the box for a split second and explode off of it. Don't bounce! Your knees must still be pushed out and your abs, upper back, and arms should remain tight while your back stays arched. When you're on the box, it's important to have the shins perpendicular to the floor, or better yet, past perpendicular. This places all of the tension on the squatting muscles.



Phase IV: After you pause on the box, explode off by first driving the head and upper back into the bar and then drive with the hips. When you begin the squat (during the eccentric phase), the hips move first and then the head. You should do the

opposite of that (the concentric phase) on the way up by involving the head first and then the glutes. It only makes sense to try to lift the bar first. If you don't drive with the upper back first, the bar will begin to move forward. If the bar moves forward before you drive with the hips, you'll miss the weight and fall forward.

As you're coming up, you still need to maintain all tightness by driving your back and head into the bar, pushing out on your knees and feet, pulling the elbows forward, keeping the shoulder blades together, and holding your air.

Falling Forward in the Squat

One of the most common mistakes when squatting is falling forward. You see it at the gym and at meets. It happens with novice lifters and advanced lifters.

The first thing that you have to do is recognize that you have a problem. You have to understand the problem and how the problem is affecting your squat. When you are dealing with sticking points you have to remember they can be:

- Technical
- Mental
- Physical

In many cases, there is a little bit of all three.

For example, by having bad technique you incorporate more use out of one muscle group or firing pattern than what is needed. This causes over development in one area and under development in others. By having weak abs you may tend to fall into the squat too much as you sit back. If this happens every time you squat you will begin to develop a mental process of falling into the squat when you sit back. Regardless of what strength training changes you make this process will still be established. Finally you may have perfect technique until 90% gets on the bar and then all hell breaks loose.

What I am trying to say is you need to go after this from more than one angle.

Mental

Get your head out of the toilet. If you are constantly worrying about your sticking point and expecting it to be there, it always will. This happens to most lifters at

one time or another. You get the heavy weight on your back and begin to sit down and say to yourself “Here I go again, I am about to drop forward”. How do I know this? Because many people will say, “Once I get to about 90% of my max, I begin to fall forward. You have already established this is going to happen. So, get this out of your head and find a way to have success with weights over 90% where this will not happen. These things I am now recommending has nothing to do with the physical aspect of training but getting your head right. You can try visualization, self-talk and other modes of building your confidence. I always hear the term, “It’s all mental.” I find this statement to be nauseating and over done, but there is some truth to it. If you believe it, bad or good, it will usually happen. The problem is that you have to really believe it.

If you are like any other lifter I know, getting into a peak state is not an issue. It is keeping the state when problems happen under the bar. Please remember that a peak state doesn’t always mean that you are a mad man. You have to be focused.

Try heavy high box squats with weight above 90%. Take the box up a few inches. Use gear if you need. Find a way to squat over 90% and not fall forward. You can also try high pin squats and reverse band squats. You are going to have to find tricks to get your confidence up. For example, some people have problems benching 405. Usually it’s because it’s 4 45lb plates per side. It can be intimidating. But if they use 3 45lb plates and make up the difference with 25’s and 10’s, this can be overcome.

Physical

For this portion, I am going to ask you to think. Think about your training. Think about what you do and what you don’t do. If you think hard enough you will see you know exactly what to do.

1. You may not be able to hold the static arch long enough to get down – Take a safety squat bar and bend over as you would a good morning. At the half way

point hold the position and arch you back and hard as you can. Hold for 2-3 second and relax, then arch again. This would be done at the end of your workout.

2. You abs are not strong enough to support your torso when you hips break – Add in heavy ab work. Namely, heavy leg raises and side bends. I would highly advise you to train your abs in this manner at least twice/week.

3. Your upper back is rounding. This has a flow effect. Your upper back will round and then your lower back will follow. Once again the safety squat bar movement above will help with this as well as face pulls and anything else that tending to pull your upper back tight in a contracted position.

4. Your lower back is just weak! Add more weight to all your accessory work.

5. Your elbows are not under the bar. If your elbows are pointed backwards (towards your butt) then you are sure to fall forward. Simply attempt to bring your elbows forward and under the bar. There is no exercise that can help correct this; just make sure you have verbal cues.

Technical

See the above section for the proper technique.

Remember that falling forward in the squat is not a unique happening. A lot of lifters do it. And it has been overcome. I have given you many ways to approach your problem and solve. Now you have to do the work.

Box Squat Cycles

Squatting with Straight Weight and Chains

Beginner

Week 1: 63% for 10 sets of 2 reps

Week 2: 65% for 10 sets of 2 reps

Week 3: 68% for 10 sets of 2 reps

The beginner has a couple more sets than the advanced and intermediate lifter. This is to improve form. The main goal for the beginner is to have perfect form so in many cases 10 sets will not be enough. The beginner will have to perform as high as 12 sets. After week three, return to week one and repeat the cycle.



Intermediate

Week 1: 60% for 8 sets of 2 reps

Week 2: 63% for 8 sets of 2 reps

Week 3: 65% for 8 sets of 2 reps

Advanced

Week 1: 55% for 8 sets of 2 reps

Week 2: 58% for 8 sets of 2 reps

Week 3: 60% for 8 sets of 2 reps

Remember, when using chains, the percentages are the same as with straight weight because of the total deload of the chains at the bottom of the lift.

Recommended Chains for Squatting

Squat max 200–500 lbs = two 5/8-inch chains/side

Squat max 500–800 lbs = three 5/8-inch chains/side

Squat max 800 + lbs = four 5/8-inch chains side

The chains are added on to the weight of the barbell. Make sure to warm up with the chains on the bar first. Then, add the weights. When the barbell is in the rack,

4–5 links of chain should be resting on the floor. At no point in time should all of the chain be off the floor during the squat.

Box Squatting With Bands

These cycles are only for the intermediate and advanced lifters. The beginners are better off sticking with straight weight or chains. If the beginner wants to use bands with his squat, I suggest keeping the tension minimal and reducing the training loads by 10 percent. The bands are not added to the percentage.

Regular training phase (or strength-speed)

Week 1: 47% (RG band), 8 sets of 2

Week 2: 51% (RG band), 8 sets of 2

Week 3: 53% (RG band), 8 sets of 2

The majority of lifters stick with the regular training phase. This is simply repeated every three weeks. Make sure that you work up to heavier weights every couple of weeks to test your form and speed. This should only be done when you feel strong, and it is not done every week.

Circa-maximal phase

Week 1: 47% (CM band), 5 sets of 2

Week 2: 51% (CM band), 5 sets of 2

Week 3: 53% (CM band), 5 sets of 2

Week 4: 47% (CM band), 5 sets of 2

The circa-maximal phase is designed for pre-contest or pre-max training. This phase, along with the following deloading phase, has been responsible for more crushed personal records by a huge margin than any other training phase I've seen, including at least ten, 900-lb squats. This phase is recommended for the experienced squatter only. ***Do not attempt a circa-max phase if you are not an Elite level powerlifter!***

Deload phase

Week 1: 53% (RG band), 5 sets of 2

Week 2: 47% (RG band), 5 sets of 2

Week 3: Meet or test date

This deloading phase is designed to bring the speed back into the training before the max attempt or competition. This phase is a must after the circa-maximal phase. Some have done very well with a two-week deload while others only like to do one week. If your choice is a one-week deload, drop the first week of the phase.

Recommended Bands for Squat Training Phases

Squat, 300–500 lbs

RG band: light

CM band: average or strong

Squat, 501–750 lbs

RG band: average

CM band: strong/light

Squat, 751–1000 lbs

RG band: strong

CM band: strong/average

Example Squat Cycles

The following cycle is 12 weeks long and is recommended for the intermediate to advanced lifter. Notice that week seven through week nine is a circa-maximal phase. This is followed by a two-week deload.

1. 8 X 2 at 47 % + average band
2. 8 X 2 at 50% + average band
3. 8 X 2 at 53% + average band

4. 8 x 2 at 47 % + strong band
5. 8 X 2 at 50% + strong band
6. 8 X 2 at 53% + strong band
7. 6 X 2 at 47 % + strong/ Light band
8. 6 X 2 at 50% + strong/Light band
9. 6 X 2 at 53% + strong/Light band
10. 6 X 2 at 50% + strong band
11. 6 X 2 at 47% + average band
12. Test day

The following is a squat cycle for the beginner lifter.

1. 8 X 2 at 47 % + light band
2. 8 X 2 at 50% + light band
3. 8 X 2 at 53% + light band
4. 8 X 2 at 47 % + average band
5. 8 X 2 at 50% + average band
6. 8 X 2 at 53% + average band
7. 6 X 2 at 47 % + strong band
8. 6 X 2 at 50% + strong band
9. 6 X 2 at 53% + strong band
10. 6 X 2 at 50% + average band
11. 6 X 2 at 47% + light band
12. Test day

If the strong band is too much, simply use the average band. If you feel like your speed is suffering and the workout is turning into a max effort, you must reduce the band tension, not the bar weight.

The next squat cycle is an extreme variation and is only recommended for Elite level lifters. Do not attempt this unless you fall into this category.

1. 8 X 2 at 40% + strong band
2. 8 X 2 at 43% + strong band
3. 8 X 2 at 46% + strong band
4. 6 X 2 at 40% + strong/light band
5. 6 X 2 at 40% + strong band
6. 6 X 2 at 43% + strong/light band
7. 6 X 2 at 40% + strong band
8. 6 X 2 at 46% + strong/light band
9. 6 X 2 at 40% + strong band
10. 5 X 2 at 40% + strong/average band
11. 5 X 2 at 40% + strong band
12. 5 X 2 at 43% + strong/average band
13. 5 X 2 at 40% + strong band
14. 5 X 2 at 46% + strong/average band
15. 5 X 2 at 40% + strong band
16. Test/meet

Notice that there is a download week every other week. This is done to let the body recover from the large amount of band tension.

Several things are different with the next squat cycle. First, the circa-maximal phase is planned several weeks before the competition. This allows the shoulders and elbows to recover and lets the body heal. This is crucial when training for the bench press. Second, there is a download week every fifth week. This is done so that the body and mind can recover from the heavy training. For a 900-lb squatter, 405 lbs with no bands or chains is very easy, both mentally and physically. Plus, by adding in straight weight, the lifter gets used to not being "grounded" by the bands. The "grounding" effect is something that we have noticed with many lifters and is a problem when going to meets. When using heavy band tension, the lifter is being driven into the ground by the bands and

the weight is being distributed from the floor to the shoulders. When squatting at a meet (with no bands), the weight is all on the shoulders. Many lifters feel unstable when setting up. Also, when using bands, the bar does not whip like it would when taking a max attempt.

These weeks are a great way to get ready for a meet. That is why the last two weeks do not use any band tension. Before starting this training cycle, some preparatory work must be done. This is because you are jumping right into the heavy band phase, and your body must be conditioned for it. I recommend that your low back, abdominals, and hamstrings are conditioned and your GPP is up to par.

The following squat cycle is a sample cycle for a 900-lb squatter. This is for advanced lifters only and can't be done year-round.

Heavy band phase

Week 1: 3-5 X 2 at 275 + two strong bands/side

Week 2: 3-5 X 2 at 300 + two strong bands/side

Week 3: 3-5 X 2 at 325 + two strong bands/side

Week 4: 3-5 X 2 at 275 + two strong bands/side

Week 5: 6 X 2 at 405 (straight weight)

Circa-maximal phase

Week 6: 5 X 2 at 405 + average band/strong band

Week 7: 5 X 2 at 435 + average band/strong band

Week 8: 5 X 2 at 465 + average band/strong band

Week 9: 5 X 2 at 405 + average band/strong band

Week 10: 5 X 2 at 405 (straight weight)

Regular band phase

Week 11: 5 X 2 at 465 + blue band

Week 12: 5 X 2 at 435 + blue band

Week 13: 5 X 2 at 405 + blue band

Week 14: 5 X 2 at 405 (straight weight)

Week 15: 5 X 2 at 405 (straight weight)

Week 16: Meet

Ten Things to Increase Your Squat (4)

Secret #1: Get your stance out wide!

If you squat with a close stance, move your feet out. If you think you squat wide already, move your feet further out! We teach everyone at Westside to squat wide. We don't believe in a close-stance squatter. When you squat wide, you create better leverages for the squat. The distance between your knee and hip is greater with a close stance, thus a longer and more difficult squat. By using a wide squat, you cut this distance back as well as place the emphasis on the glutes, hamstrings, and lower back. These are the muscles that squat big weights!

While squatting wide, try to keep your toes straight ahead or slightly turned out. This will create a tremendous amount of tension in the hips and glutes and make it hard to squat down. This tension will create a great stretch reflex out of the bottom of the squat. This is vital to the development of barbell speed.

Secret #2: Get a tight arch!

You must learn to develop the strength to keep a tight arch in the lower back. This arch must be kept throughout the entire movement. The moment you begin to lose this arch, the bar will begin to drift forward and out of the natural barbell path. When the bar starts to drift toward the toes, you'll lose the squat and end up stapled to the floor. The bar must stay close to the hip joint and away from the toes. You must also keep the shoulder blades pulled together with your elbows

pulled forward. This will create the much needed upper back tightness to keep the barbell in proper position. Remember, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line so you must keep the barbell in the proper path. When your elbows turn out toward the back, the bar will drift forward again and end up stapling you to the floor as well as ripping your head off. This is one common mistake I see in all of my seminars. When I ask attendees who taught them how to squat with their elbows back, nine out of ten times they reply, "My coach." This is another example of those who think they know how to squat *not knowing how to squat!*

Secret #3: Spread the floor!

Spread the floor with your feet as you squat. Remember the wide stance? Well, you must also force your knees out hard during the entire motion and push out on the sides of your shoes while you squat. This keeps the tension in the hips where it should be. This is also why most squat shoes, tennis shoes, and cross trainers *suck* for squatting. The best shoes for squatting are Converse Chuck Taylor All Stars. The soles are flat, and the side construction is rugged enough to push out against without a blowout or rolling over the sole.

Secret #4: Drive your head into the bar!

This doesn't mean look up toward the sky like your old high school coach told you. You must look straight ahead and drive your head back into the traps. Your body will always follow the head so make sure your head is driving back into the bar. On a side note, what's the last thing to move when you squat? Your head. So what should be the first thing to move when coming out of the hole? You got it. Your head. This only makes perfect sense. You have to think about driving your back and head into the bar first during the ascent. We tell our lifters that the chest and head should always be first. You're trying to raise the bar so move it first! If the quads flex first, the hips will rise before the bar and force the barbell forward. Here's another coaching tool—watch the lifter's quads. If they flex first, get him to sit back more and force his knees out. The glutes should flex first.

Secret #5: The hips should move before the knees!

If your knees are the first to move while beginning a squat, your path is going to be *straight down*. As discussed before, the tension must be on the glutes, hips, and hamstrings. These are the muscles that squat big weights, not the quads. Think about this. Why can't a lifter with a 400-lb deep Olympic squat perform a 700-lb power squat? A powerlifter who can squat 700 lbs can do an easy 400-lb Olympic squat. This is because the Olympic squatter doesn't have the back, glutes, or hamstring to support the 700 lbs! What does that tell you about the quads and squatting big weights? (Hint: They just aren't that important!)

Secret #6: Get on the box!

The greatest secret to our success at Westside is the use of the box squat. We don't do any full squatting at all, except for in competition. We haven't had any lifters over the past 15 years have any lower back or knee injuries either. The only side effects we've seen with box squatting are big squats! The key is to do them properly. The benefits of the box are many. First, you can sit back further than you can without it. This places more stress on the posterior chain muscles. Second, you always know how low you're going. If you want to squat two inches below parallel, set your box up at that height. This way your body will always sit as low as it's conditioned. If you want to squat one inch high, set the box higher. We suggest one inch below parallel because this is what's needed to pass in a powerlifting competition. Third, squatting on a box breaks the eccentric/concentric chain. This is one of the best ways to develop explosive strength. Fourth, the box is great for teaching proper squatting technique. Most athletes and lifters have very poor squat technique because of bad coaching, muscle imbalances, and poor flexibility. The box can be a great aid to teaching the proper way to sit back into a squat. I'll be the first to tell you that the competitive power squat isn't an easy thing to master. It takes many years of work, and technique is very important. The stronger you get, the more you need better technique. One inch in the wrong direction and you'll miss the lift.

Secret #7: Learn to use your belly!

I've caught more shit over this than any other aspect of training. But the truth is that every big squatter I know has learned how to use his abdominals while squatting. You must learn how to breathe into your belly. You want to pull as much air as you can into your belly and then flex and force your abdominals *out*. Walk over to a mirror. Take a look at your shoulders and take a deep breath. Did they rise? If they did, you're pulling all the air into your chest, not your belly. You need to learn how to breathe into your belly. This is how we teach everyone to squat. For the squat, we advise the use of a weight belt worn one notch looser than usual. This is to teach you to pull air into your belly and then push out into the belt. The belt acts as a great training aid to push against. On a side note, we use the same technique for all of our max effort work, but we don't use the belt in that situation.

This is one aspect of our training that has been misunderstood for too long. We use the belt to teach others how to use the abdominals for the squat, bench, and deadlift. We do *not* advocate its use for anything else unless the lifter feels it's needed. Many in the gym have worked up to 600- and 700-lb good mornings without any adverse effects and have been doing them this way for over ten years. This brings me to the next point. We've been told that breathing and using the abdominals in this way will lead to back injuries. Louie Simmons has been coaching this for the past twenty years at Westside and hasn't had any lifters with these problems. Learning to use the belly has made a profound difference in all of our squats, especially for those who've never tried it. I've seen squats increase by 25–50 lbs using this aspect alone. Now that's what squatting big is all about. Filling your belly with air will also create a larger torso and give you a bigger base of support from which to drive. Ever wonder why those with bigger waists squat so much? Think about it. We want as much tightness and support as we can get from the gross muscles of the spinal erectors, abdominals, and obliques.

Secret #8: Train for speed!

If you were to jump up on a table, how high would you get if you jumped slowly? How much force would you develop? Not much, huh? So why in the world would you want to train to be slow? Why not train to be faster? The faster you are, the greater the chance you'll have of blasting through your sticking point. This is what the dynamic training day is all about. If you're a 500-lb squatter and are training with 250 lbs, you must apply 500 lbs of force to the bar during the lift. Think *blast!* Only take 45–60 seconds rest between sets and use compensatory acceleration when performing all of your reps. That means you should really try to explode the weight up.

Secret #9: Train for chaos!

Chaos training is a system of training that will make or break your squat. A cardinal sin of squatting is falling forward during the lift or dumping the bar over your head. When this happens, it means only one thing—you haven't done the necessary work to squat big. When a barbell falls forward, it's known as a chaotic event. You have to train to avoid these situations. This is why we have a max effort day. On this day, you'll perform a 1RM on some type of low box squat, deadlift, or good morning. Use some type of good morning movement for seven out of ten workouts or 70 percent of all max effort days for the lower body. The low box squat should be used 20 percent of the time and the deadlift 10 percent of the time. This comes out to about once a week.

The reason for so many good mornings is two-fold. First, we've found this type of movement to be the absolute best for the development of the squat and deadlift. Second, remember the cardinal sin of falling over? Well, that's exactly what happens with a good morning. If your good morning is strong enough, you'll be able to keep the arch and not fall forward. If you do begin to fall forward, you'll be able to arch the bar back into position without even thinking about it. You'll have

the strength, and it'll be automatic. We've found that a minimum good morning of 60 percent of your max squat to be a very important element of squatting big.

Secret #10: Build the glutes and hamstrings!

As I've stated before, the quads aren't an important element of a big squat. You have to have very strong hamstrings and glutes. You must prioritize your hamstrings and hit them at least twice a week. The best movements we've found for training the hamstrings are glute ham raises, band leg curls, reverse hyperextensions, pull-throughs, and high repetition partial deadlifts. We've found that two heavy hamstring workouts a week are fine for most lifters, but many times, we've prescribed up to six hamstring training sessions a week to bring them up to where they should be. This is all based on the situation, exercises, and lifter.

Using Specialty Bars on Dynamic Effort Squat Day

The safety squat (SS) bar and the cambered squat (CS) bar are used for several reasons on dynamic effort day. One of the main reasons is to take the stress off of our shoulders and elbows. The SS bar allows you to keep your hands completely off the bar. The CS bar allows you to put your hands at about waist level. This helps keep the stress off of your shoulders and allows for better bench pressing during the week. Another reason why we do this is because it is something different and challenging. The camber of the SS bar is always in the process of trying to pull you forward. Many people miss squats because they fall forward so we've found this bar to be the perfect anecdote to this problem. The CS bar is one of the toughest bars to squat with. It is very unstable and forces you to stay tight. This is especially true when coming off the box. This is another area that lifters have a problem with and this bar addresses that issue. We are always looking to innovate our training and using these specialty bars may be just the thing to raise our totals.

Because we are using different bars during dynamic effort training, the idea of “dynamic effort” remains the same. We are still trying to push with force and become more explosive. So the intent of the day remains the same. We are just using a different bar to achieve those means.

If you want to incorporate these bars into your training, experiment with them first when you have plenty of time before a meet. You do not want to introduce a new stimulus to your training when you are several weeks out from a contest. This will allow you to assess your training and how the different bars affect your recovery and progress.

In order to select the proper weight, use about 60 percent of your best max effort with the appropriate bar. For example, if you perform your dynamic effort squatting on a 14-inch box with 600 lbs, use the SS bar on that same box with 365 lbs. Perform ten sets of two reps at this weight and increase the weight 3–5 percent for two more weeks. At the end of this three-week cycle, drop back down to the original weight. If you feel that the original weight is too heavy, drop 3–5 percent and use that weight for your second week. When using the SS bar, we rarely use bands and will occasionally use chains. If you choose to use chains, the bar weight will remain the same because the chains have a complete deload at the bottom of the lift. When using this bar, we’ve found that using a medium stance works best. Some have been experimenting with alternating their foot position from a close, medium, and wide stance. Experiment for yourself and see what works for you.

With the CS bar, use the same protocol as above. We have used bands when using this bar, but we have set the bands up differently than with a straight bar. We have been choking the bands under the Monolift (this has not changed), but instead of placing the bands around the bar, we put them over the 45-lb plates. Again, start with about 60 percent of your best cambered box squat. We have been using a wide stance with this bar. If you choose to use bands, I highly

recommend that you use a light (purple) band when starting and progress as you see fit.



We are not sure if one can use these bars leading up to a meet. Everyone who has used these bars in the gym has gone into a meet using a straight bar for their training. Unless you have a shoulder problem that prohibits you from using a

straight bar (except at meets), I highly recommend that you use a straight bar for the last 6–8 weeks prior to a meet.

Dynamic Effort Deadlifting

This is pretty simple. All of our dynamic effort work on the deadlift is done immediately after our dynamic effort squatting session. We generally perform 6–10 sets of one repetition with 45 seconds rest between sets. We will generally use 50–60 percent of our competition max. We will also use the jump stretch sumo platform with mini-bands. The mini-bands are quadrupled around the bar and provide resistance from the beginning of the lift. The tension at the top is unbelievable. When performing deadlifts against bands, the bar weight will have to be lower. When determining what weight to use, start with a light weight and work up until you feel that the bar speed slows down. We are not sure of the tension that the bands provide at the top and the bottom. Remember, the purpose is to pull fast and with good form. Most of us will vary our stance from sumo to conventional from set to set. This is not set in stone either. If you need

more technique work with a certain stance, use that stance when performing speed work on the deadlift.

Deadlift Technique (1)

1. Round the shoulders: Stand in a deadlift stance and pull your shoulder blades together. Take a look at where your fingertips are. Now, if you let your shoulders relax and even round forward a little, you'll see that your fingertips are much lower. This is why we teach a rounding of the upper back. First, the bar has to travel a shorter distance. Second, there's less stress on the shoulder region. It'll also help to keep your shoulder blades behind the bar. You'll read more on this later.

2. Arch the low back: Not arching the back happens because of a weak lower back or a bad starting position. While keeping your shoulders rounded, keep your lower back arched. This will keep the shin straight and the shoulders behind the bar. It will keep your body in the proper position to pull big while keeping the back under minimal stress.

If you pull with a rounded back, the bar is going to drift forward away from the legs, thus putting you back into a very difficult position from which to recover. When the bar drifts forward, the weight of it will begin to work against your leverages and cause you to have a sticking point just below the knees or mid-shin level. When you pull, you can either arch your back in the beginning standing position before you crouch down to pull or once you grab the bar. Either way, it's important to keep the lower back arched and tight.

There are many ways to strengthen the lower back for this. Good mornings, reverse hyperextensions, and arched back good mornings are a few. You can also use a band around your traps and feet for simulated good mornings. With this technique, you only use the bands and train for higher reps (in the 20–30 rep range) for local muscular endurance.

3. Fill your belly with air: As with most exercises, you must learn how to breathe. Stand in front of a mirror and take a deep breath. Do your shoulders rise? If so, you need to learn how to breathe. Learn to pull your air into your diaphragm. In other words, use your belly! Pull as much air into your belly as possible, and then when you think you have all you can get, pull more. The deadlift isn't started by driving your feet into the floor. It's started by driving your belly into your belt and hip flexors.

Try and hold your air as long as possible, but this can only last for a few seconds while under strain because you'll pass out. So for a long pull, you're going to have to breathe or you'll hit the floor and people will stare. While there are several people out there who may think this is a cool thing, I disagree. It's much cooler to make the lift!

When you reach the point where you begin to really have to fight with the weight, let out small bursts of air. Don't let it all out at one time or you'll lose torso tightness, which will cause the bar to drop down. By letting out small bursts, you can keep your tightness, continue to pull, and lockout the weight.

4. Pull the bar back: The deadlift is all about leverage and positioning. Visualize a teeter-totter. What happens when the weight on one end is coming down? The other end goes up. So if your body is falling backward, what happens to the bar? It goes up! If your weight is falling forward, the bar will want to stay down. If you weigh 250 lbs and can get your body weight to work for you, it would be like taking 250 lbs off the bar. For many natural deadlifters, this is a very instinctive action. For others, it has to be trained.

Proper positioning is important here. If you're standing too close to the bar, it'll have to come over the knee before you can pull back, thus going forward before going backward. If your shoulders are in front of the bar at the start of the pull,

the bar will want to go forward, not backward. If your back isn't arched, the bar will also want to drift forward.

For some lifters, not being able to pull back can be a muscular thing. Many lifters tend to end up with the weight on the front of the feet instead of on the heels. This is a function of the quads trying to overpower the glutes and hamstrings, or the glutes and hamstrings not being able to finish the weight and shifting to the quads to complete the lift. What will happen many times is you'll begin shaking or miss the weight. To fix this problem, you need to add in more glute ham raises, pull-throughs, and reverse hyperextensions.

5. Don't put the bar against your shins: Many times the taller, thinner lifters are the best pullers, and they start with the bar very close to their shins. However, if you look at them from the side, they still have their shoulders behind the bar when they pull. This is just not possible to achieve with a thicker lifter.

If a thicker lifter with a large amount of body mass—whether it's muscle or fat—were to line the bar up with his shins, he would have an impossible time getting the shoulders behind the bar. Remember, you need to pull the bar back toward you, not out and away from you. I believe many lifters look to those who have great deadlifts to see how they pull and then they try to do the same themselves. What they need to do is look to those who are built the same way that they are and have great deadlifts and follow their lead.

6. Train with singles, not multiple reps: The next time you see someone doing multiple reps on the deadlift, take note of the form of each rep. The later reps will look nothing like the first rep. In competition, you only have to pull once so you need to learn how to develop what's known as starting strength for the deadlift. This is the strength needed to get the bar off the floor without an eccentric (negative) action before the start.

In other words, don't lower the bar first and then lift the weight as you do with the squat and bench press. When you train with multiple reps, you're beginning to develop reversal strength, which isn't needed with the deadlift.

These two reasons are enough to keep the deadlift training to singles. If you're using multiple reps with the deadlift, stand up in between each rep and restart the lift. This way you'll be teaching the proper form and developing the right kind of strength.

7. Keep your shoulders behind the bar: This is possibly the most important thing next to hip position in the execution of the deadlift. Your shoulders must start and stay behind the barbell when you pull deadlifts! This will keep the barbell traveling in the right direction and keep your weight going backward. The deadlift isn't an Olympic lift and shouldn't be started like one.

8. Keep your head up: Your body will always follow your head. If you're looking down, the bar is going to want to travel forward. At the same time, you don't want to look at the ceiling. Focus on an area that keeps your head in a straight up and back position with the eyes focusing on an upper area of the wall.

9. Don't start with your hips too low: Too many times, lifters try to squat the weight up rather than pull it. Think back to the number of times you've seen a big deadlift and thought how much more the lifter could have pulled if he had done a stiff-legged deadlift.

Look at your hip position at the start of the lift when you pull and watch how much your hips move up before the weight begins to break the floor. This is wasted movement and does nothing except wear you out before the pull. The closer you can keep your hips to the bar when you pull, the better the leverages will be.

Once again, next time you see a great deadlifter, stand off to the side and watch how close his hips stay to the bar throughout the pull. If you're putting your ass to

the floor before you pull, your hips are about a mile from the bar. You're setting yourself up for disaster when the lever arm is this long. This is also the second reason why lifters can't get the bar off the floor (the first reason is very simple—the bar is too heavy).

You need to find the perfect spot where your hips are close to the bar, your shoulders are behind the bar, your lower back is arched, your upper back is rounded, your belly is full of air, and you can pull toward your body. No one ever said it would be easy. But then again, what is?

Summary of Dynamic Squat/Deadlift

- Perform 8–10 sets of two repetitions.
- Train with a wide stance.
- Use three-week waves.
- Take 60 seconds rest between sets.
- Speed and technique are more important than percentages.
- Singles are used when training the deadlift.

Dynamic Squat/ Deadlift FAQ

Question: Are the percentages listed set in stone?

Answer: No. The percentages provided are guidelines based on experience working with athletes with different training backgrounds. Remember, use these as a reference point and adjust accordingly. If you understand the purpose and goal of this day, you will have a better understanding of what kind of bar weight to use.

Question: How much tension is at the top and bottom of the squat when using bands?

Answer: This is almost impossible to answer because everyone sets up the bands differently. Also, the height of the lifter will vary the tension of the bands. However, Dave and I recently measured band tension on the EFS Monolift and

figured some people would like to know what we came up with. This may help you figure out approximately what kind of tension you have. This is based on a 5'10" lifter who has choked the bands under the legs of a Monolift.

1. The base of the Monolift is 4 X 4.
2. All bands were choked.
3. All bands were jump stretch bands.
4. The bar was placed 52 inches from the ground.
5. The bands were on the sleeve of the barbell.
6. The bands were either brand new or used 2–3 times.
7. For every inch the bar went down, the tension decreased by about 10 lbs.
This only held true the first third of the way down.
8. We found that choking the bands around a 3 X 3 base caused the tension to decrease by 40 lbs, thus reinforcing the truth of statement #7.

Band/tension at the top

Strong band: 175 lbs

Average band: 115 lbs

Light band: 70 lbs

Remember that these numbers are approximate. In fact, if you understand the how and why of dynamic squatting, the tension becomes inconsequential.

Question: If I squat 400 lbs with a choked strong band, how much will I squat?

Answer: There is no way to answer this question. There is no direct correlation. In order to find out how much you can squat, either test it or go to a meet.

Question: What do you mean by “choking” a band?

Answer: To choke the bands, place the bands around the base and pull one end of the band through the other. Take the free end and put it around the sleeve of the bar.



Question: What kind of powerlifting equipment is used when performing dynamic squats?

Answer: Most will wear a pair of squat briefs or a suit with the straps down. If you are going to squat with a wide stance, we recommend that you wear some kind of support for your hips. A belt is also used on this day. We all wear some kind of flat-soled shoe similar to a Converse Chuck Taylor.

Question: I have a hard time getting off of the box, but my speed is good throughout the rest of the lift. What should I do?

Answer: Make sure you have your technique correct and that you are pushing out on the sides of your feet. This will activate your hips. Also, you may want to take some bar weight off or raise the box a half inch. This will ensure that you are fulfilling the purpose of this day.

Question: How often do you work up and attempt a heavier weight on this day?

Answer: This is usually done 1–2 times per month to check your form with heavy weights, but it can be done weekly. This is very important because it will show if you can maintain proper technique with a heavier weight. This should be done with approximately 90 percent of your best box squat. However, this number is

(again) only a guideline. You can also try to break your best box squat on this day if you are feeling good. Remember to slowly work up to the 90 percent to avoid injury.

Question: I don't compete in powerlifting and don't wear any powerlifting gear. What changes should be made?

Answer: If you are not wearing any equipment, be sure to use a narrower stance. Without the support of squat briefs or a squat suit, a wide stance will be a nightmare for your hips.

The Repetition Method

The repetition method, otherwise known as the bodybuilding method, is the best method for the development of muscle hypertrophy (growth). It is the method in which all supplemental and accessory exercises are trained and is defined as "lifting a non-maximal load to failure." Muscles develop maximal force during the fatigued state. According to this method, it's only during the final lifts that, because of fatigue, the maximal number of motor units are recruited. This system of training has a great influence on the development of muscle mass, which is why it's become so popular among the bodybuilding population.

Because the final lifts are performed in a fatigued state, this method is less effective in comparison to the others when it comes to maximal strength development. This is one of the reasons why powerlifters are much stronger than bodybuilders. Another disadvantage of this method is that each set is carried to failure. This makes it very difficult to increase your volume and work capacity over time because of the amount of restoration needed. Training to failure is very hard on your ability to recover, and in my opinion, should only be used sparingly. When you extend a set to failure many times, the last few repetitions are performed with bad technique. This, of course, can lead to injuries.

Westside Barbell has modified this principle to what I refer to as the *modified repetition method*. With the modified version, all sets should be stopped with the breakdown of technique. There should always be a repetition or two left in you. Remember, this principle is applied to all supplemental and accessory movements. These movements are designed to be exactly what they are—supplemental and accessory. The main goal of these movements is to complement the overall training program, not take away from it. By training to failure on every set, you take away from the general purpose of the movements, which is to increase work capacity.

The parameters of this method are varied and depend upon the individual. Some athletes develop muscle mass with high reps and other develop muscle mass with low reps. It is crazy to assume that one specific repetition range works for everyone. We've found that sets in the range of 5–8 with repetitions of 6–15 work best with supplemental and accessory work. This is a rather large range, but as I mentioned before, everybody is different. If you've been training for some time, I bet you have a better idea of what works for you than I could ever prescribe.

The load or weight to be used should fall in the 60–80 percent range, and you should always leave a repetition or two at the end of each set. Try to switch the exercise after every 1–5 workouts in which it's used. If you decide not to switch the exercise, switch the way it's trained. Try to add an extra set for a few weeks. Work it up for four weeks and then deload it for four weeks. The point is to change it up as much as possible.

Supplemental and Accessory Lifts for the Squat and Deadlift

All of our supplemental and accessory work for the squat and deadlift is performed with the goal of increasing the strength of those muscles responsible for increasing those two lifts. These movements should be efficient and have a purpose. For example, a leg curl and a glute ham raise both train the hamstrings. However, the glute ham raise is much different than the leg curl because it trains the hamstring from origin to insertion, unlike the leg curl. So when choosing

supplemental and accessory exercises, choose ones that address your weaknesses and increase your strengths. These movements are generally targeted to the hamstrings, glutes, hips, torso (abdominals/lower back), and quadriceps. Choose 3–5 exercises total and perform them after the main movement of the day.

Hamstring Movements

There are tons of hamstring movements but only a few that'll make the list as the best of the best. Most hamstring movements are a complete waste of time for strength because they only work the hamstrings from either the hip or knee, not both at the same time.

The best of the best list includes:

- Glute ham raises
- Reverse hyperextensions
- Pull-throughs
- Straight leg deadlifts
- Romanian deadlifts
- Dimel deadlifts
- Inverse leg curls
- Forward sled dragging
- Good mornings
- 45-degree back raises

Low Back Movements

The low back is crucial in developing a strong squat and deadlift. The following exercises are the best low back exercises that will give you the best chance to get stronger.

- Reverse hyperextensions
- 45-degree back raises

- Good mornings with jump stretch bands
- Pull-throughs
- Good mornings
- Straight leg deadlifts
- Back raises

Abdominal Movements

The abdominals are the most forgotten muscle on athletes. If you have a soft midsection and no stability, you can forget handling big weights. Remember, big abs equals big squats!

- Hanging leg raises
- Pull-down abs
- Straight leg sit-ups
- Weighted sit-ups
- Side bends with a dumbbell
- Abdominal wheel
- Roman chair sit-ups
- Rainbows
- Straight leg raises

Hip Movements

- Belt squats
- Kneeling squats
- Zercher squats
- Ultra-wide sumo deadlifts
- Ankle sled dragging

Quad Movements

- Belt squats
- High bar squats
- Manta Ray squats

- Lunges
- Backward sled dragging
- Step-ups
- Power squat machine

Supplemental and Accessory Lifts for the Bench Press

Triceps

- Triceps extensions (with dumbbells or a straight bar)
- JM presses
- 5-board presses*
- 4-board presses*
- Triceps push-downs
- Rack lockouts
- Elbows out extensions (Tate presses)

*The 4- or 5-board presses can be done with mini-bands or light bands.

Chest/Shoulders

- Side raises
- Front raises
- Rear raises
- Bradford presses
- Military presses (with dumbbells or a straight bar)
- Incline press (with dumbbells or a straight bar)
- Dumbbell bench presses
- Dumbbell floor presses
- Plate raises
- Upright rows
- Chain suspended push-ups

Lats/Upper back

1. Pull-ups/chin-ups
2. Chest supported rows
3. Bent over rows
4. Dumbbell rows
5. Lat pull-downs
6. Low pulley rows
7. Face pulls
8. Seated dumbbell cleans

Choosing Supplemental and Accessory Exercises

This is one of the most difficult parts of developing a training program because it is entirely based on the individual. However, choosing these exercises will make and break your program. These are the exercises that will make you strong, eliminate weak points, and help prevent injury. The max effort method will test your strength and the dynamic method will improve force production, but the supplemental/ accessory lifts will build your strength. Remember this!

Think about the following. Most people understand the max effort method. Pick an exercise and max out. It's simple and easy to do. With the dynamic effort method, once you internalize the purpose of this day, it's very easy to implement. So where do people make the most mistakes? They make very poor choices when choosing their supplemental and accessory exercises. Instead of trying to figure this out, people will overanalyze band tension and chain length, debate max effort exercises, and drive themselves crazy.

As a general rule of thumb, the following template can be used. Choose one exercise per muscle group.

Max Effort Squat/Deadlift

1. Max effort movement (choose one variation of a good morning, deadlift, or squat)

2. Hamstrings
3. Lower back
4. Abdominals

Max Effort Bench Press

1. Max effort movement (choose one exercise from the max effort bench press list)
2. Triceps
3. Shoulders
4. Lats/upper back

Dynamic Effort Squat/Deadlift

1. Dynamic box squat (see “Dynamic Squat Day” for details)
2. Dynamic deadlift (6–10 X 1 at 50–60 percent of your max deadlift)
3. Hamstrings
4. Lower back
5. Abdominals

Dynamic Bench Press

1. Dynamic bench press (perform 8 X 3 on the bench press using chains, bands, or straight weight; percentages are based on your training level)
2. Triceps
3. Shoulders
4. Lats/upper back

The key to picking supplemental and accessory lifts is to choose exercises that build your squat, bench, and deadlift. Don't just train the muscle! For example, you can perform kickbacks for your triceps exercise, but a JM press or a dumbbell extension will help build your bench press.

So how do you know if you are picking the correct supplemental/accessory lifts? There are several ways to figure this out. Make sure you are choosing exercises that address your particular weaknesses and build on your strengths. While this may seem confusing, consider this example. If you have a great bench lockout but are weak off the chest, you could choose dumbbell bench presses as an exercise. Make sure you are still building your lockout with high board presses though.

Another great way to choose exercises is to remember the term “training economy.” It’s always best to choose multi-joint exercises instead of isolation exercises. This will allow you to spend less time in the gym and make bigger gains! Why do you think squats are better than leg extensions?

One mistake that many beginning and intermediate lifters make when choosing exercises is that they worry too much about what their weaknesses are and how to address them. They overanalyze every little detail and come to the conclusion that their hips are weak when deadlifting. This is because they just missed 315 lbs. At that level, everything is weak. So instead of nit picking, get in the weight room, train your posterior chain and abdominals, and perfect your technique. I guarantee progress will come.

Designing a Program

The following workout design is just a template to help you structure your own program. Once you learn your own strengths and weaknesses, what exercises help you, and what kind of volume you can handle, you must adjust accordingly.

Sunday (dynamic effort bench press)

Exercise 1

Bench press: Perform eight sets of three repetitions (using chains, bands, or straight weight). Be sure to follow the guidelines given previously.

Exercise 2

Triceps (high intensity/low volume): This will be a pressing exercise such as a high rack lockout or a 4- or 5-board press. You can use chains or bands on any of these exercises. Perform 2–3 sets of 3–5 repetitions. Record your records on each board and pin and try to break them.

Exercise 3

Dumbbell pressing exercise: This is a great way to strengthen your shoulders and chest. This is crucial for developing power from the bottom end of your bench press. Some good choices are the dumbbell bench, incline bench, military press, and floor press. Change this every couple of weeks and perform 3–5 sets of 8–15 repetitions.

Exercise 4

Some kind of lat exercise: Pick one from the list and pull 3–5 sets of 8–15 reps.

Monday (max effort squat/deadlift)

Exercise 1

Max effort exercise: Choose one max effort exercise and go for a new 1–3RM.

Exercise 2

Hamstring exercise (high intensity/low volume): Choose one hamstring exercise and perform 3–5 sets of 3–8 reps. If you are going to choose glute ham raises, raise the back end of the apparatus, use a band, or place weight behind your head.

Exercise 3

Low back exercise (low intensity/high volume): Choose one lower back exercise and perform 3–5 sets of 10–20 reps. Some good choices are reverse hyperextensions, pull-throughs, back raises, 45-degree back raises, and band good mornings.

Exercise 4

Abdominals: Choose one exercise and perform 3–5 sets of 5–20 reps. Sets and reps will vary depending on the exercise.

Wednesday (max effort bench press)

Exercise 1

Max effort exercise: Choose one max effort exercise and go for a new 1–3RM.

Exercise 2

Triceps exercise (low intensity/high volume): Choose one extension or push-down and perform 3–5 sets of 10–15 reps. JM presses can also be done.

Exercise 3

Lat exercise: Choose one lat exercise and perform 3–5 sets of 6–15 reps.

Exercise 4

Upper back exercise: Choose one upper back/trap exercise and perform 3–5 sets of 10–20 reps.

Friday (dynamic effort squat/deadlift)

Exercise 1

Box squats: Choose from the sample training cycles listed above.

Exercise 2

Dynamic deadlifts: Perform 6–10 X 1 at 50–60 percent. This is usually done 6–8 weeks before a contest, not every week.

Exercise 3

Low back exercise (high intensity/low volume): Some great exercise selections for this are good mornings, 45-degree back raises (with the bar across your

back), and back raises (with the bar across your back). Perform 2–3 sets of 3–8 repetitions.

Exercise 4

Hamstring exercise (low intensity/high volume): Perform 3–5 sets of 10–20 repetitions. Some good exercise choices are glute ham raises, band leg curls, Romanian deadlifts, and inverse leg curls.

Exercise 5

Abdominal exercise: Choose one exercise and perform 3–5 sets of 5–20 reps. The sets and reps will vary depending on the exercise.

Training Three Days per Week

Some people have tried combining two workouts in one day, such as performing a max effort for both the squat and bench press in the same workout. I've been thinking about a three per day work week for quite some time and have discussed it with a few friends of mine. Because they are generous people, they decided to try it out. All of them reported back extraordinary results. All of them had bigger gains on max effort day, increased speed on dynamic effort day, less elbow and shoulder pain, and a better overall attitude in the gym. Is a three-day week training system superior to a four-day week? No. It may be more effective for some, and it could be more effective at certain times of the year for others. If you feel like you are overtrained or teetering on the edge of overtraining, a change may be what you need.

What I proposed to my friends was simple and easy to follow. Instead of repeating a specific workout (such as dynamic bench or max effort squat) every seven days, you only repeat a workout every ten days. For example, here is what a sample overview for three weeks looks like:

Week 1

Day 1: Dynamic bench press
Day 2: Max effort squat/deadlift
Day 3: Max effort bench press

Week 2

Day 1: Dynamic squat/deadlift
Day 2: Dynamic bench press
Day 3: Max effort squat/deadlift

Week 3

Day 1: Max effort bench press
Day 2: Dynamic squat/deadlift
Day 3: Dynamic bench press

As you can see, some weeks you will only perform one lower body workout while for other weeks, you will perform two workouts for the squat and deadlift. This is obviously the same for the bench press.

Why can this be effective? This kind of training schedule can do wonders for recovery and injury prevention. Because you are not performing a pressing exercise two days a week every week, your shoulders and elbows have some time to recover. This is the same with your lower body. By not having a barbell on your back twice a week or a heavy load on your spine, your recovery between workouts will improve.

In addition to physical recovery, mental recovery will also improve. All of the people who switched to a three-day week training scheme reported that they had much more enthusiasm in the gym and couldn't wait to train. A good friend of mine was about to give up powerlifting because his mind and body were both in a state of decline. Once he switched his workouts, he squatted 800 lbs (almost a 200-lb PR), and his elbow pain, which had plagued him for almost four years, has

disappeared. Also, his enthusiasm has improved.

With a three-day week training schedule, you can handle more volume during your workouts. Because you have 4–5 days to recover, you can increase the volume and try some different things. I've found that many people save themselves on some workout days so that they can increase their numbers for the following workout.

Some will argue that in a four-week training cycle you will only perform three max effort workouts per month. This is a moot point because most people will take one max effort workout off per month. Also, be sure to perform abdominal work twice per week.

Summing It Up

There is much information presented in this book, and you might be a bit overwhelmed. To make things easier, here are a few truths that will help you understand this program and allow you to make progress.

1. Perform two dynamic workouts per week—one for the bench press and one for the squat/deadlift. This day is about speed so concentrate on exploding on the way up.
2. Perform two max effort workouts per week—one for the bench press and one for the squat/deadlift. This day is about strength so be sure to strain against heavy weights and try to break personal records.
3. All accessory and supplemental work is done to help build your lifts. Don't pick exercises that won't help you. Make sure you have a reason behind every exercise that you choose.
4. Make sure you train your hamstrings, low back, and abdominals!
5. Strive for perfect form.
6. Train your weaknesses.
7. Build on your strengths.

Deload

For those not familiar with the term “deload” by basic definition of it is this: to take a break from extreme training. The deload is generally a one-week affair (sometimes three when peaking for a meet) and is done for the following reasons:

- To give your body a rest
- To give your mind a rest
- To peak for a meet
- To prevent overtraining
- To increase your chances of progress
- To prevent injury
- To increase motivation in gym/prevent becoming stale

For the purposes of this article, we will focus on all of the bullet points above with the exception of “To peak for a meet.”

Now most experienced lifters deload by feel and can tell if they need to take a week or workout off. Unfortunately for many lifters, they do not know their bodies/minds well enough to make this decision. Or (and experienced lifters fall into this category, too) people still take the attitude, “No pain, no gain” or something similar that let’s their egos get in the way of their training. Critics will counter and say that too many people deload and this gives them a chance to take it easy or to be lazy. While this may be true of the general population, I respond by saying that almost everyone that reads this article does not fall into this category and thus the deload can only be a positive thing. So with this in mind, think of the deload as recovery/restoration and a very important part of your training.

Part of the problem with the deload, in my opinion, is that for it to be effective, you need to deload entirely. The best example of this was my experience at the University of Arizona. During our off-season workouts, we would deload every

5th and 10th week (in a 12 week cycle). The first two years of this, we would deload the lifting but would increase the running volume. This never worked very well. The last couple of years, Dan Wirth changed the program and had us deload both the lifting and the running on weeks 5 and 10. By increasing the running/decreasing the lifting, we never got the full effect of the deload.

Another problem with the deload is that each individual person may have to deload at different times. This could mean every three, four or even five weeks. Even in high school, I learned that I needed to deload about every fourth/fifth week. But until you figure this out, planning your deload in advance will help you know when the best time is for you.

How to deload

There are several ways to do this, but here are some of the most popular examples;

1. No max effort work during the week; only do the dynamic effort and repetition training.
2. Max effort work and dynamic work only, no (or limited) repetition training.
3. Max effort work done to about 80%, dynamic work the same and limited repetition training.
4. No max effort or dynamic work; just repetition work.

Example #1: No max effort work during the week; only do the dynamic effort and repetition training.

This example is pretty easy to understand but the one big downfall that I see people make in this example is that they increase the volume on the repetition training. While everyone has a different tolerance to volume on repetition day, here is a typical example of how to deload using this method.

Dynamic Bench Training

- Bench Press – 8 sets of 3 reps @ 55%
- 4 Board Press – 3 sets of 3 reps (this should be done lighter than usual; for example if your max set of 3 reps is 405, your top set during the deload week should be around 335-365)
- Chest Supported Rows – 3-4 sets of 10 reps
- Face Pulls – 3-4 sets of 15 reps

Max Effort Squat/DL Training

- No max effort work
- Belt Squats – 3-4 sets of 8-10
- 45 Degree Back Raise – 3 sets of 8 reps
- Roman Chair Sit ups w/ weight – 5 sets of 10 reps

Max Effort Bench Training

- No max effort work
- DB Bench – 4 sets of 10-12 reps
- Pull ups – 4 sets of 8 reps
- Rear lateral raises – 4 sets of 12 reps

Dynamic Effort Squat Training

- Box Squat – 10 sets of 2 reps @ given percentage
- Glute Ham Raises – 4 sets of 10 reps
- Reverse Hyperextensions – 3 sets of 12 reps
- Hanging Leg Raises – 5 sets of 12 reps

The reason why this way is effective is that the max effort days are certainly the most stressful for people, both physically and mentally. In order for this day to be effective, you have to be aware of not overdoing the repetition method and really adhering to the rule of dynamic day; Percentages are just guidelines! In no way

should your dynamic work be too stressful thus negating the effects of the deload. Here are some tips:

If you use bands/chains on dynamic bench press, you may want to take them off and use straight weight.

If you use bands on the squat, you can do two things – you can use straight weight or lower the band tension (go one band down i.e. if you usually use an average band, use a light band)

If your dynamic day during training is truly dynamic, then you will probably have little problems with your current cycle.

Example #2 - Max effort work and dynamic work only, no (or limited) repetition training.

In this example, you are limiting the volume on your accessory work and focusing on the bigger lifts.

Dynamic Bench Training

- Bench Press – 8 sets of 3 reps
- Chest supported rows – 3-4 sets of 10 reps

Max Effort Squat/DL Training

- Rack Deadlifts – work up to a 1RM (standard max effort training)
- Roman Chair Sit-ups – 5 sets of 10 reps

Max Effort Bench Training

- Floor Press – work up to a 1RM (standard max effort training)
- Rear lateral raises – 5 sets of 12 reps

Dynamic Squat Training

- Box Squat – 10 sets of 2 reps @ given percentage
- Glute Ham Raises – 4 sets of 12 reps

Note: When doing your dynamic and max effort training, do not do anymore than you usually would do. This will negate your deload.

The good thing about this example is that you can entirely focus on your big training lifts and then get out of the weight room. The bad thing is that you may not give your body, especially your joints, a rest. This is a good way to deload if your body still feels good and you feel strong, but you know (in your mind and experience) that your body needs to take a little bit of a break. This is a great option if you feel strong as hell in your training cycle and want to continue to ride the wave while still doing a deload. Please note that many times, after training for awhile, people have great success with this method and continue to do this kind of training. The negative effect is that overtime you will lose muscle mass, become de-conditioned, lose work capacity and eventually stall. Also, by not strengthening your body, working weak points and addressing imbalances via the repetition method you are opening yourself up for a host of injuries. Take note of this.

Example #3 - Max effort work done to about 80%, dynamic work the same and limited repetition training.

Dynamic Bench Training

- Bench Press – 8 sets of 3 reps
- 4 Board Press – 3 sets of 3 reps, going to about 80% of your previous 3 rep best)
- Chest supported rows – 3-4 sets of 10 reps

Max Effort Squat/DL Training

- Rack Deadlifts – work up to 1-2 sets of 1 rep at 80% of your previous best

- Belt Squat – 3 sets of 10-12 reps
- Roman Chair Sit-ups – 5 sets of 10 reps

Max Effort Bench Training

- Floor Press – work up to 1-2 sets of 1 rep at 80% of your previous best
- DB Bench Press – 3-4 sets of 10 reps
- Rear lateral raises – 5 sets of 12 reps

Dynamic Squat Training

- Box Squat – 10 sets of 2 reps @ given percentage
- Reverse Hyperextensions – 3 sets of 12 reps
- Glute Ham Raises – 4 sets of 12 reps

Of all three examples, this is the least “deload” but you can manipulate it for your needs. For example, you can cut out all or most of the repetition work and concentrate on the dynamic work and perform the 80% max effort work. For many people, this example works well because they are still handling some weight on max effort day, but they don’t have the mental psyche to get prepared for it. This can work, but understand that if your mind isn’t fully into it, then you can get injured. So make sure that you are mentally into training. 80% isn’t a fluff weight, so don’t treat it as such.

Example #4 - No max effort or dynamic work; just repetition work.

Dynamic Bench Training

- No dynamic work

- 4 Board Press – 3 sets of 3 reps (this should be done lighter than usual; for example if your max set of 3 reps is 405, your top set during the deload week should be around 335-365)
- Chest Supported Rows – 3-4 sets of 10 reps
- Face Pulls – 3-4 sets of 15 reps

Max Effort Squat/DL Training

- No max effort work
- Belt Squats – 3-4 sets of 8-10
- 45 Degree Back Raise – 3 sets of 8 reps
- Roman Chair Sit ups w/ weight – 5 sets of 10 reps

Max Effort Bench Training

- No max effort work
- DB Bench – 4 sets of 10-12 reps
- Pull ups – 4 sets of 8 reps
- Rear lateral raises – 4 sets of 12 reps

Dynamic Effort Squat Training

- No dynamic work
- Glute Ham Raises – 4 sets of 10 reps
- Reverse Hyperextensions – 3 sets of 12 reps
- Hanging Leg Raises – 5 sets of 12 reps

This is pretty much the same as example #1, with the exception of no dynamic work. With this option, you really do give your mind and body a complete rest. Many people complain of the pain in the joints (elbow and hips) when doing dynamic squatting and benching. This deload will give your body some time to heal and there is little mental preparation when doing the above workout.

Deloading the 3 Week Dynamic Squat Phase

We've gotten a number of questions regarding how to deload your squat when doing a three week squat phase. So everyone here is on the same page, this is a typical squat cycle:

- Week 1 – all sets done at 50%
- Week 2 – all sets done at 55%
- Week 3 – all sets done at 60%

Now the dilemma is when does one deload if keeping with the spirit of the three week wave? The best way to do this is to keep everything on this pattern, thus resulting in something like this.

- Week 1 – all sets done at 50%
- Week 2 – all sets done at 55%
- Week 3 – all sets done at 60%
- Week 4 – all sets done at 50% (deload using straight weight or lighter band tension)
- Week 5 – start 3 week cycle over

So in the above example, you train for 3 weeks, the fourth week is a deload using the first week's percentage but with straight weight or less band tension. If you are already using straight weight, you are simply going to repeat the 50% week (or whatever the lightest %'s that you use) two weeks in a row.

Now let's say that you want to deload after 2 weeks. This means that you train hard for two weeks and deload on the third week. Here is how you can approach this:

- Week 1 – all sets done at 55%
- Week 2 – all sets done at 60%
- Week 3 – all sets done at 50% (deload)

To wrap this up, the purpose of the deload, when looking at the big picture, is to make you stronger. What we are trying to do is give your mind and body a break from extreme training. No matter how tough or hard you are as a person, in or out of the gym, you can't continue to beat yourself to a pulp when training. Your body has a funny way of rebelling against this type of nonsense. While it may look good for articles or make for tough guy (but laughable) slogans on t-shirts, taking some time to recuperate can only help you reach your goals. However you choose to structure this aspect of your training, stick to this rule; if you are going to deload, deload! Don't do anything half-ass, even if you are taking it easy.

The following is Dave's best article. I wanted to include it in this book because I believe everyone should read it. —Jim Wendler

Strength?

By Dave Tate

I just returned from a consulting engagement with a Division I football program. I was contracted to review and provide insight on their strength training program. This university had one of the best facilities I've ever seen. They must have had 15 power racks, 15 power bench racks, and 15 lifting platforms plus all of the latest machines and dumbbells that you would ever need. The first thing I thought was, "Man, you could really make a team strong here." At least that is what I thought until I looked up at the wall. They had a list of standard goals to be met by each position. The linemen's' goals were to squat 500 lbs, bench press 385 lbs, incline press 325 lbs, and power clean 300 lbs. I was amazed at how low the numbers were for linemen who weigh between 260–300 lbs. But I thought at least they had standard goals for each of them to strive for. This was fine until I looked further down the wall and saw a chart for all of those who had reached this status. I stood in disbelief because there were none listed. Now, I was determined to figure out how this could be.

As I stood there in disbelief, I overheard two people passing by who were in town for a coaching conference. They were also very amazed at these numbers. I was about to comment when I learned that they were amazed for different reasons than I was. They thought the numbers were great! Now, I was beginning to wonder what was wrong with this picture. After some thought, I figured out what it was. People need to view strength for what it really is.

Strength training simply means the pursuit of being stronger. Somewhere down the line this theory has been lost. Many times there is too much emphasis placed on maintaining strength, not on creating it. How can two people look at the same board and one be amazed at how low the numbers are and another be amazed

at how high they are? To answer this, we must look at what I call the personal paradigms of training.

A personal paradigm is the way one sees the world behind his own eyes. I heard this once explained using a map by Steven Covey, author of “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.” If you were to attend one of my seminars in Columbus, Ohio, and I sent you a map titled, “Columbus” but it really was a map of Detroit, Michigan, the first thing that would happen is you would get lost and backtrack to see if you missed a street. After getting lost again, you may give me a call. I would tell you to try harder and reread the map. You would reply, “I have read the map and can’t find the streets.” I would tell you to take your time and look at it more thoroughly. Well, you would head back out and once again get lost. This time you may head into a bookstore and buy the best motivational book on the market. Now, you would be all fired up, and you would head back out again only to get lost once more. You see, the problem is very simple. No matter how hard you try or how motivated you get, you still have the wrong map. Until you change your current map, you will be lost. Most coaches and lifters underestimate what strength really is because they have been using the wrong map or the wrong set of definitions and standards.

In the field of strength training, there really are no set definitions as to what expectable levels of strength are for individual athletes. The only definitions are the personal ones set by the lifters themselves, the trainer, or the coach. Let me explain further. Let’s assume that you decided to hire a personal trainer or coach to train you for your next competition. Your current lifts are a 700-lb squat, a 450-lb bench, and a 650-lb deadlift. Unless this trainer has processed a certain degree of strength himself, he may be impressed with your current level. How hard do you think you will be trained and on what level of knowledge is this program built? This trainer may only be able to bench 300 lbs and his best current client may only be able to bench 350 lbs. So to him your 450-lb bench is outstanding. This will make you feel great to receive all the praise from this

trainer but will it help? Your current level of 450 lbs may be far under what you are really capable of doing.

One standard goal I believe in for the squat, bench, and deadlift for most power athletes and football players is the top 100 in *Powerlifting USA*. Now, I understand that not every athlete is a powerlifter or even wants to be, but I also feel a college or professional football athlete should be able to at least break into the top 100 or at least 100 lbs shy of it. Another standard for ranking squat and bench press strength is the strength ratings compiled by Dale Harder in his book, *Strength & Speed Ratings*, available from Crain's Muscle World. (See the tables listed below.)

Keep one thing in mind about powerlifting and please don't misunderstand my point. Powerlifting is a very small sport compared to others. It is filled with athletes who were not good enough to play football, basketball, baseball, or any other high profile sport past the high school level and those retired from those sports (past their prime). Yes, many lifters are suited for the sport but not as many as one might think. Take a close look at many of your top 100 lifters. Only a small percentage of powerlifters are suited for the sport. Most have average structure. This does not mean that powerlifters don't train hard for what they have achieved. I believe they train harder and smarter than most coaches and trainers are currently training their athletes in terms of maximum strength development. Think about this for a minute, and you will see my point.

A Division I athlete has reached that level because of his genetic disposition and the hard work required to reach that level. These athletes are the cream of the crop or some of the best in the country. Now, why is it that these "best of the best" athletes can't even come close to those powerlifters who were not regarded as the "best of the best" but as "past their prime?" Is it because the powerlifters have better facilities? Most train in garages, key clubs, and local gyms while Division I athletes train in multimillion dollar complexes complete with physical therapy centers and the best equipment money can buy. Better coaching? How

many powerlifting coaches do you know? I can think of about ten. Now, how many strength coaches and trainers are there? There are about one or two strength coaches for every school, including high schools, and there are thousands of personal trainers.

Why the difference in strength? There are a few reasons I can think of, but the one that comes to mind is the comprehension level of strength. Powerlifters may think they are strong until they go to a local meet and find out they may not be as strong as they thought. So they head back to the gym and reevaluate their program and start back to work with a new definition of what strength is. Then when they build themselves up to a higher level and compete at their first national competition, they find out again that they still are not as strong as they thought and need to change their definition of what strength is. The best lifters are the ones who are always in a constant process of trying to push it up to the next level and who are always redefining themselves. If you listen to these lifters, you will almost never hear them say that they missed a lift because they were not strong enough. What you will hear them say is that the bar fell out of the groove, the equipment didn't fit right, or they had one lagging muscle. But you will never hear them say they were not strong enough. Being stronger is a forgone conclusion and just a matter of putting it together. For a novice lifter, coach, or trainer, you will hear them say they weren't strong enough or that they just don't have the strength potential or genetics. There is never any new definition being made.

Another reason for the strength difference is many coaches and trainers feel that a 400-lb bench press and a 500-lb squat are unnecessary for sports performance. Is not all strength based on maximal strength? If you are spending time in the weight room, should that time not be devoted to getting stronger? Why spend valuable training time just maintaining? It makes no sense to go into the weight room to work on maintaining strength when the same time could be spent on developing strength. I do understand that there are many components of fitness when it comes to the total development of the athlete and that

maximum strength is only one of them. A training program for a client or athlete based solely on maximum strength development is a major mistake. You must also address flexibility, endurance, mobility, agility, speed, and many other components. I believe these components need to be trained and are all affected by the total absolute strength that you have. In other words, all things being equal, the stronger athlete will win.

So how then can you change your definition of strength?

1. As a powerlifter, you must train with a group of other lifters. Having good training partners is a vital part of the process. Very few ever reach the top by themselves. You should try to get with a group of lifters who are stronger than yourself. This will reinforce the belief that it can be done when you see it being done time and time again in the gym. I used to feel a 600-lb bench was a big bench until eight people in our gym (Westside Barbell) did it. Now, it seems to be in reach for anybody who believes it can be done.
2. As a lifter, you must compete. Have you ever noticed that the biggest attitudes are held by those who only lift in the gym? These lifters believe they are the biggest and best out there. Why is it that the lifters who compete at the highest levels do not possess these same attitudes? I believe it is because to compete at this level they have all been humbled many times. They realize that there are many strong lifters out there and they are only one of them.
3. As a coach or trainer, you must workout. You would think this is a given, but it isn't. There are many trainers and coaches out there who have the credentials on paper and wear them as well, but there are still far too many who only have credentials on paper. I wonder how you can teach strength if you have never possessed it in the first place. I overheard a top trainer giving training instructions to an 800-lb squatter on what he had to

do to fix his technique. I would venture to guess that this trainer's best squat ever is around 400 lbs. Having done an 800-lb squat, I can tell you there is a big difference in what you have to do to squat 800 lbs compared to 400 lbs. I am not saying that all strength coaches and trainers need to squat 800 lbs. This could not be further from the truth. But they should at least know what it feels like to lift maximal loads. I was always brought up with the belief to never ask someone to do what you would not do yourself.

A second point about this topic is the value of respect. You will gain greater respect from your client and coach if you are practicing what you preach. This is best done if you have the opportunity to train with the client or team. Let them see the intensity you put into your own training and you will get the same intensity back. Come to Westside Barbell and view the intensity of the training. You will notice that Louie is right in there banging away with us. Would that same intensity be there if he was not training? If you look at the recent success of Westside Barbell in the past five years, it directly relates to the time when Louie started his comeback. Think about it!

4. Check the *Powerlifting USA* top 100. As mentioned above, show your clients and athletes these lists. Let them know that they can reach the same strength level. Praise them for all personal records while encouraging and recognizing their potential to reach even higher goals. In comparison to the linemen's goals at the beginning of the article, the last numbers on the top 100 for the 275-lb weight class last year were a 700-lb squat and a 507-lb bench. If this doesn't inspire the athlete to strive for bigger numbers, let them know that the goals of a 500-lb squat and 385-lb bench would not even break the top 100 for the 165-lb weight class. With this in mind, are those goals solid goals for a lineman weighing 275–300 lbs in a four-year program?

5. Believe in yourself and act as if. This goes for both the powerlifter and the coach. If you tell them to act as if they are the strongest team in the league or if you act as if you are one of the top 10 powerlifters, you are on the right path. Act as if means do the same things they would do. Do they spend time in the gym training on solid programs? Do they research and read everything they can on strength? Do they have a positive attitude? Do they ever skip workouts? Do they look to those who are better than them for guidance? Do you?

Vince Lombardi once said, "I firmly believe that any ***man's finest hour***—his greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear—is that moment when he has ***worked his heart out*** for a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle ***victorious.***" Do you want to lie on the ground victorious or with your face down in the dirt?

Bench press ratings by body weight											
Body weight	114	123	132	148	165	181	198	220	242	275	SHW
World class	215	253	300	355	400	435	462	492	525	540	560
National class	175	230	275	340	380	420	450	485	515	529	540
College star	160	180	200	250	300	330	340	350	375	390	400
College letter	140	155	180	200	250	275	300	315	320	340	350
High school star	125	140	170	190	200	215	225	230	250	270	300
High school letter	115	135	150	180	190	200	210	220	225	250	275
Junior high star	90	100	135	160	180	190	200	210	220	230	240
Junior high letter	80	90	115	130	150	170	175	180	185	190	200

Squat ratings by body weight (through August 1996)											
Body weight	114	123	132	148	165	181	198	220	242	275	SHW
World class	330	380	450	515	585	605	675	722	738	755	793
National class	270	325	385	501	556	600	655	698	710	730	775
College star	235	300	350	425	470	500	545	570	585	615	640
College letter	205	265	310	375	405	425	460	470	480	490	500
High school star	180	240	270	330	360	380	400	425	450	460	470
High school letter	160	200	235	250	270	280	290	300	320	340	360
Junior high star	135	175	200	220	240	250	260	270	280	290	300
Junior high letter	115	150	165	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	250

Dale Harder, author of "Strength & Speed Ratings"

MEN											
Weight class	114	123	132	148	165	181	198	220	242	275	SHW
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Elite	1064	1157	1246	1394	1527	1642	1731	1824	1890	1946	2033
Master	981	1064	1146	1279	1400	1505	1593	1675	1736	1786	1857
Class 1	882	953	1025	1152	1257	1350	1422	1505	1554	1598	1670
Class 2	777	838	904	1009	1102	1190	1257	1323	1367	1411	1472
Class 3	672	733	788	887	965	1036	1097	1157	1196	1229	1279
Class 4	590	639	689	772	838	904	953	1003	1047	1075	1119

WOMEN											
Weight Class		97	105	114	123	132	148	165	181	198	SHW
<hr/>											
Elite		639	683	733	782	827	909	981	1053	1130	1190
Master		579	623	667	711	749	827	893	959	1025	1080
Class 1		518	562	601	639	672	744	805	865	920	970
Class 2		463	496	535	568	601	661	716	766	821	865
Class 3		402	435	468	496	524	579	623	672	716	755
Class 4		347	375	402	424	452	496	535	573	617	650

How do you rank? This is the former USPF classification system used to define powerlifting status. The numbers listed are the total for the squat, bench, and deadlift.

12-Week Beginner WSB Program (for those with limited equipment)

Here is a 12-week program designed for those of you with minimal equipment. Most of the equipment can be found in a commercial gym so there are no excuses.

Week 1

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps at 55%

Dumbbell military press: 3 sets of 12 reps

Dumbbell bent over rows: 3 sets of 15 reps

Triceps extensions: 3 sets of 10 reps

Rear laterals: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Parallel squat (no box): 2 sets of 5 reps at 80%

Deadlift: 2 sets of 3 reps at 80%

Cable pull-throughs: 3 sets of 20 reps

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Bench press: 2 sets of 5 reps at 80%

Dips (weighted): 3 sets of 10 reps

Chins: 30 total reps

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 8 sets of 2 reps at 55%

Back raises: 3 sets of 10–15 reps

Lunges: 3 sets of 6 reps/leg

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 2

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 6 sets of 3 reps at 60%

Dumbbell military press: 4 sets of 8–10 reps

Dumbbell bent over rows: 4 sets of 15 reps

Triceps push-downs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Rear laterals: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Parallel squat (no box): 2 sets of 3 reps at 82.5%

Deadlift: 2 sets of 3 reps at 82.5%

Cable pull-throughs: 3 sets of 20 reps

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

2-Board press: 2 sets of 3 reps at 82.5% (this is based on your 2-board max, not your bench press)

Dips (weighted): 4 sets of 10 reps

Chins: 40 total reps

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 8 sets of 2 reps at 65%

Lunges: 3 sets of 6 reps/leg

Back raises: 3 sets of 10–15 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 3

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 5 sets of 3 reps at 65%

Dumbbell bench press: 5 sets of 8–10 reps

Dumbbell bent over rows: 5 sets of 12 reps

Triceps push-downs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Rear laterals: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Squat: 2 sets of 3 reps at 85%

Deadlift: 2 sets of 2 reps at 85%

Lunges: 3 sets of 6 reps/leg

Cable pull-throughs: 3 sets of 20 reps

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Floor press: 2 sets of 3 reps at 85% (this is based on your floor press max, not your bench press)

Dips (weighted): 5 sets of 10 reps

Chins: 50 total reps

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 6 sets of 2 reps at 70%

Back raises: 3 sets of 10–15 reps

Leg curls (or band leg curls): 3 sets of 12 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 4

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 4 sets of 3 reps at 65%

Triceps push-downs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Rear laterals: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Squat: 2 sets of 3 reps at 65%

Cable pull-throughs: 3 sets of 20 reps

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Bench press: 2 sets of 3 reps at 65%

Chins: 2 sets of 10 reps

Friday

Box squat: 3 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Back raises: 3 sets of 10–15 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 5

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps at 55%

Dumbbell incline press: 3 sets of 12 reps

Chest supported rows: 3 sets of 8 reps

Triceps extensions: 3 sets of 10 reps

Face pulls: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Parallel squat (no box): 2 sets of 3 reps at 85%

Deadlift: 2 sets of 2 reps at 85%

Dumbbell swings: 3 sets of 15 reps

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Bench press: 2 sets of 3 reps at 85%

Dips (weighted): 3 sets of 10 reps

Chins: 30 total reps

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 8 sets of 2 reps at 55%

Barbell step-ups: 3 sets of 6 reps/leg

Back raises: 3 sets of 10–15 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 6

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 6 sets of 3 reps at 60%

Dumbbell incline press: 4 sets of 12 reps

Chest supported rows: 4 sets of 8 reps

Triceps extensions: 3 sets of 10 reps

Face pulls: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Parallel squat (no box): 2 sets of 2 reps at 87.5%

Deadlift: 2 sets of 1 rep at 87.5%

Dumbbell swings: 3 sets of 15 reps

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

2-Board press: 2 sets of 3 reps at 87.5% (based on your 2-board max, not bench press max)

Dips (weighted): 3 sets of 10 reps

Chins: 30 total reps

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 8 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Barbell step-ups: 3 sets of 6 reps/leg

Back raises: 3 sets of 10–15 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 7

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 5 sets of 3 reps at 65%

Dumbbell Incline press: 5 sets of 12 reps

Chest supported rows: 5 sets of 8 reps

Triceps extensions: 3 sets of 10 reps

Face pulls: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Squat: 2 sets of 2 reps at 90%

Deadlift: 2 sets of 1 reps at 90%

Dumbbell swings: 3 sets of 15 reps

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Floor press: 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% (based on your floor press max, not bench press max)

Dips (weighted): 3 sets of 10 reps

Chins: 30 total reps

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 6 sets of 2 reps at 65%

Barbell step-ups: 3 sets of 6 reps/leg

Back raises: 3 sets of 10–15 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 8

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 4 sets of 3 reps at 65%

Rear laterals: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Squat: 2 sets of 3 reps at 65%

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Bench press: 2 sets of 3 reps at 65%

Chins: 2 sets of 10 reps

Friday

Box squat: 3 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 9

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps at 55%

Dumbbell bench press: 3 sets of 10–12 reps

Rear laterals: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Squat: 1 set of 1 rep at 92.5%

Deadlift: 2 sets of 2 reps at 80%

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Bench press: 2 sets of 1 reps at 92.5%

Chins: 3 sets of 10 reps

Triceps push-downs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 6 sets of 2 reps at 55%

Back raises: 3 sets of 10 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 10

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 6 sets of 3 reps at 55%

Dumbbell bench press: 3 sets of 10–12 reps

Rear laterals: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Squat: 1 set of 1 rep at 95%

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Bench press: 1 sets of 1 reps at 95%

Chins: 3 sets of 10 reps

Triceps push-downs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 6 sets of 2 reps at 55%

Back raises: 3 sets of 10 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 11

Sunday

Dynamic bench press: 6 sets of 3 reps at 55%

Dumbbell bench press: 3 sets of 10–12 reps

Rear laterals: 3 sets of 20 reps

Monday

Squat: 1 set of 3 rep at 70%

Hanging leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Wednesday

Bench press: 1 sets of 3 reps at 70%

Chins: 3 sets of 10 reps

Triceps push-downs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Friday

Box squat: 6 sets of 2 reps at 55%

Back raises: 3 sets of 10 reps

Weighted sit-ups (place weight behind your head): 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 12

Sunday

OFF

Monday

Squat: Work up to new 1RM

Wednesday

Bench press: Work up to new 1RM

Friday

Deadlift: Work up to new 1RM

Refined Nine-Week Basic Program

This is a new nine-week program designed for a more advanced lifter. It does not have any chains or bands.

Week 1

Day 1 (Max effort squat/deadlift)

Safety squat bar parallel box squats: Work up to 1RM

Glute ham raise: 3 sets of 12 reps

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 15 reps

Pull-down abs: 5 sets of 15 rep

Day 2 (Max effort bench press)

3-Board press: Work up to 1RM

Dumbbell bench press: 3 sets to failure, 5 minutes rest in between sets

Barbell triceps extensions: 4 sets of 10 reps

Seated dumbbell cleans: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 3 (Dynamic effort squat day)

Box squats: 10 sets of 2 reps with 50% of 1RM, 1 X 1 at 60%, 1 X 1 at 70%, 1 X 1 at 80%

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 8 reps

Belt squats: 3 sets of 10 reps

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 4 (Dynamic effort bench day)

Bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps with 60% of 1RM

4-Board press: 4 sets of 5 reps

Dumbbell side raises: 3 sets of 10 reps

Dumbbell rear raise: 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 2

Day 1 (Max effort squat/deadlift)

Rack pulls: Work up to 1RM
Glute ham raise: 3 sets of 12 reps
Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 15 reps
Pull-down abs: 5 sets of 15 rep

Day 2 (Max effort bench press)
Floor press: Work up to 1RM
Barbell steep incline press: 3 sets of 5 reps
Barbell triceps extensions: 3 sets of 10 reps
Seated dumbbell cleans: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 3 (Dynamic effort squat day)
Box squats: 10 sets of 2 reps with 55% of 1RM, 1 X 1 at 60%, 1 X 1 at 70%, 1 X 1 at 80%, 1 X 1 at 85%
Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 8 reps
Belt squats: 3 sets of 10 reps
Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 4 (Dynamic effort bench day)
Bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps with 60% of 1RM
5-Board press: 4 sets of 5 reps
Dumbbell side raises: 3 sets of 10 reps
Dumbbell rear raise: 3 sets of 10 rep

Week 3

Day 1 (Max effort squat/deadlift)
Good mornings: Work up to 5RM
Glute ham raise: 3 sets of 12 reps
Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 15 reps
Pull-down abs: 5 sets of 15 rep

Day 2 (Max effort bench press)

2-Board press with double mini-bands: Work up to 1RM

Barbell steep incline press: 2 sets of 3 reps, 2 sets of 8 reps

Seated dumbbell cleans: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 3 (Dynamic effort squat day)

Box squats: 10 sets of 2 reps with 60% of 1RM, 1 X 1 at 60%, 1 X 1 at 70%, 1 X 1 at 80%, 1 X 2 at 85%

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 8 reps

Belt squats: 3 sets of 10 reps

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 4 (Dynamic effort bench day)

Bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps with 60% of 1RM

Triceps extensions: 4 sets of 10 reps

Dumbbell side raises: 3 sets of 10 reps

Dumbbell rear raise: 3 sets of 10 rep

Week 4

Day 1 (Max effort squat/deadlift)

Belt squats: 3 sets of 10 reps

Glute ham raise: 3 sets of 12 reps

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 15 reps

Pulldown abs: 5 sets of 15 rep

Day 2 (Max effort bench press)

Dumbbell bench press: 3 sets of 10 reps

Lat pull-downs: 3 sets of 12 reps

Triceps push-downs: Get a pump

Day 3 (Dynamic effort squat day)

Box squats: 10 sets of 2 reps with 50% of 1RM

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 8 reps

Lying leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 4 (Dynamic effort bench day)

Bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps with 60% of 1RM

Chest supported rows: 3 sets of 8 reps

Side laterals: 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 5

Day 1 (Max effort squat/deadlift)

Cambered bar parallel box squat: Work up to 1RM

Glute ham raise: 3 sets of 12 reps

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 15 reps

Pull-down abs: 5 sets of 15 rep

Day 2 (Max effort bench press)

Floor press with three chains/side: Work up to 1RM

Dumbbell bench press: 3 sets to failure, 5 minutes rest in between sets

Barbell triceps extensions: 4 sets of 10 reps

Seated dumbbell cleans: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 3 (Dynamic effort squat day)

Box squats: 10 sets of 2 reps with 50% of 1RM, 1 X 2 at 60%, 1 X 2 at 70%, 1 X 2 at 80%

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 8 reps

Belt squats: 3 sets of 10 reps

Lying leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 4 (Dynamic effort bench day)

Bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps with 60% of 1RM

4-Board press: 3 sets of 3 reps
One-arm cable rows: 3 sets of 15 reps
Dumbbell rear raise: 3 sets of 10 rep

Week 6

Day 1 (Max effort squat/deadlift)
Deadlift off of plates: Work up to 1RM
Glute ham raise: 3 sets of 12 reps
Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 15 reps
Pull-down abs: 5 sets of 15 rep

Day 2 (Max effort bench press)
3-Board press with doubled light band: Work up to 1RM
Dumbbell incline press: 4 sets of 12 reps
Lat pull-downs: 4 sets of 10 reps
Face pulls: 3 sets of 20 reps

Day 3 (Dynamic effort squat day)
Box squats: 10 sets of 2 reps with 50% of 1RM, 1 X 2 at 60%, 1 X 2 at 70%, 1 X 2 at 80%, 1 X 2 at 85%
Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 8 reps
Belt squats: 3 sets of 10 reps
Lying leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 4 (Dynamic effort bench day)
Bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps with 60% of 1RM
3-Board press: 3 sets of 3 reps
Chest supported rows: 3 sets of 10 reps
Dumbbell rear raise: 3 sets of 10 rep

Week 7

Day 1 (Max effort squat/deadlift)

Chain suspended good morning: Work up to 3RM

Glute ham raise: 3 sets of 12 reps

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 15 reps

Pull-down abs: 5 sets of 15 rep

Day 2 (Max effort bench press)

2-Board press: Work up to 1RM

Dumbbell incline press: 4 sets of 12 reps

Lat pull-downs: 4 sets of 10 reps

Face pulls: 3 sets of 20 reps

Day 3 (Dynamic effort squat day)

Box squats: 10 sets of 2 reps with 50% of 1RM, 1 X 2 at 60%, 1 X 2 at 70%, 1 X 2 at 80%, 1 X 1 at 85%, 1 X 1 at 90%

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 8 reps

Belt squats: 3 sets of 10 reps

Lying leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 4 (Dynamic effort bench day)

Bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps with 60% of 1RM

Triceps extensions: 4 sets of 10 reps

Dumbbell side raises: 3 sets of 10 reps

Dumbbell rear raise: 3 sets of 10 rep

Week 8

Day 1 (Max effort squat/deadlift)

Belt squats: 3 sets of 10 reps

Glute ham raise: 3 sets of 12 reps

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 15 reps

Pull-down abs: 5 sets of 15 rep

Day 2 (Max effort bench press)

Dumbbell bench press: 3 sets of 10 reps

Lat pull-downs: 3 sets of 12 reps

Triceps push-downs: Get a pump

Day 3 (Dynamic effort squat day)

Box squats: 10 sets of 2 reps with 50% of 1RM

Reverse hypers: 3 sets of 8 reps

Lying leg raises: 3 sets of 15 reps

Day 4 (Dynamic effort bench day)

Bench press: 8 sets of 3 reps with 60% of 1RM

Chest supported rows: 3 sets of 8 reps

Side laterals: 3 sets of 10 reps

Week 9

Max this week on the box squat and the bench press. You can do both lifts on one day or spread it out over two.

About the Authors

Dave Tate is the founder and CEO of Elite Fitness Systems, staffed by experienced professionals dedicated to providing strength coaches, athletes, and trainers with the highest quality equipment, personalized service, and extensive knowledge needed to advance their training programs.

Dave has been involved with powerlifting for more than two and a half decades as a world class participant, coach, and consultant. He has logged more than 10,000 hours of personal training and strength consulting sessions with professional, elite, and novice athletes as well as with professional and university strength coaches. He holds Elite status in powerlifting (in three weight classes) with best lifts of a 935-lb squat, 740-lb deadlift, 610-lb bench press, and 2,205-lb total.

In addition to remaining active as a participant who still pushes himself to excel, Dave contributes insights and inspiration to the sport that has shaped him. Through Elite Fitness Systems, he has conducted hundreds of influential seminars and clinics nationwide for gyms, training centers, schools, and universities. He has written more than 100 articles on strength training for magazines and web sites including *Powerlifting USA*, *Men's Fitness*, *Men's Health*, and *T-Nation.com*. This athlete-entrepreneur earned a Lifetime Achievement award in 2005 from the Society for Weight Training Specialists.

Dave Tate's impact also extends beyond training techniques and his sport. As a business adviser, motivational speaker, and author, he shows how athletic disciplines teach valuable lessons for overall achievement. "We each have all we need to achieve success in anything we choose to do," says Tate, describing the theme of his 2005 book, *Under the Bar/Twelve Lessons of Life from the World of Powerlifting*. He lives with his family in London, Ohio.

Jim Wendler is the senior editor and sales manager of Elite Fitness Systems. He worked as a strength and conditioning coach at the University of Kentucky where he worked with several different teams including football and baseball. He played football and graduated from the University of Arizona where he earned three letters. Jim's best lifts include a 1000-lb squat, 675-lb bench press, 700-lb deadlift, and 2375-lb total in the 275-lb class.

Jim doesn't have a fancy resume like Dave, but he does have the most popular training log at EFS. The people have spoken!

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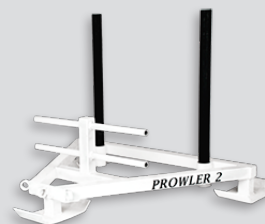
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