

5/3/1

FOR POWERLIFTING

**SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE TRAINING
FOR MAXIMAL STRENGTH**



WENDLER

**5/3/1 for Powerlifting: Simple and Effective Training
for Maximal Strength**

By Jim Wendler

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

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A Declaration

The world of powerlifting is very fractured—dozens of different organizations, raw versus single ply versus multi-ply, bad calls, awful judging, internet heroes, and internet judges. With all this, there is a tremendous amount of negativity and hatred being spewed back and forth. If I were new to the sport, I wouldn't want any part of it.

However, the essence of powerlifting is strength and this is something that has been lost along the way—the art of training, the satisfaction of hard work, the pride of strength. These all lie at the core of powerlifting. These are the things that attracted me to strength training, not the politics of judging, supportive gear, and name calling. I was at a Pro-Am meet in 2009, and while in the warm-up room and throughout the venue, I didn't hear a single person talk about training. It was all about how to use the gear better. There wasn't any mention of how they were training to get *stronger* or *better*. This isn't what powerlifting is about. If you think it is, you're reading the wrong book. And really you are in the wrong activity.

This is a book for people who want to get strong. If you want to join the club, read on. If you're part of the club, welcome back. If you want to piss and moan about judging and how weak you are, thanks for showing up but show yourself out. We're too busy getting better to hold your hand on the way out.

Now let's get to business.

5/3/1 Training

(This is an excerpt from the original 5/3/1 book. I recommend you re-read it as there are some changes that are exclusive to the 5/3/1 for Powerlifting book).

The 5/3/1 Philosophy

The 5/3/1 philosophy is more important than the sets and reps. Whenever I feel like I'm getting sidetracked or want to try something different, I revisit these rules to make sure I'm doing things the right way. Even if you decide this program isn't for you, these basic tenets have stood the test of time. Take these things to heart, and you'll be greatly rewarded.

Emphasize Big, Multi-Joint Movements

This really isn't any secret. Beginners have been told to do this for years, and advanced lifters swear by these movements. Multi-joint lifts are lifts that involve more than one muscle – i.e., not an isolation exercise like leg extensions – and allow you to build the most muscle. These lifts are the most efficient for building muscle and strength. Examples are the squat, deadlift, bench press and power clean.

Start Too Light

My coaches emphasized this to me when I was in high school, but unfortunately, I didn't listen. Hopefully you will. Starting too light allows for more time for you to progress forward. It's easy for anyone – beginner or advanced – to want to get ahead of themselves. Your lifts will go up for a few months, but then they'll stall – and stall, and stall some more. Lifters get frustrated and don't understand that the way around this is to prolong the time it takes to get to the goal. You have to keep inching forward. This is a very hard pill to swallow for most lifters. They want to start heavy, and they want to start now. This is nothing more than ego, and nothing will destroy a lifter faster, or for longer, than ego.

Progress Slowly

This goes hand in hand with starting light. Slow progress might not get you the best rewards today, but it will tomorrow. The longer you can progress, even if it's by one rep or 2.5 pounds, the more it means that you're actually *making* progress. People always scoff when I want their bench to go up by 20-25 pounds their first year. They want the program that will put 40 pounds on their bench in 8 weeks. When they say this, I ask them how much their bench went up in the last year, and they hang their heads in shame. I can't understand why someone wouldn't want progress – even it's just 5 pounds. It's better than nothing. It's progress.

The game of lifting isn't an 8-week pursuit. It doesn't last as long as your latest program does. Rather, it's a lifetime pursuit. If you understand this, then progressing slowly isn't a big deal. In fact, this can be a huge weight lifted off your back. Now you can focus on getting those 5 extra pounds rather than 50.

It's always been one of my goals to standing press 300 pounds. In the summer of 2008, I did just that. When someone asked me what my next goal was, my response was simple: "305 pounds." If you bench press 225 pounds and want to get 275, you have to bench 230 first.

Break Personal Records (PR's)

This is where the fun of this – and any – program begins and ends. This program allows you to break a wide variety of rep records throughout the entire year. Most people live and die by their 1-rep max. To me, this is foolish and shortsighted. If your squat goes from 225x6 to 225x9, you've gotten stronger. If you keep setting and breaking rep records, you'll get stronger. Don't get stuck just trying to increase your one rep max. If you keep breaking your rep records, it'll go up. There's also a simple way of comparing rep maxes that I'll explain later.

Breaking personal records is a great motivator, and it's also a great way to add some excitement into your training. When you do this, the sets and reps carry much more meaning. There's something on the line. You'll have greater focus and purpose in your

training. You'll no longer have to just do a set of 5 reps. You'll focus on beating the number and beating the weight.

All of the above concerns are addressed in this program. Even if you don't follow this particular program, I believe these things should be emphasized no matter what you're doing or why you're training.

The 5/3/1 Program

This is a very easy program to work with. The following is a general outline of the training I suggest. I'll go into detail on each point in the chapters to follow.

- You will train 3-4 days per week (this will be up to you).
- One day will be devoted to the standing military press, one day to the parallel squat, one day to the deadlift and one day to the bench press.
- Each training cycle lasts 4 weeks.
- The first week you will do 3 sets of 5 reps (3x5).
- The second week you will do 3 sets of 3 reps (3x3).
- The third week you will do 1 set of 5 reps, 1 set of 3 reps and 1 set of 1 rep (5/3/1).
- The fourth week you will do 3 sets of 5 reps (3x5). This is an easy deload week.
- After the fourth week, you begin again with 3 sets of 5 reps.
- Each week and each set has a percentage to follow, so you won't be guessing what to do anymore.

As you can see, there's nothing fancy to this program. I believe in big compound lifts, keeping the set and rep schemes simple, and deloading every fourth week. These

concepts are nothing new, and I admit that. The beauty of this program, however, is how you begin. If you begin correctly, you'll end correctly.

Beginning the Program

First, know your maxes for the four lifts (squat, bench, deadlift and standing military press). These are not maxes you think you can do, maxes you've done, or maxes you think you might be able to do. These are maxes you can do RIGHT NOW. This is not the time to be a braggart lifter. If you overestimate your maxes, you'll be in for a rude awakening.

If you don't know your maxes for any of the lifts, you can take a few days and see where you're at, or you can take a rep max. This is a good way to get an idea of your strength without loading the bar for a maximal attempt. Here's how to do it:

- Estimate your 1RM for the lift. If you can't even do this, you probably shouldn't be doing this program.
- Take 80% or 85% of your supposed max and perform as many reps as possible.
- Plug the reps and the weight into this formula to get your estimated 1RM:

$$\text{Weight} \times \text{Reps} \times .0333 + \text{Weight} = \text{Estimated 1RM}$$

Once you have your maxes for each lift (bench, squat, deadlift and standing military press), I want you to take 90% of this number and use this as your "max" for the first 4 weeks of the training cycle. The easiest way to do this is to take your max and multiply it by .9 (that's "point" 9). For example, let's say you have a 400 deadlift, 385 squat, 190 military press, and a 295 bench press. Your numbers would look like this:

- **Deadlift:** $400 \times .9 = 360$
- **Squat:** $385 \times .9 = 345$
- **Military:** $190 \times .9 = 170$
- **Bench Press:** $295 \times .9 = 265$

You would then begin the 5/3/1 program using the above numbers (360, 345, 170, 265) as your starting “maxes.”

This will allow you to use sub-maximal weights to get stronger, and since you won't be handling heavy weights all the time, it'll keep your body fresh and you won't plateau or regress. If you decide you don't want to do this, don't do this program. I've gotten a lot of questions about why this must be done, and the answer is simple: by starting out at 10% less than your max, you won't burn out, and you won't plateau. So, leave your ego at the door and do it correctly. You don't need to operate at your real max to make gains with this program. Here are some examples:

- Monte Sparkman – benched 440 at a meet using a 405 training max.
- Jim Wendler – deadlifted 710 using nothing higher than a 650 training max.
- Leigh Ann Jaskiewicz – benched 135x10 and 175x1 using nothing higher than a 140 training max.
- Phil Wylie – deadlifted 677 at a meet with a highest training pull of 550x9.

These are extreme examples, but the point is this: you don't have to train maximally to get strong. You just have to train optimally. This is the greatest lesson I learned from Louie Simmons. So, the first part of this program entails finding your maxes for the squat, bench, deadlift and standing military press. *Once you have these maxes, make the commitment to starting your training program at 90% of your max.*

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
65% x 5 reps	70% x 3 reps	75% x 5 reps	40% x 5 reps
75% x 5 reps	80% x 3 reps	85% x 3 reps	50% x 5 reps
85% x 5 or more reps	90% x 3 or more reps	95% x 1 or more reps	60% x 5 reps

You can also do another variation which is how much of the 5/3/1 for Powerlifting is based on.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
70% x 3 reps	65% x 5 reps	75% x 5 reps	40% x 5 reps
80% x 3 reps	75% x 5 reps	85% x 3 reps	50% x 5 reps
90% x 3 or more reps	85% x 5 or more reps	95% x 1 or more reps	60% x 5 reps

Now I know I will get a ton of question as to why there is a switch of weeks 1 and 2. The biggest reason is that it allows you to take singles on the two heaviest weeks and have a week off in between them (this will be shown in the book). But here is how it is set up:

Week 1 – 3x3 + heavy singles

Week 2 – 3x5

Week 3 – 5/3/1 + heavy singles

Week 4 – 3x5, deload

So with the above example, we have now see that the 4 week program is waved like this:

Week 1 – Heavy

Week 2 – Medium

Week 3 – Heavy

Week 4 – Light

So what this does is help you recover between the heavier weeks and the heavy singles. What you will notice in the programs and outlines in the books is that the 3x5 week (week 2) will not be done for max reps.

The Last Set

Whichever option you choose, you'll notice that the last set of the day reads, "or more reps." This is where the fun begins. The last set of the day is the all-out set. You'll be going for as many reps as possible. I hesitate to tell anyone to do anything to failure, because that's not what I'm after. I wouldn't prescribe this. This last set should be a ball buster, though, and it's the one you really need to focus on. This is when you dig in and try to move the world.

Because you're working off a weight that's 10% less than your actual max, you should be able to get the prescribed reps for the day fairly easily. This is a foregone conclusion. On the last set, however, you'll have to reach further and grind it out – not to failure so you're dead and can't train the rest of the week, but it should take some life out of you.

I highly recommend having a goal in mind for these last sets. Sit down the night before, or the week before, and think of the number of reps you'd like to hit. See yourself doing it. Write it down and visualize the bar in your hands or on your back. When it's time, let yourself go and attack the weight.

I've always thought of doing the prescribed reps as simply testing your strength. Anything over and above that builds strength, muscle and character. Doing the prescribed reps shows you and your body that you're strong enough for the workout. The extra reps are your way of dominating the workout and getting better.

One word of warning, however: don't take the lighter sets for granted. These will set you up mentally for the big sets. If these sets are light and explosive, you'll feel confident and strong for your last set. If you take these lightly, or you take a carefree attitude toward them, your mind will not be right for the last set.

As you progress through this program, the weights will increase and getting more reps will get harder. If you progress slowly and start too light, you'll continue to make progress over a longer period of time, and the last set will continue to be a motivating factor.

Important note: in the 4th week (your deload week), you should NOT be going for max reps. This is a week to get some light work in and prime yourself for the next month of training.

How to Progress

Because I believe in starting too light and progressing slowly, this program has a very easy system for progressing from month to month. Remember, the first four weeks will start with a “max” that’s 10% less than your actual max. I’ve even had lifters use 15% less than their actual max and get great results. Also, you should make sure this number is based on a training max, not a competition max. To demonstrate, let’s take a hypothetical lifter whose actual maxes are as follows:

- **Squat:** 315
- **Bench:** 250
- **Military:** 170
- **Deadlift:** 350

The first four weeks will look something like this:

Week I	Week II		Week III		Week IV	
Military	Military		Military		Military	
150						
<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>
5	100	3	105	5	115	5
5	115	3	120	3	130	5
5	130	3	135	1	145	5
Deadlift	Deadlift		Deadlift		Deadlift	
325						
<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>
5	215	3	230	5	245	5
5	245	3	260	3	280	5
5	280	3	295	1	310	5
Bench	Bench		Bench		Bench	
225						
<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>
5	150	3	160	5	170	5
5	170	3	180	3	195	5
5	195	3	205	1	215	5
Squat	Squat		Squat		Squat	
285						
<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>
5	190	3	200	5	215	5
5	215	3	230	3	245	5
5	245	3	260	1	275	5

In the far left column, you'll notice that each lift has a corresponding max next to it. This number represents 10% less than what this lifter can actually do in the gym. The first four weeks of this cycle can be difficult to adjust to because many lifters are used to maxing out all the time. They stay at the same weight for months, and they don't make any progress. Then, when they're asked to lighten the load, they'll throw their hands up in disgust and say, "I can't get strong like that!"

I really don't know what the problem is here, because they're not getting strong anyway. This can also be difficult for the lifter who's used to doing singles all the time. This program requires that you push yourself on the last set. This often entails performing 10 or more reps.

Again, remember that during deload weeks, you'll only be doing the reps listed. Don't go for max reps during these sessions.

The first four weeks are also a great way to establish some personal records. Make sure you keep track of these and try to break them.

In the second four week phase, the lifter will increase his maxes no more than 5 pounds per upper body lift, and 10 pounds for lower body lifts. These increases are to the max that you're basing your percentages on. You're NOT increasing the weight for each set. The next four weeks will look something like this:

Week I	Week II		Week III		Week IV	
Military	Military		Military		Military	
155						
<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>
5	105	3	110	5	120	5
5	120	3	125	3	135	5
5	135	3	140	1	150	5
Deadlift	Deadlift		Deadlift		Deadlift	
335						
<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>
5	220	3	235	5	255	5
5	255	3	270	3	285	5
5	285	3	305	1	320	5
Bench	Bench		Bench		Bench	
230						
<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>
5	150	3	165	5	175	5
5	175	3	185	3	200	5
5	200	3	210	1	220	5
Squat	Squat		Squat		Squat	
295						
<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i>
5	195	3	210	5	225	5
5	225	3	240	3	255	5
5	255	3	270	1	285	5

Keep in mind that you're always trying to hit more reps on your last set of each workout. The following month, you'll follow a similar progression – 5 pounds more for your upper body maxes, and 10 more pounds for your lower body maxes. Here is the next four weeks of the training cycle:

Week I	Week II	Week III	Week IV
Military 160	Military	Military	Military
<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>
5 105	3 115	5 120	5 80
5 120	3 130	3 140	5 100
5 140	3 145	1 155	5 115
Deadlift 345	Deadlift	Deadlift	Deadlift
<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>
5 225	3 245	5 260	5 175
5 260	3 280	3 295	5 210
5 295	3 315	1 330	5 245
Bench 235	Bench	Bench	Bench
<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>
5 155	3 165	5 180	5 120
5 180	3 190	3 200	5 145
5 200	3 215	1 225	5 165
Squat 305	Squat	Squat	Squat
<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Reps</i> <i>Weight</i>
5 200	3 215	5 230	5 155
5 230	3 245	3 260	5 185
5 260	3 275	1 290	5 215

Pretty simple, right? These are small, steady progressions over time that will lead to big gains, and that's what lifting is all about. You keep on increasing the max you're working from every four weeks until you can no longer hit the prescribed sets and reps.

Stalling in 5/3/1

You'll eventually come to a point where you can't make any more progress on a lift. You won't be able to hit the sets and reps you're supposed to hit, and the weights will start to get too heavy. When this happens, I simply take 90% of my max (either a 1RM or a rep max) and start all over again.

For example, let's say I did 205x4 on my military press when I first started the program. Using the rep-max calculator, my estimated max would be 230 pounds. Since I started

with 10% less, my beginning max would be 210. Over the course of six months, I worked up to a rep max of 185x10. This puts my estimated max at 245. Now, I'll take 10% of 245 (220), and begin to work my way up again. This is a matter of taking three steps forward and one step back.

You may stall out with one lift before you do with the others. When this happens, you only need to decrease the one stalled lift. If you're stalling out on multiple lifts, and you feel like everything is catching up with you, take a deload week and recalculate your maxes.

If you're really starting out with 10% less than your actual maxes, you can expect to go through 5-7 cycles at a minimum before you stall out. I've gone through 8 before having to back off.

How to Warm-up

Warming up prior to training is important. I usually recommend the following:

- 1x5 @ 40%
- 1x5 @ 50%
- 1x3 @ 60%
- Work sets

The purpose of a warm-up is to prepare yourself for a great day of work sets – not an average one. You really shouldn't need too many warm-up sets to prepare yourself for your work sets. For a more detailed full body warm-up, see the "Moving North of Vag" section later in this book.

Comparing Rep Maxes

How do you compare your 6-rep max to your 3-rep max? How do you know which one is better? Is your new 8-rep max better than your 2-rep max? I've used the following rep formula since high school. It's allowed me to assess where I am and see how my training has progressed without always having to take a true 1RM. This formula is not

necessarily an accurate predictor of your 1RM, but it affords you a good general way to gauge your progress. Here it is:

$$\text{Weight} \times \text{Reps} \times .0333 + \text{Weight} = \text{Estimated 1RM}$$

The only constant in this formula is .0333. All the other numbers will be determined by your performance. We can try a comparison to illustrate this. Let's say you deadlifted 550x9 in one workout, and in another, you managed 580x5.

$$550 \times 9 \times .0333 + 550 = 715$$

$$580 \times 5 \times .0333 + 580 = 675$$

From this, we can see that the 550x9 is a stronger rep max than the 580x5. This is best used for motivation, and for a way to mentally prepare for your workouts. Let's say you bench pressed 255x8 in your last workout. The following week, your last prescribed set is 270x3, but you want to beat last week's performance. How do you do this? First, you need to figure out what your perceived max is for 255x8.

$$255 \times 8 \times .0333 + 255 = 322$$

You want to beat this max, so the next thing to do is find out how many reps, according to the formula, this will take with 270.

$$270 \times 6 \times .0333 + 270 = 323$$

This isn't a huge increase, but it's an increase, and that's the most important thing to remember. It's going to take a couple of runs through to figure out what reps you're going to need, but this will force you to really push on your last set. It'll give you focus throughout your day and in your training.

Having a Less than Stellar Day

You're not always going to have great training days. Life is filled with distractions, and you're going to get stressed out. Combine that with a bad night's sleep or a lack of food, and you're looking at a lot of things that can potentially go wrong. The bottom line here is that you're not going to have great days all the time.

When this happens, I recommend going into the weight room with one purpose: getting your prescribed weights and leaving. The weights may feel heavy, but every part of this program is designed to build onto every other part – from one workout to the next, and one wave to the next. This week of 3x5 will earn you the right to move on to the next 3x5 week of the next wave.



5/3/1 for Powerlifting: An Overview

We can really divide up training for a meet into three phases—off-season, pre-season, and meet preparation. All phases build on to each other and are very easy to manipulate to your schedule. The problem I've run into while writing this book is keeping this easy to understand and not making it into some kind of science textbook. Maybe I'm giving myself too much credit because no one would mistake me for an academic, but training for a meet isn't hard. People seem to forget that. If you're strong, you'll lift big weights. If you're weak, you'll make excuses. There aren't two ways around it.

So with that in mind and a constant reminder to keep things easy for you, here are some basic outlines of the three phases. These phases are used with or without gear.

Off-season (you don't have a meet picked out or you're more than eight weeks out): This is when everything is pushed pretty hard—big lifts, assistance work, and conditioning. Also, this is the time to focus a little bit on one thing if need be. For example, if you really like pushing PRs, make that the priority and back off the assistance work. If you're fat as hell and need to gain muscle and lose fat, just do the main lifts (no extra reps), push the assistance work with lower rest periods and higher volume, and push the conditioning work. All of these things can be easily manipulated within the basic template.

- Perform 5/3/1 training as normal. Push the last sets hard when you're feeling good, but always leaving a rep or two in the tank.
- Push the assistance work hard to gain muscle mass, improve the basic lifts, and give balance to your training and body.
- Push the conditioning work. Keep your body lean and your mind strong. For many people, this is going to be the hardest part. You have to push through it, especially if you're severely out of shape.

Pre-meet training (you have a meet picked out): This is when things focus a bit more on improving your one rep max. Training has more of a purpose. It's best not to get

ahead of yourself and introduce the singles slowly. If you had something that you focused on during the off-season (conditioning, mass), it's time to move on and let the work you did carry itself (i.e., don't try to focus on two things at once). That's how you overtrain. Remember the goal.

- Don't push the last sets of the 5/3/1 training too hard; you can go for more reps than intended but don't go to failure. Introduce singles into your training.
- Push the assistance work but don't let it affect major lifts.
- Do enough conditioning to maintain. This can't be introduced in this phase because the added stress and work will take away from your lifting. Once a stressor has been introduced and adapted, you'll be fine.

Meet preparation (usually four to six weeks before the meet): This is when you hone and sharpen your body and mind. Nothing negative can dissuade you from your goals. Quality work is more important than quantity of work. Each work set means perfect form, strength, and speed. Failure is weakness.

- Don't push any of the last sets in your 5/3/1 training. Singles are still used until the last one to two weeks before the meet.
- Minimize the assistance work to allow focus on the main work.
- Maintain or eliminate conditioning. This is all based on recovery issues and is up to you.

What I want you to realize is that the most important factors in using the 5/3/1 program (and really any program) while preparing for a powerlifting meet are the following:

- Regulation of volume of the main work sets: There are times when you push hard on the program and other times when you leave more in the tank. The further you are out from a meet, the harder you can push the last set. The closer you are to a meet, the less pushing you will do.
- Regulation of assistance work: The off-season is when you want to push this hard. As you get closer to a meet, you have to concentrate on the main lifts.

- Introduction of singles in the 5/3/1 training program: This is very easy to do and will be explained later. This will help prepare your mind and body for some of the heavier weights.
- Regulation of conditioning: I still believe this to be paramount to overall strength and health. The further you are out from a meet, the harder you can push. The closer you are to the meet, the less you will do. Save your body and recovery for the main lifts.

All these things have to be manipulated in order for your body to peak for a meet. Too many times, people try to make up for lost time before a meet and they push too hard on the back end. This leads to overtraining, soreness, and a bad meet. Do yourself a favor and take care of business when you're supposed to. Don't cram for a meet. This isn't college.

Off-Season Training

Off-season training occurs when you're far enough out from a meet (more than eight weeks). This is when everything is pretty hard—the main lifts, assistance lifts, and conditioning. This is where you build your strength, body, and mind. This is the core of the training. The other phases are where you refine it. So take this seriously. This is when you get big and strong.

Off-season for mass

This is a template that will probably give most of you a sweatpants boner. Most people are closet bodybuilders even if they yearn to move big weights on the platform. With mass (muscle, not fat) being the goal, we have to serve that master. You can't work for everything at once. That's called overtraining and poor programming.

Main lift (first lift of the day): This is done just for the required reps. What this does is help maintain/increase your total strength without taking away from the high volume assistance work. You may find that the "just do the required reps" will actually increase your strength because you won't be pushing too hard. You'll feel fresh and fast. But please don't leave this out. You have to keep the heavier work in.

Assistance work: Because you're training to get bigger, this is the part of training you need to focus on. I highly recommend working up to a higher volume because there isn't any need to jump right into the cold water. Too many times people try to do everything all at once when they increase the volume, and in two to three workouts, they're completely burned out. So add in the increases of volume slowly. Personally, I think the "boring but big" assistance work works very well for most people (this is explained in detail in the 5/3/1 book). It's simple yet incredibly effective.

Conditioning: This needs to be done in such a way that you simply maintain your current levels (or improve slightly) but don't take away from your recovery or training. This really depends on where you're currently at and how out of shape you are. And really, if you're fat and out of shape, you probably don't need to be doing this training template.

Something as simple as three “easy” Prowler workouts a week, a couple long walks, some Strongman training after workouts (flipping tires, farmer’s walk, etc), or weighted vest walks upstairs/hills could fit the bill. None of these things should be done in such a way that they compromise your mass building capabilities.

Note: Learn how to eat big. There are two easy ways to do this, and please don’t be one of those people who will argue about this. It works.

1. Drink a gallon of milk a day. I don’t care what kind. Just do it.
2. Eat four normal meals per day. After each meal, drink a protein drink/MRP/weight gain shake in two cups of milk. Add in whatever you want to increase the calories.

That’s it. Now stop being a skinny wimp who makes excuses. Be a man of action.

Monday

- Military press, 5/3/1 sets/reps plus 1 drop set of 10–15 reps (each set of military presses should be supersetted with chin-ups or lat pull-downs)
- Dumbbell shoulder press, 5 sets of 10 reps
- Barbell curls, 5 sets of 10 reps
- Dumbbell rear raise/dumbbell lateral raise (superset), 3 sets of 10 reps each
- Conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Good morning, 4 sets of 10 reps
- Bent over rows, 4 sets of 10 reps
- Leg curls, 4 sets of 12 reps
- Abdominal wheel, 4 sets of 12 reps
- Conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 5/3/1 sets/reps plus 1 drop set of 10–15 reps (each set of bench presses should be supersetted with chin-ups or lat pull-downs)
- Dumbbell bench press, 5 sets of 10 reps
- Chest supported rows, 5 sets of 12 reps
- Triceps push-downs, 100 reps
- Face pulls, 100 reps
- Conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 5/3/1 sets/reps plus 1 drop set of 20 reps
- Leg press, 4 sets of 10 reps
- Glute ham raises, 4 sets of 10 reps
- Hanging leg raises, 4 sets of 10 reps
- Conditioning

Off-season template for strength

We all kind of need this. Hell, powerlifting is our sport and we all need to get stronger, right? But for those of you who are happy with your body fat levels and mass, you can push the main lifts a bit harder and focus on them. This is probably the best template to use overall. So if you don't know where you stand or what to do, do this. It combines all the things in more balance than the other two templates.

With this template, there is less focus and volume on the assistance work and more on the main work and setting PRs. There is more time to look at the overall training program, so pick what sets you want to go all out on (this is what I call "picking your battles") and plan your training accordingly. This is especially true for the more experienced lifters. They need less volume on the assistance work, more "good" training days than PR days, and more restoration. Lifters who fall into this category usually operate well under failure. Every week or two, pick *one* lift to really push hard. Perform the required reps on the rest of the days.

To be honest, this philosophy works well for just about everyone, besides absolute beginners. By picking and choosing your battles, you can regulate the effort of the training day based on how you feel. This is why the 5/3/1 program works so well. The program has built in autoregulation. When things feel great, you go for a record. When things are feeling bad or just OK, you can just get the required reps in and still make progress for the next workout. Remember, each workout is simply a step forward to the next. Sometimes the step is big (huge PR) and other times it's a shuffle. But you're always moving forward, which is important. You're always building.

The assistance work is done but never with any psyche—the idea to train "muscles not movements" is paramount. For example, these lifters can get more out of a 135-lb good morning than a novice can out of an all-out 225-lb effort.

For conditioning, I highly recommend pushing on the lower body days. Put all the stressful work on that day. Keep the conditioning easy on the upper body days.

Here are some sample guidelines:

- Hard conditioning: Prowler push for 15 40-yard sprints, high handles, 90 lbs, 90 seconds rest
- Easy conditioning: Prowler push for 8 40-yard sprints, high handles, 90 lbs, 60 seconds rest



Working the Prowler.

Monday

- Military press, 5/3/1 sets/ reps (each set of military presses should be supersetted with chin-ups or lat pull-downs)
- Dumbbell shoulder press, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Dips, 3 sets of 10 sets (weighted)
- Face pulls, 3 sets of 20 reps
- Barbell curls, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Conditioning, easy

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Good morning, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Bent over rows, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Leg curls, 3 sets of 12 reps
- Abdominal wheel, 4 sets of 12 reps
- Conditioning, hard

Thursday

- Bench press, 5/3/1 sets/reps (each set of bench presses should be supersetted with chin-ups or lat pull-downs)
- Dumbbell bench press, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Blast strap push-ups, 3 sets to failure
- Chest supported rows, 3 sets of 12 reps
- Rear laterals, 3 sets of 20 reps
- Conditioning, easy

Friday

- Squat, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Leg press, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Glute ham raises, 3 sets of 10-15 reps
- Hanging leg raises, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Conditioning, hHard

Off-season template for conditioning

This is very much like the off-season template for strength, only the focus is really on the conditioning part of training. The main lift is and can be pushed. Again, this depends on how good you feel and if you can recover from the actual conditioning. There will be a tradeoff and you *must* understand that. When you push the conditioning hard, your strength will suffer. So don't think that you can do both, at least not until your body starts to adapt. That can take months or even longer for some people, depending on how hard they push and what level they want to be at. If your goal is to become a powerlifter and compete in a meet, you don't have to condition like you're fighting in the UFC.

Without a doubt, the best conditioning I've used without a loss to my strength is the use of a Prowler. The simplest workout is 10 40-yard sprints with 90 lbs on the Prowler. Rest one minute between sprints. Alternate between the high perpendicular handles and the highest "low" parallel handles. Do this and you'll be pleased.

For many people, the main lift is performed for required reps (back off the training max on account of the added stress from the conditioning) along with limited assistance work and a ton of conditioning. If your conditioning is simply walking or any other standard cardio equipment, things are much easier. You can push the strength a little bit harder and the volume of the training can be increased. If you want to grow some hair on your nuts (or the metaphorical nuts if ye be lacking) and do some real work, your legs are going to take a pounding and your lifting strength will go down. However, remember that we're training for a bigger purpose. While some of these things will take your strength away in the beginning, they do make you stronger overall and can pay dividends in the long run. So don't throw something out simply because you got weaker for one workout. Look at it as an overall investment in your strength.

Monday

- Morning conditioning (optional), hard (Prowler work, hill sprints, stadium stairs)
- Military press, 5/3/1 sets/reps (each set of military presses should be supersetted with chin-ups or lat pull-downs)
- Dumbbell shoulder press, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Barbell curls, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Conditioning, hard (Prowler work, hill sprints, stadium stairs)

Tuesday

- Morning conditioning (optional), easy
- Deadlift, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Good morning, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Abdominal wheel, 4 sets of 12 reps
- Conditioning, hard (Prowler work, hill sprints, stadium stairs)

Thursday

- Morning conditioning (optional), hard (Prowler work, hill sprints, stadium stairs)
- Bench press, 5/3/1 sets/reps (each set of bench presses should be supersetted with chin-ups or lat pull-downs)
- Dumbbell bench press, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Chest supported rows, 3 sets of 12 reps
- Conditioning, hard (Prowler work, hill sprints, stadium stairs)

Friday

- Morning conditioning (optional), easy
- Squat, 5/3/1 sets/reps

- Leg press, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Hanging leg raises, 3 sets of 10 reps
- Conditioning, hard (Prowler work, hill sprints, stadium stairs)

Off-season training for the geared lifter

The above templates can be used for geared or raw lifters, but many times a lifter will need extra time in his gear to get used to it. This is why I created a specific template just for equipped lifters to get used to their gear, so they can still make raw strength gains without sacrificing recovery. I still want you to push the last sets of the raw work hard. Don't neglect that! Also, notice that with geared lifters, I took out the military press and replaced it with a 3-board press. I still think that the military press is very important. It should be used as a permanent assistance movement for geared lifters. Strong shoulders will never go out of style. However, the board work will be used to aid in the midpoint and lockout of the bench press. You can also perform a 4-board press (or whatever board works best for you.) I will provide a full, four-week template to cover all bases.

Week 1

Monday

- 3-board press, 3 sets of 3 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 80% of meet best (use suit for single)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 3 reps at 80% of meet best (use shirt for triple)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 3 reps at 80% of meet best (use suit/briefs and wraps for triple)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Week 2

Monday

- 3-board press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

*Remember that for this week you don't go for max reps on the final set. Just do the required reps and move on to the assistance work.

Week 3

Monday

- 3-board press, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet best (use suit for single)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 5/3/1, 1 set for 1 rep at 85% of meet best (use shirt for single)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 5/3/1, 1 set for 1 rep at 85% of meet best (use suit/briefs and wraps for single)

- Assistance work/conditioning

Week 4

- Deload (no equipment; train with usual deload numbers)

Note: The percentages are just guidelines for the geared lifts. I advise you to go even lower if need be.

Please remember that the percentages above are based on your meet best lifts, not what you want to do. This is because we are in off-season mode and not fully peaked for the upcoming meet. This off-season work will allow you to get used to your equipment and still train for strength. The key isn't to kill yourself with the gear. Do just enough to keep your groove and the feel of the equipment—*no more*. We're still focused on building strength, and the gear work is really secondary during this part of training. Remember, the lower the weights you can use in gear in this training and still get something out of it, the better. You will be less beat up and still reap the benefits.

Wrapping up the off-season

I hope everyone can see the similarities between all these off-season training templates. All I did was manipulate a few of the variables, but the basic *structure* has remained intact. All you have to do is add/subtract from one of the three components—main lift, assistance, or conditioning. Don't try to do too many things. Don't try to focus on strength, mass, and conditioning all at once. You can't serve two masters. Make up your mind and put the plan to work.

If you're someone who doesn't need to focus too much on one thing, every part of the training has to be done in moderation. Conditioning is pushed but don't kill yourself. The

volume of assistance work is kept right in the middle (enough to make some progress but not enough to hinder your main work sets on later training days). This is what too many people do with assistance work. They do too much on one day, and the rest of the week is screwed up because of it. (This is also known as the phenomenon of myopic training.) As for the main lifts, choose your battles. That seems to work the best.

It's best that the off-season training be done for eight or more weeks. Remember, this is where progress is made and built. Make a strong base and let's learn how to refine it.

Pre-Meet Training

Regardless of what your focus was in the off-season, it's time to focus on the meet. So you'd better be happy with your training up until now and realize that it has built the base you're now building on. The main differences between off-season training and pre-meet training are in pre-meet training there aren't any max reps, we include singles, we back off the assistance work, and we back off the conditioning to maintain. The pre-meet training lasts four weeks and will look like this if you're a raw lifter. If you don't need any practice in gear, an equipped lifter can do the following as well.

Pre-meet training for a raw lifter

Week 1

Monday

- Military press, 3 sets of 3 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

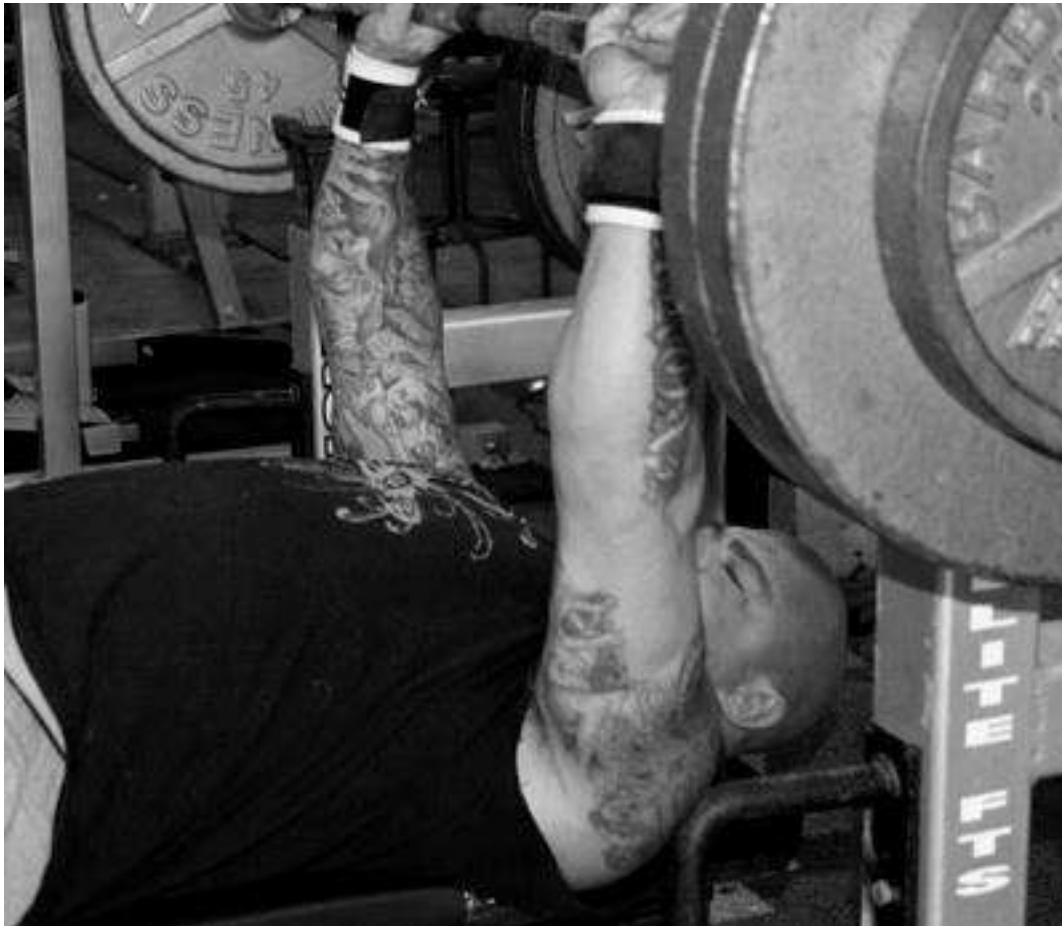
- Deadlift, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal, 1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal, 1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal, 1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning



Week 2

Monday

- Military press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Week 3

Monday

- Military press, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1, 1 set of 1 rep at 85%, 1 set of 1 rep at 95% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 5/3/1, 1 set of 1 rep at 85%, 1 set of 1 rep at 95% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 5/3/1, 1 set of 1 rep at 85%, 1 set of 1 rep at 95% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning

Week 4 (deload)

Monday

- Military press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Pre-meet training for a geared lifter

Week 1

Monday

- 3-board press, 3 sets of 3 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal, 1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal (put on suit for all singles)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal, 1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal (put on shirt for all singles)

- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal, 1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal (put on suit/briefs and wraps for all singles)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Week 2

Monday

- Military press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Week 3

Monday

- 3-board press, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1, 1 set of 1 rep at 85%, 1 set at 1 rep at 95% of meet goal (put on suit for all singles)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 5/3/1, 1 set of 1 rep at 85%, 1 set of 1 rep at 95% of meet goal (put on shirt for all singles)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 5/3/1, 1 set of 1 rep at 85%, 1 set of 1 rep at 95% of meet goal (put on suit/briefs and wraps for all singles)
- Assistance work/conditioning

Week 4 (deload)

Monday

- Military press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning



Meet Preparation Training

This is when things start tapering off and the mental games begin. Besides the body being honed to a sharp, lethal point, this is when the mental part of training begins. I want all the training for you during the meet preparation phase to be done with purpose. I want weights to fly up. I want focus on each rep of each set, even during warm ups. This isn't the time to go crazy with assistance work. In fact, I could care less if you even do it. You aren't really going to get too much stronger during this time, but you can become a hell of a lot weaker. If you've prepared for these four weeks, there isn't any question. If you've slacked off and are trying to make up for lost time, you will pay like a beggar on the platform.

I want you to focus on confidence during these weeks. There won't be any sets done without attention to making the weight feel fast and light. I want you to reach the

platform knowing that you will get each lift. I don't want any stress on the platform. Just a confidence that no one else will have.

My coach in college was Dino Babers. He was the best football coach I've ever had. He was and is a mean son of a bitch. He didn't care if you were white, black, scholarship, or walk-on. If you were good, you played. And if you sucked, he let you know. Hell, even thinking about Babers makes a cold chill go up my spine. He ran you, demanded perfection when you couldn't breathe, and never accepted any excuses ("Don't tell me about the pain. Just deliver the baby.")

The one thing he always preached was "make the game easy." That's why he pushed us so hard during practice. Halfway through practice, the running backs were war torn, raped, and bruised. By the time we got to full contact/full line, we could barely stand. But come game time, nothing seemed hard. A few plays, block someone, talk some trash, and you were done. Games were a far cry from the relentless physical and mental beatings he evoked in practice.

So what I'm trying to say is that the training up until now has prepared you for these meet preparation weeks and the meet itself. Don't make the meet harder than it already is. Don't go to a meeting without your notes. Don't speak without knowing your subject, and don't go to a meet as a mental and physical weakling.

Meet preparation training for the raw lifter

Week 1

Monday

- Military press, 3 sets of 3 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 set of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Week 2

Monday

- Military press, 3 set of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Week 3

Monday

- Military press, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Thursday

- Bench press, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Friday

- Squat, 5/3/1

Week 4 (deload)

- Week before the meet so no training
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Note: You can end the meet preparation training however you want. You can have a one-, two- or even three-week deload—whatever you want. I usually recommend only a one-week deload (so week four will lead right to the meet on Saturday). You can really do nothing on that week (actually recommended) or just the bare minimum to keep your mind healthy. *This isn't the week to retake your openers.* You've already done that numerous times, so don't be a pussy.

Meet preparation training for the geared lifter

Week 1

Monday

- 3-board press, 3 sets of 3 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal (put on suit for all singles)
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal (put on shirt for all singles)
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 3 reps, 1 set of 1 rep at 85% of meet goal (put on suit/briefs and wraps for all singles)
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)



Week 2

Monday

- Military press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Thursday

- Bench press, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Friday

- Squat, 3 sets of 5 reps
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Week 3

Monday

- 3-board press, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Thursday

- Bench press, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Friday

- Squat, 5/3/1
- Assistance work/conditioning (minimal, if at all)

Week 4 (deload)

- Week before the meet so no training

Note: You can end the meet preparation training however you want. You can have a one-, two- or even three-week deload—whatever you want. I usually recommend only a one-week deload (so week four will lead right to the meet on Saturday). You can really do nothing on that week (actually recommended) or just the bare minimum to keep your mind healthy. *This isn't the week to retake your openers.* You've already done that numerous times, so don't be a pussy.

Week of the meet

I generally don't prescribe training during this week, but it does help to keep a schedule and keep your body loose. Here are a few things that I like to do on meet week. I recommend that you keep doing basic warm ups for stretching, mobility, and soft tissue work (foam/PVC rolling). This will help keep your body and mind fresh. This isn't the time to introduce anything new or unusual. Don't begin a radical new therapy unless an injury prompts it.

Picking attempts

I have a huge thorn in my side regarding this. Huge. I can't tell you how many meets I've been to where people's openers look like their all-time max attempts plus 10 lbs. I don't understand this at all. In fact, I think people choose their openers to impress others, not to do well at the meet. I guess we all have our odd fetishes, but impressing men with my opener at a powerlifting meet is not one of them. I've talked extensively with John Bott about this phenomenon. There are few people I respect more in the sport than John. He has always been a voice of reason. We both agreed that the following attempts suit most lifters but may not satisfy that opener ego of yours.

- Attempt 1: 85% of goal
- Attempt 2: 92.5% of goal
- Attempt 3: 100% of goal

I want you to crush your opener. The most stressful time at a meet is prior to the opening squat. Once you get this in, you're golden. Confidence is high, and the pressure is off. If you destroy your opener, you'll be able to walk back to the platform knowing that you're on track. If you get crushed, your confidence will be shot and your plans for the meet will have been ripped and torn (obvious Slayer reference!).

Obviously, to pick your openers, you have to have a goal for the meet. Once you have that, all you need is a calculator or a private education to figure out your attempts.

N.O.V. Powerlifting



North of Vag—this is more than a style of lifting or training. It's a way of life. This has taken off and become a rallying cry for people frustrated with the emasculation of society. This emasculation has made its way into the lifting world, and I will fight like hell to get it out. There are now people writing, talking, teaching, instructing, and coaching strength that have none. There are people who have marginalized strength training, trivialized squatting and deadlifting, and somehow convinced others that strength isn't important. Why? Because they aren't strong. They don't have the desire to be strong. They don't have the discipline to put a heavy bar on their backs or the guts to pull something heavy.

At a certain point, we have to take a stand. And the point has come. I'm done with the people trying to make this more complicated than it is. You want to have a good meet? Be strong. That's it. Be strong mentally. Be strong physically.

So here's the N.O.V. powerlifting template. This is to be performed throughout the year, except for the last cycle for the meet. Push the last set hard when you're feeling good. If not, go for the minimum reps and move on. Conditioning should consist of Prowler sprints, hill sprints, inclined treadmill sprints, sled sprints, sled pulls, any kind of Strongman implement, weighted vest work, jumping rope, body weight circuits, and whatever else you can come up with. If it isn't awesome, don't do it. If your grandmother does it for "cardio," don't do it.

N.O.V. template

This is a year-round training template, save for the last four weeks or so before a meet. This makes things easy for you. There isn't any real thinking. It's just pure barbarism. Train hard for PRs, do some assistance work, and go run. This is the essence of training. Don't let people fool you with their house of cards. Being strong and being in shape is where it's at. It takes time. It takes heart. Do this and the only things you'll lose are fat and the paralysis that encompasses the training world. Do this and the things you will gain are innumerable and immeasurable. You will gain strength of mind, body, and soul. There aren't any drugs, therapy, 12-step programs, or self-help nonsense that can compare to getting strong and running hard. When you lay in a heap at the top of a hill, you want two things—water and oxygen. When these two things are the most important things in your life, things start becoming very, very easy. A total transformation will occur, lifelong.

Monday:

- Standing military press, 5/3/1 sets/ reps
- 2–3 assistance lifts
- Hard conditioning

Tuesday:

- Deadlift, 5/3/1 sets/ reps
- 2–3 assistance lifts
- Hard conditioning

Thursday:

- Bench press, 5/3/1 sets/ reps

- 2–3 assistance lifts
- Hard conditioning

Friday:

- Squat, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- 2–3 assistance lifts
- Hard conditioning

Prepping for a Meet—N.O.V.

This is for the last four weeks before a meet. It's the same basic template with just a few changes.

- Don't go for max reps; just get the minimum.
- Cut the conditioning down to things that are easy to recover from or completely remove it.
- Cut back on the assistance work; focus on the main lifts.
- In the last week before the meet, don't do any training.
- At the meet, kick ass. No excuses. You're strong, in shape, and ready.

After a Meet—N.O.V.

Take a week or three off. Go build yourself in other ways. Be passionate about something else during the time you usually train. Read some books. Write. Volunteer. Take a road trip. Keep the mind and soul strong. Rest the body. This time off won't make you weaker but will allow you to build the fire to once again train hard.

N.O.V isn't just about training. It's about being more than what is passed off as "being a man" in today's world. It's about passion and the fulfillment of personal goals and

relationships. Success won't be measured by someone else's standards—just your own.

Training for the Non-Competitive Powerlifter

Many of you out there have a desire to get on the platform and simply want to get stronger. For most, the standard 5/3/1 program will work fine. Simple, slow progress over time is always the answer. But we all have egos and nothing indicates penis size better than displaying maximal strength on barbells. So if you're a dedicated lifter who wants to improve his rep PRs and one rep max strength, here's the simple program to follow:

Week 1: 3 sets of 3 reps, work up to a heavy single (no more than 95% of predicted max)

Week 2: 3 sets of 5 reps

Week 3: 5/3/1, work up to a heavy single (no more than 95% of predicted max)

Week 4: Deload

You don't have to do a single every week, and you don't have to go too heavy. Just push/pull a weight that is fairly heavy and move on. There isn't anything special or magical about this. It's easy to implement into your training without disrupting it or making any huge changes. Every once in a while or when you feel really strong, try for a new max, but here are two big warnings:

1. Don't shortchange your last set every week to work up. Keep pushing that last set hard. This is where gains are made. Remember, it's better to build strength than to test it.
2. Don't continually ask if you should change your training max if you work up and set a PR. Stay the course and don't change it.

Old Man Winter: Training for Mr. Gray Pubes

I'm training in the weight room today, and I realized that I left out the one thing that changed my training in the last year. I've written about it extensively in my training log and shared it with anyone who would listen, but it needs to be written here, too. This is what motivated me to do a meet again and allowed me to train hard.

For the record, I don't have gray pubes.

The simple origin of this was an email lashing from Paul Carter about my training. After experimenting with two, three, and four days of training a week, it was painfully obvious that training twice a week was the best option for me. Unfortunately, decades of training dogma got the best of me. Every time I trained twice a week and felt great, I'd quickly move right back to training four days a week. It's like going back to that crazy ex-girlfriend just for the sex. I couldn't break the cycle.

Paul got on my case and told me what was right in front of me—my body had reached a point where weight training twice a week was what was best for me. Here is the general template that I used:

Week 1

Monday

- Squat, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Assistance exercises (can add in some light deadlifts after this, preferably the weights you'd use on your deload week – this is great to get some form work and extra work in for deadlifting).
- Conditioning work

Wednesday

- Bench, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Assistance exercises

- Conditioning work

Thursday

- Conditioning work

Week 2

Monday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Assistance exercises (can add in some light squats after this, preferably the weights you'd use on your deload week – this is great to get some form work and extra work in for squatting).
- Conditioning work

Wednesday

- Press, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Assistance exercises
- Conditioning work

Thursday

- Conditioning work

The only change I made with the sets/reps is that I never took a deload week with this training. There is enough rest and recuperation with this training that you don't need a deload week.

The one problem is that it takes longer to go through a training cycle (six weeks rather than four), but now that you're old and decrepit, those are the breaks. I can't emphasize how much this changed my training and well-being. I was able to push hard and give each day the attention it needed, not just go through the motions and take 45 minutes to warm up for a sub-par workout. Every workout had purpose.

The training is a bit deceiving because it looks pretty easy, but the conditioning work is brutal. I don't dance on an elliptical or stroll on the treadmill. I push the Prowler and run hills. So the training is still very hard overall, just not the standard.

Assistance work is whatever you want. You have gray pubes, so you know what to do.

Strong(er)



Assistance Work

Holy hell. If I had a nickel for every question I've been asked about assistance work in this program, I'd be lighting cigars I don't smoke with \$100 bills. I can understand the questions, but the bottom line is that assistance work isn't as important as the main work. In fact, assistance work can severely take away from the main work. I see people trying to win in assistance work but only care to place or show with their main lifts. You want to perform assistance work for three reasons—to bring up your main lifts, provide balance to your body, and add muscle mass. There is a lot of confusion as to what to do, so here are some of the best assistance lifts for each main lift.

Deadlift/squat

Good morning: These can be done with a variety of bars—safety squat bars, cambered squat bars, straight bars, or buffalo bars. The key to the good morning isn't to handle a ton of weight but to strengthen the lower back, glutes, and hamstrings. If at any time you have to drop your hips and dip under the weight to get it up, you aren't doing it correctly, and more times than not, you're handling too much weight. Get more out of less. That's what I tell all the women I sleep with.

Leg presses: Although not as well revered among the Order of the Free Weight, the leg press allows you to strengthen the quads to a large degree. This is especially important for conventional deadlifters and raw squatters. Just make sure you use a full range of motion. Don't be that dude who wraps his knees and puts his hands on his thighs when doing this exercise.

Glute ham raises: Glute ham raises are great for strengthening the hamstrings. If you don't have access to a glute ham raise, don't worry. You can do good mornings, back raises, leg curls, straight leg deadlifts, or any variation of these. I get asked all the time about natural glute ham raises and I think they suck. Why? Because they suck. They are like Zercher squats in that they're a red flag to newbie-ism.

Leg curls: Many, many strong lifters have used leg curls as part of their programs. Leg curls are quite unpopular among the posterior chain crew, but they also do glute bridges, so fuck 'em.

Back raises: Back raises are done on a hyper extension bench, glute ham raise, or 45-degree back raise. These are great for strengthening your lower back and hamstrings. Put a bar on your back to be extra strong.

Reverse hypers: Reverse hyperextensions are another great exercise for developing your lower back, glutes, and hamstrings. I like doing these with or without weight. When doing these without weight, try to hold your legs at the top and do a slow and controlled movement.

Bent over rows: These are great for developing lockout power in the deadlift and overall “back of the body” strength. Please don’t be the dude who does half reps and wears straps. I rest the bar on the floor after each rep. I don’t wear straps.

Kroc rows: These have become legendary in the strength world. A Kroc row is a one-arm dumbbell row done with the heaviest dumbbell you can handle. Reps are usually around 20–50. This is great for developing great grip strength and upper back strength for the deadlift. If you have problems holding on to the bar during a pull, make these a priority in your training.

Abdominal work: There are tons of different abdominal movements that can be done, but the most important thing is to do *something*! My personal favorites are hanging leg raises, the abdominal wheel, weighted sit-ups, and dumbbell side bends. Make these a priority.

Bench press

Dumbbell pressing: These include pressing at any angle, overhead, on an incline, or on a bench. I’ve used all these with much success. For the bench and incline presses, I like to pause at the bottom, stay tight for a few seconds, and explode up. This is great for starting strength off your chest.

Dips: I love doing dips because they’re great for developing pressing power in your triceps, shoulders, and chest. You can do these weighted or unweighted.



Standing presses: You're already doing these as part of your training, but they're great for your bench press. I credit this lift with increasing my bench press more than any other movement.

Board presses: The 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-board presses are great for developing lockout power and working where you fail. These are only recommended for geared lifters. Please don't learn how to heave the weight off the board. Do them with purpose, not to become a better board presser.

Incline presses: This is another great lift for your shoulders, chest, and triceps. I hope I don't have to explain this one. Any angle is fine.

Swiss bar/football bar: This bar has neutral handles (rather than having your hands pronated). This is very good for triceps strength and for easing the stress on your shoulders. These can also be done with the standing press.



Log presses: Provided you have access to a Strongman log, these are great for supine and standing presses. Plus, they look awesome.

Lat work: Do any and all kinds including chin-ups/pull-ups, lat pull-downs, bent over rows, dumbbell rows, Kroc rows, chest supported rows, and T-Bar rows. They're all good options. As a rule of thumb, for every pressing rep that you do, strive to do two pulling reps (including your pressing warm ups into the equation). I've never met a powerlifter who couldn't do some more lat work.

Upper back work: Do any and all kinds including face pulls, rear raises, strict clean and presses (without any leg drive), seated snatches, Cuban presses, rear lateral machine presses, and band pull-aparts. Do them because they will give you balance and a large upper back.

Curls: Yeah, curls. Strong arms make a strong lifter. Don't forget these in your training. A few sets a week can go a long way.

Assistance work template

Putting these together can be troublesome, but that's why you've come to me. Let me help sort all this out. Here is a basic template that you can use to mix/match some of the different exercises and not feel overwhelmed.

Monday

- Military press, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Bent over rows, 5 sets of 10 reps
- Weighted dips, 5 sets of 10 reps
- Barbell curls/rear laterals, superset these two exercises for 3–5 sets of 10–20 reps

Tuesday

- Deadlift, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Good morning, 5 sets of 10 reps
- Abdominal wheel, 5 sets of 15 reps

Thursday

- Bench press, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Dumbbell bench press, 5 sets of 10 reps
- Chin-ups, 5 sets of 10 reps (can be performed with body weight, assisted, or added weight)
- Triceps push-downs/face pulls, 100 reps each

Friday

- Squat, 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Leg press, 5 sets of 10 reps
- Hanging leg raises, 5 sets of 20 reps

Note: You can see with this template that we're able to train the muscles needed with each lift without overdoing it. There isn't any need for a thousand different exercises per workout. Just pick one and work hard. When you want to switch them up, do so. There isn't any reason why you can't stay with one for a few months. If good mornings are what make your back strong, keep doing them. If you want to switch every month, you can do that, too. Just be sure that you're always hitting the proper muscles when you choose assistance work.

You can choose to do all your sets with the same weight or pyramid up. There's no sense in being a slave to one method of loading. Some weeks you might feel good and go up. Other weeks you might want to stick with a lighter weight and stay with it.

The sets and reps are really up to you. Just don't max out on these lifts. They should be done without a training psyche. Don't major in assistance work. There isn't any sense in studying for a degree in dumbbell benching because it won't get you anywhere.



To Pause or Not to Pause: The Bench Press

There isn't any real answer to this. Some people feel they need to pause all their benches in order to get ready for the meet. Others don't need any practice and can do fine at a meet without that preparation.

When benching in a shirt, the pause isn't that big of a deal because the bar is coming down much, much slower than in a raw bench. Because there is a small sweet spot on the bench, this lower eccentric phase allows you to find that spot. In addition, a bench shirt gives a tremendous explosion off the chest, which is commonly the weakest point in the natural strength curve. When training in a shirt, the pause is almost natural.

However, it may help to have your training partners give you a “press” command once the bar is motionless on your chest. This will help you get ready for meet conditions. My advice? Don't wait for the command—anticipate it.

For a raw bencher, the pause is a bigger deal. The bottom of the bench is the weakest portion of the press, and by pausing, you take away some of that stretch reflex. A good

bencher will stay extremely tight in this position. This isn't a time to relax in any way. Your hands should be tight, feet driven hard into the ground, and ass clenched. *Never* let out your air.

I've noticed a big difference between "touch and go" benches and paused benches with beginners. This is usually because beginners don't stay tight throughout the movement and dive bomb the eccentric phase. This usually results in a big bounce off the chest. Older, more experienced lifters have learned that while a fast eccentric phase can be beneficial, you also have to come down under control. This allows for the correct path of the bar on the way down. So while these lifters may touch and go, it's very much under control. When a pause is used in training or in a meet, the difference is minimal.

If you do choose to use a pause in your training, be sure to base your percentages on your paused max, not your touch and go max. Overall, I think the stress some lifters feel over the pause at a meet is completely unnecessary. It isn't terribly long, and if you remain intense and tight, it won't matter. All you need to focus on is staying tight, lowering slowly, waiting for the press command, and exploding up. Don't overthink this. The minute you put too much emphasis on such a small issue, you'll start doubting and worrying.

Using Knee Warps

Knee wraps have been part of the squatting world for a long time, but many people have ditched them in recent years. They see knee wraps as an unnecessary hassle in getting prepared to get on the platform, and the limited carryover many have from them deems them an expendable part of the squatter's gear box. This is mainly for lifters who use equipment. This is because the squatting style while wearing a suit is vastly different than squatting without one. Sitting far back and using a wide stance (as one does with equipment) doesn't allow for knee wraps to be used effectively. There is less bounce out of the hole. Still, people claim they do get 30–50 lbs out of their knee wraps when using equipment. This is a decision you will have to make.

When lifting without a suit, knee wraps are a no brainer (provided you choose to lift in them). A closer stance, emphasis on using more legs than back, and a quicker descent allow knee wraps to do their job. How you choose to implement them into your training is really up to you. Some people freak out when they first put knee wraps on. They're tight and uncomfortable and can affect your technique. Also, they can make the walk out more difficult. My suggestion is don't use knee wraps for your training sets. Build your strength without them. If you do need some knee protection and warmth, I highly recommend using knee sleeves. You can keep them on between sets, they can offer some pop to your squat, and they can do wonders for knee health. There are numerous brands and styles out there. Just choose one that fits tightly but comfortably.

When you do want to get used to knee wraps, I recommend using them on a few warm-up sets. This will allow you to get used to them without the added stress of heavy weight on your back. You can focus on getting your walk out and set up correct and your technique with wraps honed in. You can also see how different it is in the hole with wraps. With a good, tight wrap, the explosion out of the hole is unreal, so be careful of the bar coming off your back.

If you do need more practice in knee wraps before a meet, make sure you don't alter your training maxes for the wraps. Keep them the same. Once you do get used to

them, wear them for your heavier singles so you know what it feels like with weights close to your max.

Box Squats Versus Free Squats

There has been a lot of debate on which is better for developing squatting strength—box squats or free squats. Arguments can be made for both. In general, the box squat has a better carryover to geared squatting than raw squatting. A geared squat uses less bounce out of the hole. It can be done with a wider stance and allows you to sit back much further. These things can be emphasized while box squatting.

For a raw squat, the box squat isn't as effective. This is mainly because the raw squat needs a rapid bounce out of the hole and a push off the hamstrings at the bottom. By using a box, this alters your technique and style. You're learning a different way of squatting. I've seen many people use the box squat for raw training and consistently fail at the bottom without the box. The strength, timing, and tightness are all alien when the box is taken away.

Obviously, free squatting while using gear has been used for years and has been proven to work. The good thing about using a box is that you aren't as sore after training, so your recovery is certainly better. However, the fact that you aren't as sore should tell you something—you aren't using the same muscles as you would during a free squat.

Another popular argument in using a box for squatting is that it allows a lifter to know where parallel is. For a raw squatter, this is a ridiculous statement. At some time, you're going to have to learn where parallel is and it might as well be now. Get rid of the damn box, grow some balls, and get down there. Even a light tap on the box (which many people use) isn't a good idea. You're still searching for the box and altering your form. You can't learn how to effectively bounce out of the hole with a box underneath you. Well, I guess you can, but that's your spine, not mine. So stop pussyfooting around and do it right.

With gear squatting, a box should be low enough to illicit results and offer proper form while being high enough to save your hips. Because most people who wear gear use a stance wider than shoulder width, the squatting can take a toll on your hips. I highly recommend using briefs or a squat suit (straps down) for your sets.

If you use a narrow stance and wear equipment, the choice is yours. However, I recommend using free squatting rather than box squatting in your training. This is because a narrower stance, even if you use equipment, uses a bigger bounce out of the hole, and your gear will be vastly different than what is used by wide stance squatters. If it isn't, it should be.

The only caveat to this is health. Box squatting can be much easier on your knees than free squatting. If box squatting allows you to squat regularly without knee pain, *do it!* I'd rather have you perform a squatting movement than no movement at all.

It's paramount that your box squat form looks like your free squat form, gear or no gear. I've seen countless people take the "sit back" command way too seriously. Their shins are at an obtuse angle to their feet. Think about it this way—if someone were to take the box out from under you while you were sitting on it, you should be able to hold that position and squat out of it. Another thing I've noticed is that people relax too much on the box. I think this is a horrible idea. Even when wearing gear, you should never relax your body. Stay extremely tight throughout the entire movement. Don't relax anything.

Choosing a Shoe

I get asked this question all the time. What shoe is best for squatting? You have two basic types—a flat-soled shoe and a shoe with a raised heel (commonly referred to as an Olympic lifting shoe). For a wider squatter, the flat-soled shoe is recommended. This is because the flat sole allows you to sit back further into the squat and thus use the suit more effectively.

My first recommendation is the Metal squat shoe. They're sold exclusively through Metal Gear and available on their website. The Metal squat shoes are expensive but well worth it. I've had two pairs in seven years, and they've stood up in hundreds of squatting and deadlifting sessions. However, the most popular choice is Converse's Chuck Taylor high top. These are available everywhere and are inexpensive. Though they look like ass, they do a good job. Adidas Sambas are another shoe I've lifted in and they work as well as the Chuck Taylors.

All these shoes are good for raw squatting, although I prefer using an Olympic shoe. I wavered back and forth on this for awhile but have come to the conclusion that these shoes are the better choice for a raw squatter. They lock your feet into the ground and give you an extremely strong base to squat from, and the raised heel complements a raw squat perfectly. While you must sit back into a raw squat, your knees have to travel forward to emphasize your quads. These shoes allow you to do that perfectly. The only problem I had with these shoes is the walk out on the squat. It took a while to get used to and I'm still not entirely comfortable with it, but countless Olympic lifters have squatted massive weights while walking the weights out. So it's just a matter of me sucking it up, not thinking about it, and growing a pair.

For benching, wear whatever you want. Match your singlet.

For deadlifting, I recommend using any of the flat-soled shoes listed above. I've seen some people use deadlift slippers. I just don't know if I can justify wearing slippers at any time.

Squatting in Gear

A squat done with gear is much different than a raw squat. As mentioned before, squatting with a suit allows you to sit back into a squat. What this does is load the suit and give you more pop out of the hole. The further you can sit back into the suit (within reason), the better the suit will work.

I can distinctly remember my walk to the platform when I squatted 1000 lbs. I kept telling myself to be patient and push back. I knew that if I did those two things, I'd get the lift. When you push hard into the suit, good things can happen, but it isn't that easy. The further and harder you push back, the harder it is to maintain proper back position. In other words, you feel like you're going to fold over. So many times a lifter will push back into a suit and not have the strength to maintain the proper position. When this happens, the knees shift forward and the back loses its arch. From here, the lifter can either hope that he can reach parallel and come up or get some help from the army of spotters.

While squat suits can add hundreds of pounds to your squat, you have to be strong enough to handle the weight correctly. Maintaining proper position isn't easy. Obviously, a steady diet of strength training is in order—squatting, deadlifting, good mornings, abdominal work, and mobility work. But here some more tips that can help you:

- Before taking off the bar, take a deep breath and hold it low (“in your stomach”). Don’t hold that air in your chest. Think about keeping everything low and toward your belly button.
- Once you take the bar off, keep your air in and set up. If you're using a monolift, I recommend keeping this air in the entire time. If you're walking out, hold that air until you're set up. Let some out and get a big breath of air before you squat. Again, that air needs to be held low.
- While a wide grip on the bar can save you some shoulder pain, I highly recommend taking a narrower grip on the bar. You don't necessarily need a narrow grip but a narrower grip. This allows you to keep your upper back (and now lower back) arched and it provides a bigger, thicker shelf to put the bar on.

Also, this stops many lifters from falling forward in the squat. You have less of a chance of your elbows going back, not down. Having your elbows down during the squat allows your hips to come up underneath you.

- Make sure the bar isn't whipping around before you squat. Have your handler give you a “go” or “now” verbal cue when the bar has settled. This isn't a big deal if you're squatting lighter weights, but once the weights start nearing the 700-lb mark, I don't recommend it.
- When taking weights out of a monolift (and not walking them out), plant your feet firmly on the ground and place gentle pressure on the bar. Where do you feel the pressure on your feet? It should be centered perfectly. If the weight is too far on your heels or toes, adjust your feet and try again. A perfect set up in a monolift is essential to a big squat.
- When squatting in gear, carry the bar higher than you would without gear. Because of the thickness of the straps, very few people can carry the bar low. You can't feel it, and the bar will roll off your back. People have a hard time with this, so be sure you understand how this will change your squatting mechanics. When I started doing this, I altered my squat form to get used to it. All my box squatting work, even with just briefs, was performed with the bar carried higher. It was odd at first, but it soon became second nature.
- When you begin your descent, push your knees out *and* your butt back. This should happen at the same time. As you push back and out, keep your head and eyes focused perfectly. The goal of the “push back and out” is to get into the perfect position to squat *down*. Remember that you have to squat down at some point.
- Your descent should be slow enough to maintain proper position but fast enough so that you don't get tired and take away the stretch reflex at the bottom.
- During the descent, fight hard to maintain that position. This is the hardest part of the squat for many people. The harder you fight on the way down to do it correctly, the easier it will be to come up.

- Once you reach the proper depth (and I'm not even going to go into that!), you have to explode up. This isn't a time to ease into the movement. Keep your air in until you are about three-quarters of the way up.

Fitting a squat suit and briefs

This is all very individual, but here are some points that have helped me and countless others. Squat suits should fit very tightly but not so much that the lifter is distracted during or between attempts or sets.

- If you are a wide stance squatter, make sure the legs of the suit aren't too long. This will force your knees in and won't allow you to squat with proper form. I have taken two to four inches off the length of certain squat suits just to get it to fit correctly. The same applies for briefs.
- The legs should be tight but not tight enough to cut off the circulation. This is probably the biggest problem I see with squat suits. Numb, purple legs aren't strong squat legs. The same goes for briefs.
- While the legs should be tight and comfortable, the hips should be very tight. If you have a stock squat suit, get the legs fitting comfortably first and then the hips. Usually the hips need to be brought in. Again, the same applies for briefs.
- The torso should be comfortable, but it shouldn't inhibit your breathing. The suit or briefs shouldn't be painted on!
- If allowable, get Velcro straps on your suit. This makes it easier to get the suit on and off between attempts and easier to adjust for attempts. If this isn't an option (meaning your federation doesn't allow it), make sure the straps are tight enough to push against but not so tight that they fold you over. A very strong geared lifter can use very tight straps and get a lot more out of the suit. The problem is when a novice geared lifter (no matter how many years of training he has under his belt) uses tight straps. He isn't used to the pressure and the pull that these straps have. Tight straps can dump you hard. So it's best to have looser straps when

you first learn and then get them tighter as you get stronger and more comfortable.

Benching in a Shirt

Like squatting in a suit, benching in a shirt is vastly different than raw benching. But you don't need to be a Rhodes Scholar to figure this one out. If you walked into a gym and saw someone sans bench shirt benching really low, you'd probably point and laugh them out of the gym. Pressing with a shirt has turned into this mythical activity. You hear sightings of 365-lb raw pressers benching 700 lbs at the meet. There are seminars held on how to use a shirt. If people bomb out of a bench meet (if you're one of the 75 percent that do), they always blame their shirt. But the bottom line is that if you're strong, you'll bench big, provided you took some time to get comfortable in a shirt.

Scott Yard is one of the best geared benchers of all time. In talking to him, I was hoping to pick up some secret tips on getting more out of my shirt. His secret technique? "Bring it to your dick; throw it to your face." What this means is, "bring the bar low, and press it back toward your face." While people point to a million reasons why they failed at a meet, dumped a bar, or lost the groove, the only reason is this—the shirt was too tight for the weight they could handle. That's all that it comes down to.

So please stop the excuses and just be honest with yourself. If the bar hovers an inch over your chest for ten seconds and you dump the bar, it's because the shirt was too tight and you couldn't handle the weight. If the shirt was bigger, the bar would have come down fine. And if you can't press it with that shirt, you're too weak. I'm far from the smartest man alive, but this simple conundrum seems easy to figure out.

Now that we can all agree on that, let's move on to some simple tips on benching in a shirt.

- When receiving the hand out for the bench, make sure you get the bar out over your lats. Too many people take it out and have it supported on their upper backs. This isn't good. If you begin the descent of the bar with it high above your

traps/upper back, you will get bound up. So make sure your lift off is brought out to you so that the bar is above your lats. It should almost feel like it's too low.

- Make sure your elbows are *out* at the beginning, not tucked in. This causes bent elbows at the start with the weight being too heavily placed on the elbows. Also, this prevents you from starting the bench properly.
- Start the lift by breaking the elbows first. Break them *out* and to the sides. This helps lock the bench shirt into place on your triceps. Once you move the bar down a few inches, you will feel the pressure on your triceps. When you do, tuck your elbows hard.
- As you bring the bar down, you need to bring it low. Your wrists are going to have to be cocked back, and your elbows need to be tucked hard. Make sure your stomach is extended (*get fat!*) as much as possible.
- When the bar is being brought down at first, make sure it is done slowly. Once you're locked into the proper path, try to accelerate the bar down quickly. This doesn't mean relax or lose control, but you have to bring the bar down fast. Only do this when you know the bar is locked in the perfect position.
- Once the bar touches your chest, the press should be up *and* back toward your face. Don't just press up. Don't go crazy. Push in with force but caution. Trying to go too fast off the bottom often results in a sloppy form on the way up and a lost lift (the bar usually only goes up and not back). So press with hate but control!
- As the bar is about halfway up, start transitioning your elbows from a tucked to an elbows out position. The bar should be moving back towards your face in a "C" motion.
- As the bar is getting closer to a locked out position, your elbows should be out and the bar over your face. Finish the lift.
- Don't be that guy who stands on the bench after setting a PR thumping his chest.

Fitting a bench shirt

- The sleeves should be tight but not so tight that they cut off the circulation of your arms. This is one of the biggest problems when wearing a bench shirt. Holding a barbell over your face with numb arms and hands is rarely a good idea.
- The shoulders should be tight. “Cap” your shoulders, but they can’t be so tight that they force your shoulders in and prevent you from being able to keep your upper back and lats pulled back and together.
- The chest plate will make a huge difference. The tighter it is, the more pop you'll have off the bottom. However, it will be harder to touch, and the shirt may blow out. So you'll have to find a happy medium.

Deadlifting in a Suit



The hardest thing about deadlifting in a suit is that it is terribly uncomfortable. The best deadlift suit is the Metal Deadlift suit. It gives tremendous pop out of the bottom and can carry you through the top. The down fall is that it feels like your crotch is being ripped off. A deadlift suit should be tight enough to give you a great start off the floor while still maintaining good position. Also, it has to be loose enough for you to reach the bar and lower your hips. I always liked (and most people do) a suit that is snug around the legs, looser at the hips than a squat suit (this will allow you to reach the bar) and straps tight enough to give you support and pop. The straps, if too tight, will negatively affect your form and not allow you to pick up the bar.

The deadlift suit is really a series of compromises with the fit until you get confident and strong enough to use a tighter suit. Of all the equipment worn in modern powerlifting this is the easiest to dial in.



Rich T. Baggins Squat Cycle



This is something I developed for Rich “T. Baggins” Douglas because he wanted a squat cycle that mirrored one he had grown familiar with—multiples sets of two reps (this was inspired by the squat cycles done at Westside Barbell). However, he also wanted something a little more concrete and progressive. This squat cycle has its roots in the 5/3/1—just the reps change. The last sets are never taken for as many reps as you can get. Just do the scheduled reps.

I've been asked by many people who have seen this if this set and rep protocol can be used for the other lifts. I don't see why not, but I've never tried it and have no idea if it would work or not. The benefits of this kind of set and rep protocol are that you have more sets to practice your stance, technique, and set up. You're doing twice as many sets per week as you normally would with the regular 5/3/1 program. Also, you aren't

taking the last set to failure, which is a good way for people to regulate their training a bit more. Instead of going balls to the wall all the time, this will allow them to train hard but not too hard.

The bad thing is you aren't getting the hypertrophy work for the higher reps (so you won't get as big), and you aren't setting yourself up for rep records (so you won't see progress every week). Also, you won't get as big (muscle mass) as you will with the regular set/rep scheme.

I only recommend this set/rep training for an experienced lifter or someone who is having a hard time mentally committing to the standard 5/3/1 sets/reps.

Rich used this training with both the box squat *and* the free squat, but he never mixed them. Choose one or the other based on your training, goals, experience, and needs. Rich always wore briefs during the sets. This is encouraged if you're a geared lifter. Obviously, it isn't if you compete raw.

The same progression applies as normal—10-lb increases to your training max every cycle.

There are two variations to this squat cycle—normal and changing your first and second weeks. This will allow you to have a lighter (medium) week between two heavier weeks followed by a deload. So essentially the four-week cycle is heavy, medium, heavy, and light.

Variation 1

Week 1

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85%

Week 2

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90%

Week 3

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85%
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95%

Week 4 (deload)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Variation 2

Week 1

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90%

Week 2

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75%

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85%

Week 3

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85%
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95%

Week 4 (deload)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Circa Max Training for the Squat

This is very similar to the Rich T. Baggins squat cycle. The only difference is that you *don't* increase the bar weight. You increase the band tension in each cycle. I *only* recommend this squat cycle for those who have gone through a circa max phase before (and have had success) or who need something drastically different. This is a 12- to 16-week training cycle that is followed by whatever deload you need. For most people, the deload will last only one to three weeks before the meet.

People have asked me many times how to prepare for this kind of training. The first eight to 12 weeks will prepare you for the hardest part, and if you need preparation for the first eight to 12 weeks, you shouldn't be using this training cycle (or lifting in general!).

The circa max training is only for the geared lifter because we're using bands. You can use the box squat or free squat. Just don't mix and match *during* the cycle. Choose one.

For those with a lot of experience with bands, choose your training max by what you want the last week of the heavy band phase to be. So if you want the last set with strong/average bands to be around 500 lbs, set your training max to 525 lbs (500 lbs is 95 percent of 525 lbs).

If you want, you can wear briefs/suit (straps down) for the strong/average band phase. This is up to you. Obviously, if you only wear a suit (or can't/don't wear briefs), just wear your suit with the straps down for all sets and all weeks.

For the deload weeks, *do not use bands*. In fact, for some older lifters, you don't even have to squat that week. Just take the week off from squatting and focus on recovery measures such as flexibility, mobility, foam rolling, and massage.

Circa max training, variation I

(The first four weeks are optional.)

Week 1 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus light bands

Week 2 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus light bands

Week 3 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus light bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus light bands

Week 4 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60% (or full equipment—1 set of 3 reps at 80% of meet goal)

Week 5 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus average bands

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus average bands

Week 6 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus average bands

Week 7 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus average bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus average bands

Week 8 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60% (or full equipment—1 set of 2 reps at 85% of meet goal)

Week 9 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong bands

Week 10 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus strong bands

Week 11 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus strong bands

Week 12 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60% (or full equipment—1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal)

Week 13 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong/average bands

Week 14 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus strong/average bands

Week 15 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong/average bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus strong/average bands

Week 16 (deload, no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Circa max training, variation 2

(The first four weeks are optional.)

Week 1 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus light bands

Week 2 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus light bands

Week 3 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus light bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus light bands

Week 4 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60% (or full equipment—1 set of 3 reps at 80% of meet goal)

Week 5 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus average bands

Week 6 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus average bands

Week 7 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus average bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus average bands

Week 8 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60% (or full equipment—1 set of 2 reps at 85% of meet goal)

Week 9 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus strong bands

Week 10 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong bands

Week 11 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus strong bands

Week 12 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60% (or full equipment—1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal)

Week 13 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus strong/average bands

Week 14 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong/average bands

Week 15 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong/average bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus strong/average bands

Week 16 (deload, no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Circa max training, variation 3

(The first four weeks are optional.)

Week 1 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus light bands

Week 2 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus light bands (full equipment—1 set of 3 reps at 80% of meet goal)

Week 3 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus light bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus light bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus light bands

Week 4 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Week 5 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus average bands

Week 6 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus average bands (full equipment—1 set of 2 reps at 85% of meet goal)

Week 7 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus average bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus average bands

Week 8 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Week 9 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus strong bands

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus strong bands

Week 10 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong bands (full equipment—1 set of 1 rep at 92.5% of meet goal)

Week 11 (briefs)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus strong bands

Week 12 (briefs, deload; no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Week 13 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 70% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 80% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 90% plus strong/average bands

Week 14 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 65% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong/average bands

Week 15 (briefs, suit, straps down)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 75% plus strong/average bands
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 85% plus strong/average bands
- 1 set of 2 reps at 95% plus strong/average bands

Week 16 (deload, no bands)

- 2 sets of 2 reps at 40%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 50%
- 2 sets of 2 reps at 60%

Note: When working up in full equipment, take 10 percent jumps until you reach the given percentage. When it says “full equipment,” that means *everything* you wear for the meet, including knee wraps (if applicable). All sets with full equipment are done without bands.

After week 16—Circa max

There are a number of options with this, but please don't make this complicated. You aren't splitting the atom when getting ready for a meet. Just remember that you need to be primed and rested.

Option 1: Week 17—Meet week, rest

Option 2: Week 17—Repeat deload

 Week 18—Meet week, rest

Option 3: Week 17—Work up to opener in suit

 Week 18—Meet week, rest

Your First Powerlifting Meet

“Am I ready to do my first meet? Am I strong enough? Will people laugh at me?”

These are common questions everyone asks before they decide to enter their first powerlifting meet. I know because I asked myself the same questions. The best advice I can give you is just jump in and test the waters. And the water is almost always fine. Your fears and questions will be gone as soon as you hit your opening squat.

First of all, no one really feels he's ever strong enough, so don't worry. You aren't alone. And if you wait until you think you are, you'll probably never compete in a meet. Finally, no one will laugh at you. People who lift at meets recognize and admire the commitment and work that goes into preparing for a meet. So even if you aren't lifting world record weights, it doesn't matter. Let's face it—99 percent of people at meets aren't lifting those weights anyway. The vast majority are just like you—people who love to lift weights, love the challenge, and want to test themselves. So in the immortal words of Delmar Donnell, “C'mon in boys! The water is fine!”

Meet Checklist

- Large bag: You'll need something to hold all your equipment (squat suit, bench shirt, lifting shoes, etc.)
- Chalk: Always bring chalk! Even if the meet director provides this, it is best to have your own stash in a plastic container just in case. There is a good chance it will run out.
- Water/Gatorade: Keep yourself hydrated between attempts and lifts.
- Food: Don't eat anything that will bloat your stomach or food you don't normally eat. This isn't the time to be experimenting with protein bars you've never tried. I recommend eating some kind of trail mix.
- Extra T-shirts: You'll probably sweat more than you think and it's nice to have a dry shirt to put on after each lift.
- Sweatshirt: Sometimes it's cold in the warm-up area (especially at the beginning of the meet). Keep one around just in case.
- Extra underwear: This is always a good idea no matter where or what you're doing. Clean underwear is the first step in taking over the world.
- Shorts: Don't be that guy who wears his singlet around between lifts. We don't need to see your pasty thighs.
- Extra socks: Keep your feet dry.
- Ammonia: This is a personal preference, but nothing compares to crushing a few ammonia caps before a big lift. I'm not sure if it really helps though.
- Baby powder: This is used on the thighs during deadlifting and helps the bar slide up more easily. This isn't a huge deal though.
- Bench/lifting singlet: No matter what kind of meet you're doing (geared or raw), this is essential.
- Towels: A couple hand towels to wipe the sweat off your head and hands are always a good idea. They're also good for wiping the bench down before or after your warm-up attempts.
- Ibuprofen or aspirin: This is great for aches and pains during a long meet.
- Music/headphones: This is obvious.

- Knee sleeves: If you're doing a raw meet where these are allowed, make sure you take advantage and use them. They're also good for geared lifters during warm ups on the squat.
- Foam roller/PVC pipe: If you use this in your training, bring one to the meet. It will keep your muscles loose between attempts and lifts.
- Bands for stretching: If you use one to stretch before workouts, bring one to the meet.
- Camera/video: You shouldn't be in charge of this, so have a family member or your handler take care of this.
- Liniment: Some people bathe in this stuff before they lift. If you're one of them, don't forget it.
- Federation card: If you want to compete, you gotta pay!

Preparation for a geared meet

The two biggest issues when preparing for a geared meet are getting your gear and working in your gear. This training program assumes you already have your gear. This isn't the time to be buying new suits and trying to get things to fit. Get your stuff early and make sure it fits properly!

Here is the list of lifting equipment you'll need for your meet:

- Belt
- Squat suit
- Squat briefs (optional)
- Bench shirt
- Bench singlet
- Deadlift suit
- Deadlift socks
- Knee wraps (optional)
- Wrist wraps (optional)

- Shoes for each lift
- Suit/shirt slippers

I highly recommend getting a large duffel bag to hold all your equipment. Many people have two or more pieces of equipment (bench shirts, squat suits) in case one tears or doesn't fit right. Keep smaller things such as wraps and ammonia in the side pockets. I also highly recommend that you have two to three sets of knee wraps at your disposal. This will allow you or your handler to grab an extra one if it unrolls during the wrapping process. This will keep you stress free and allow you to get to the platform on time.

You must have a very good idea of what your goals are for the meet. This will be imperative to your meet training. Doing this will keep you focused on the end goal and help you visualize during your training and in your off time. Every repetition of the main sets should be devoted to getting you closer to your goal.



100 Training Questions Answered

1. What do I do if I am weak out of the bottom of Military Press?

Without a doubt, you need more work at the bottom end of the movement. I recommend lowering your training max, taking a false grip, using a belt, learning how to tuck your elbows and use your lats as a shelf. Most people respond well with more volume on this lift so I recommend something like this:

On your main day, do all your sets and REPEAT the first set for max reps. That same week, on bench day, perform 5 sets of 10 reps of military pressing.

2. How do I become more explosive on leg movements?

Add in some box jumps, standing long jumps and vertical jumps into your training program for 3 cycles. This is done before your lifting;

- Cycle one: 10-15 jumps/day
- Cycle two: 10-20 jumps/day
- Cycle three: 10-25 jumps/day

You can do it every training day, before you lift. Adjust volume of jumps according to the day. Adjust volume of accessories according to feel.

3. When to do conditioning work? How many times per week?

As for the conditioning work, do it whenever you can find the time! (morning, after workout, off days) – the perfect time is whenever you have time. No one lives in a perfect world and there is no perfect time to do this no matter what the experts say. Remember that most experts in the weight room/internet are rarely experts in performance. In general, I recommend doing some kind of hard conditioning 3 days/week (sled, prowler, run hills).

4. Do you like using dips instead of military press to improve bench?

Using dips is a great idea to improve your upper body strength – this is an awesome exercise to strengthen your shoulders, chest and triceps (provided your shoulders are healthy enough to do it). But I do not recommend substituting dips instead of the standing press – use dips as an assistance exercise and keep the standing press as a main, core lift.

5. How can I increase the amount of volume on lat/upper back movements?

I recommend everyone do one set of pulling between EVERY PUSHING MOVEMENT – even the warm-ups and work sets. I do 50 chin ups before I even touch a barbell in the weight room. And then sets of 10 between every set that I do, including all warm-ups and work sets. You can do any kind of lat/upper back movement between pushing sets – rows, lat pulldowns, face pulls, rear laterals and shrugs are all good choices. The key is to just do the exercises and not kill yourself.

6. What should I do if I get sick, go on vacation or have to take some time off?

You're going to have to use your best judgment with this – I have been getting countless questions about illnesses and how to start a program after a lay off. The best advice is the following:

- 1. Start where you left off and only get the prescribed reps.
- 2. Do the deload week first to get back into the swing of things.
- 3. Screw it all – go balls out.
- 4. Start an entire cycle over again – from square one. Because reactions and illnesses are all so different, it is impossible for me to give advice. I once went through an awful bout of food poisoning when I was in high school – and came back about a week later, fully hydrated and pissed off...and hit some great numbers. I also had a huge PR a couple years ago on the deadlift after food poisoning...but had little left in the tank to do anything else! Anyone that has any kind of lay off (whether it be vacation or illness or whatever...) – USE YOUR BEST JUDGMENT. And if in doubt, start too light. YOU WILL NEVER GET WEAKER IF YOU DO THIS.

7. What do I do if I miss a training day?

This is easy! Just pick up where you left off – this won't be a big deal. One of the best parts of this program is you can go from training four days a week, to three days, to four days to two days. You can change this up every week to fit whatever schedule you are on.

A good program has built in flexibility while still maintaining its core values and beliefs.

8. What assistance template should I follow if I want to build size and strength?

I really recommend doing the the Boring But Big assistance template. Remember it is 5 sets of 10 reps at 50-60% of training max.

If you are skinny bastard, drink 1 gallon of milk a day. If you are a fat bastard, eat 4-6 meals of this template (and eat in this order):

- Steak/chicken/eggs (30-50g of protein)
- Fruit or vegetable
- Complex carb (rice/potato/oatmeal) – eat until you are full.

Also, I would do some kind of conditioning work that involves running or pushing/pulling sleds 3 times a week.

9. What are your thoughts on using a belt? Some people swear by them, others think they are the work of the devil.

The Anti-Belt Brigade are just as bad as the dudes that wear a belt and lifting straps for every single exercise. If you are on the fence with this issue here is my best advice – do the first one or two main work sets with NO belt and use the belt for the last set.

If you are new to wearing a belt and need to get used to it, wear it for ALL the sets. It's best to learn and get used to something new with lighter weights. The "why" is pretty easy to figure out.

10. I've gone through a number of 5/3/1 cycles and have now stalled. What should I do?

There are a number of things you can do. Let's say you've done five cycles. Take the weights from the second or third cycle and repeat five more cycles. Take five steps forward, two to three steps back...and repeat. This is really recommended for an older or more advanced lifter. Even if you aren't completely stalled out this will delay the inevitable plateau and keep the gains coming for a longer period of time. Don't think of where you'll be in 8 weeks, but 2 years. Or even longer. Here are some other ideas to help a lifter when he is stalled or to keep from stalling quicker.

1. Start lighter – this is probably the best advice.
2. Pick your battles – you don't have to max out on the last set all the time. I go "all out" two or three times a cycle.
3. Do more or do less – Too many workouts in a week sometimes do more harm than good. Make sure you are recovering properly. If you make gains better training 2 or 3 times a week BUT mentally have to train 4 days a week – you best get your head and your priorities straight.

11. How do you know when to push max reps on the last set?

- I usually look at the workouts a month in advance and choose the battles that way...BUT if I feel good on a day I don't have a scheduled "push" I'll do it (and adjust the other workouts accordingly).
- In general, push the "3" weeks and the "5/3/1" week.
- Think about leaving at least 1 full rep in the tank but I usually leave more than that unless I'm really pushing for an all time PR.
- Sometimes I think people get a little too nuts on the last set and I think many people would be best served if they did the last set for the set reps...or just a few over and call it a day. This is not a license to be a pussy; just understand that we are training for something bigger than today.

12. How can I combine the Boring But Big assistance template and conditioning work? That assistance work leaves me incredibly sore and I can't do much.

There are a couple things that you can do in the beginning that work pretty well. But most people that do the BBB assistance work have to do very little conditioning to stay in shape and be lean – this workout is brutal and will do wonders for changing your body composition.

1. Start with a VERY light 5 sets of 10 – don't even worry about percentages. In fact, just use the lightest weight you can without looking like a douche. Just use enough weight to maintain appearances.
2. Start training three times a week – don't do all four workouts in the week.
3. Get a Prowler – this is the best thing to do when you are sore and feel awful. Why? Because you can lean into it, walk, use a ton of weight and still get a great workout and not be a pussy. Plus it won't make you sore or add to the soreness.
4. So what kind of Prowler workout when you are so damn sore and tired? Start with high handles, 90 added pounds, walk for 40 yards – do this 6-10 times. Rest periods are not monitored but eventually strive for 60-90 seconds.

13. What do you think of using board presses?

For most raw lifters, you can use them as an assistance exercise. You can do this on either upper body days.

14. What about floor presses? Do you like them as assistance work or a main movement?

You can do them as either main movement or assistance. If it's a main movement, be sure you stick with it for a few cycles. Don't just do it for one or two cycles and call it a day. You have to stick with something for a while to see progress.

15. Where can you put complexes in 5/3/1?

These are best done after your workout. I'm not a huge fan of complexes – I like to recommend Prowler pushing, hill sprints, stair (stadium) running and strongman training.

16. I retested my max and it is much higher than my training max. What should I do?

Don't recalculate. I repeat DO NOT RECALCULATE! Keep the path you're on now. If you are getting stronger, the program is obviously working.

17. How do I add singles after my working sets of 5/3/1?

Do a couple relatively heavy singles after your working sets (2-3) in order to get used to heavier weights. This is pretty well laid out in the 5/3/1 Powerlifting book.

18. What do you think of using front squats as 5/3/1 movement?

No. Only as an accessory movement. These are good to use for BBB sets but with a lighter weight than your 40-60% squat training max.

19. I noticed you used treadmill sprints in the winter as conditioning work. How do you do this?

Here is a good beginning workout on the treadmill; for someone that has never done them before. After a good warm-up, put the treadmill on the steepest incline that you feel comfortable with – if in doubt, go lower than you think. Start the treadmill and put it at a speed that allows you to jog. Jog for 15 seconds and rest for 45. After the first sprint/jog increase the speed a bit and do the same thing – 15 seconds on/45 seconds off. Keep doing this until you reach a speed in which you are sprinting hard but in no danger of falling off.

In between sprints, stand on the sides of the treadmill.

Start off with 10-20 sprints the first time.

20. How to incorporate Power Cleans or any other Olympic lift.

I recommend you put the Olympic movement just prior to your squat or deadlift. You can follow the 5/3/1 template. Also, you can either go balls deep on both exercises and do rep maxes or do a rep max for one and not the other...or not do a rep max for either and move further south towards vag.

21. Can you use Dave Tate Time's Under Tension training principles?

Fine to include as philosophy for accessory work

22. Ways to avoid over training and continue progression

Pick your battles. You don't always need to go for rep maxes.

23. Partial pressing movements in 5/3/1

Floor presses, board presses, pin presses should generally be avoided but can be done, refer to other tips on FLOOR AND BOARD pressing under UPPER BODY

24. What are some options with Boring But Big exercises?

The 5 sets of 10 reps can be done with a very similar exercise to your main lift. Here are a couple examples of what you can do:

- Squat – box squat, leg press, hack squat, safety bar squat
- Deadlift – trap bar, rack pulls, straight leg deadlifts, good mornings, snatch grip deadlifts, deficit deadlifts.
- Bench Press/Press – any kind of pressing exercise with different kinds of barbells and dumbbells or bodyweight. Incline press, floor press, fat bar presses, dumbbell presses, weighted dips.

25. How can I use Fat Bars and Fat Gripz and the 5/3/1 program?

\Do your working sets without the Fat Bar or Fat Gripz (use a regular barbell for your main work)., You can use the Fat Bar/Fat Gripz for your BBB sets (on deads, bench, military) or for any other accessory work. Remember you can use the fat bars and other implements in a variety of assistance movements.

26. What is the best way to train two times a week?

Week1/Day 1

- Squat – 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Squat or Leg Press – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Good morning or Straight leg deadlift – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Abs

Week 1/Day 2

- Bench Press – 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Military Press – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Lat Work – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Upper back work – 3-5 sets
- Triceps/biceps – 3-5 sets

Week 2/Day 1

- Deadlift – 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Squat or Leg Press – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Good morning or Straight leg deadlift – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Abs

Week 2/Day 2

- Press – 5/3/1 sets/reps
- Bench Press – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Lat Work – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Upper back work – 3-5 sets
- Triceps/biceps – 3-5 sets

27. When you are doing the press, do you clean the barbell to your shoulders or do you take the bar off the power rack?

Either way is fine – whatever works best for you.

28. Do you have any tips for breaking through stalled bench press using 5/3/1?

- If I'm getting ready to have a big week pressing, I'll take a week or two OFF from any kind of pressing accessory movements. This allows my chest and shoulders some time to recover and not stress them. This doesn't mean I don't press or bench press; it means that my accessory work is usually a lot of lat and upper back work.
- So with this example in mind, understand that the best solution is not always to do more. It might be best to back off a bit and let your body recover instead. This might mean to lower the training max of your program, or keep the same training max and only do the prescribed reps. But since 1% of you will never do this and will choose the more volume route, here are two suggestions:
- Perform the bench press sets as written, then repeat the first set again, but go all out on this set, too.
- Perform the bench press sets as written, and repeat the percentages on the way down. For example, on the 3x5 week you would do 65% x5, 75% x5, 85% x5+, 75% x5, and 65% x 5+.

- I assume most of you are doing chins and pull-ups between all your pressing sets. Be sure to continue to do this with these extra pressing sets to keep everything in balance.

29. What is the purpose of assistance work? How important is it?

The choice of assistance lift pales in importance to the proper execution and loading of the key lifts. Too many younger lifters major in the minors, and they're called assistance lifts for a reason. When evaluating whether an assistance lift has a place in your program, it helps to consider that assistance lifts are intended to accomplish a few specific goals:

- Prevent strength imbalances.
- Build muscle.
- Strengthen weak areas.
- And most importantly, ASSIST the basic lifts (squat, bench press, overhead press, and deadlift; or whatever lifts you deem important in your training).

Let's take a look at the key lifts and what needs to be strong to do them: Squat — abs, low back, hamstrings, quads. Deadlift — same as squat, plus upper back/lats and grip. Bench Press — chest, shoulders, triceps, lats/upper back. Overhead Press — same as bench press, plus low back/abs. So with this in mind, we have to have assistance work that compliments these lifts and provides balance. (Don't worry aspiring Jersey Shore stars, your precious hypertrophy will be achieved with volume.) Here are some of the best assistance exercises for each area of the above:

- Abs — sit ups, ab wheel roll-outs, hanging leg raises.
- Low Back — good mornings, back raises, reverse hyper extensions.
- Quads — lunges, leg presses.
- Chest — dips, dumbbell presses, dumbbell flyes.
- Triceps — dumbbell presses, dips, triceps extension/pushdowns.
- Shoulders — any pressing exercise.
- Hamstrings — glute ham raise, good mornings, back raises, leg curls.

- Lats/upper back — pull-ups, bent rows, dumbbell rows, shrugs, face pulls

For the grip, just perform Kroc rows (high rep dumbbell rows) or high rep shrugs (no straps). You'll notice a lot of overlap with some of these exercises because we're trying to do more with less. That's training economy, a very good thing; better results with less time in the weight room. Now you don't have to perform all of these exercises in one workout — just pick one for each group and hammer it home. Some exercises may work better than others, but you have to give it time to work. I see people do an exercise for three weeks and fail to put 80 pounds on their bench and label it a big failure. As for volume of the assistance lifts, that tends to vary from person to person and therefore it's hard to program on paper. When in doubt, push the main lift and do assistance work based on however you might feel that day. Truth is, I tell seminar attendees all the time that a training program rarely fails due to improper assistance exercise selection. It will fail from poor programming, a lack of consistency, and failing to accommodate the ups and downs of life. In other words, a program must allow you to adjust a bit when you have a particularly good or absolutely shitty day. It's not as simple as "Do this." You have to rely on that thing that rests between your ears.

30. How does a person run hills?

There are two downsides about running hills:

- It sucks balls.
- You have to find a good hill to run.

The first is easy to overcome — just man up. The second, not so much; but I live in the very flat state of Ohio and still found a great hill. Now this took about two years of half-ass looking and testing out many duds before I found my Big Mother. The first thing I did was ask some of the locals as I'm not from this area. The second thing I did was Google search "Sledding Hill" with a couple different cities that I live near. There were half a dozen that were good but all were a long drive. This is fine for weekend training, but I didn't want to lift, travel, go run hills, travel back, and be home at 11 PM. I eventually found a great hill at a man-made reservoir, an option that I wouldn't have thought of had

it not been for some friends. Whatever the length and grade of your hill is will be fine, mostly because it has to be. You're going to be limited by what is available to you. But to give you an idea of the hills that I run:

- The small hill is about 40 yards.
- The big hill is about 75-80 yards.

I don't know about the grades of the hills, but they work for me. If you're in doubt about your hill, just ask yourself this question: Will this hill give me a hell of a workout and make me awesome? If the answer is yes, you're fine. If not, keep searching. Now the key to starting hill running/sprinting is simply going out there and doing a few and seeing how you feel. You don't have to make the first day into Hell Day. Make a goal for the day (my first time out I wanted to do and do it. Don't worry about rest periods. Don't worry about how long it takes to do. Just get it done. Do this for a few sessions and see how your knees, ankles, legs and lungs feel. Once you get a handle on your body and your conditioning level you can start setting goals, progressions, and how many days/week you want to do them. All of these things are going to be dependent on your specific goals.

When I began running hills again I knew for an absolute fact that my lifts were going to take a beating. I'm not an idiot. You don't run up and down a hill four days a week and expect your lifts to suddenly increase. So once I began my hill running, the first thing I did was lower my training max significantly on my 5/3/1 workout. I did this on ALL lifts. I also cut back on all lower body assistance lifts. Running up and walking down the hill is taxing on your legs — the workout you give your legs (and really your entire body) is phenomenal.

My workouts were very simple: I'd go to the weight room first, train my main lifts, do limited assistance work and drive to the hill. This was done four days/week. After about three weeks, my legs started to feel a bit better and got used to the demand. Don't be fooled, the first couple squat workouts were far from impressive. What was once a warm-up was now shaking violently when I walked it out. Mentally, it's hard to handle

but you have to start thinking differently-your legs are getting stronger but just aren't able to display it during a squat. So in conclusion:

- Find a hill.
- Take three weeks to adapt to it — find out how out of shape you are.
- Adjust weight room work to accommodate the extra running.
- Once your body adapts, figure out your goals and execute. If in doubt, squat and run hills. A lot. Your body will thank you. And buy some cleats.

31. Am I quad dominant or am I hamstring weak?

My suggestion is to quit thinking you're quad dominant. Unless your quads hang over your kneecaps like an elephant's testicles, you're not quad dominant. You're just hamstring weak. And to cut out a simple core exercise is not an option. I too was hamstring weak at one point. Today, I don't know if I'm hamstring STRONG, but certainly not hamstring weak. It took a lot of time to bring my hamstrings up to a level that was acceptable. This was also the case with my lats, lower back and abs. The solution was simple: Hard work and patience. The first thing I did was make hamstring work the second thing I did on lower body days. So immediately after my main exercise, I would do good mornings or glute ham raises. In fact, Kevin Deweese (my old training partner) and I would do three sets of glute ham raises before each workout, lower or upper body. And on lower body days, we'd do them (or something similar) after the main lift of the day. Because I'd neglected them for so long, it took about two years of quality training to bring them to an acceptable level. I was fine with this, as you should be too. Two years is nothing in the lifetime of a lifter, and you should be doing it anyway.

The point is this: Cutting out a "big" exercise because you're quad dominant is pointless unless you're going to hurt yourself. You may have to alter the weights a bit to make sure you don't do something stupid, but cutting it out entirely? That's the last thing you should do.

32. I get weaker when I do lots of conditioning. How do I get stronger and get in better shape.

This is the nature of the beast – when you do more conditioning you will get weaker. But here are a couple things:

- Look myself in the mirror and berate myself until I will up the weights (this works 100% of the time).
- Means you are doing too much conditioning too soon.
- Have to program the conditioning/weights better so they can co-exist.
- If this is your FIRST RUN AND DOING THIS (making goals such as these) then don't worry. It is a learning process and now you know where the guidelines should be. Hope this makes sense.
- As a general guideline repeat this to yourself: Easy conditioning on upper body days. And hard conditioning on lower body days.

Determine these two things via effort, recovery and overall sense of being after performing the workout. In other words: Do you feel like shit? = Hard Feel fine = easy Best to combine the two. But before you do this you have to make a commitment and realize you cannot serve two masters.

33. Do you have a game plan for every set and every workout?

Right now, I don't really train to failure but many times after my last rep, I know I probably can't get another. EVERY single set that I do I have a goal for the reps, I don't just "wing" it or "see what I can get" or any of the weak minded horseshit I see people do. So even if I don't go all out on my final set, I do have a goal. And once I reach that goal, no matter what, it's always my final rep. And because it's in my mind, it probably feels like the final rep/failure because my mind is so made up to do it.

34. Are deficit deadlifts good for starting strength in the deadlift (do they strengthen the bottom portion of the pull)?

People have certainly used it before with great success. I always thought that the leg press and the good morning helped my starting strength more than any other assistance lifts.

35. Is there an optimal rep range for 5, 3 & 5/3/1 days?

This is very individual so hard for me to say – Some people like to get 10 on “5” day, 6-8 on “3” day and 5 on “5/3/1” day. In general, you should always be able to get the required reps with some basic intensity and warm-up. Stimulate don’t annihilate.

36. How to go about testing a rough 1RM on 5/3/1

On the third week of the program (the 5/3/1 week) do only the required reps. Work up to a 1RM. This is all explained in the book this came in!

37. What do you think of sumo deadlifts as a main 5/3/1 exercise?

Yes, this is fine. I am no expert on sumo deadlifting and only pull conventional.

38. Have you ever tried using the Dogg Crapp (Rest Pause) Training for assistance work? Do you think this is a good idea?

Yes! This is very easy to implement and program, especially with the 5/3/1 program.

39. What exercises can replace the bench press?

I recommend using the floor press or incline press. I really recommend keeping the basic exercises the same (bench press, press, squat, deadlift) and using the assistance work to work new exercises into the program.

40. What's an easy way to get some extra volume?

After doing the main work sets, repeat the first set for as many reps as possible.

41. What is the definition of failure?

Failure is when you can no longer perform the exercise with proper form.

42. Do you recommend a staggered stance for the press?

You can use this stance if you feel comfortable with it; I know a friend of mine switched to a staggered stance and made immediate improvement. As long as you the spirit and form of the movement is not compromised, by all means!

43. How long should one stick with assistance work before switching?

Let be me the first to say the fear people have of adapting to an exercise after a few workouts is ridiculous. "Confusing" the body is one of the buzz words echoed by idiots, charlatans and other thick tongued losers in this industry. Most people haven't trained long or hard enough to adapt to anything. Just switch when you are bored – its assistance work so it's used to ASSIST in your training.

As a side note, the worst saying ever? "The best program is the one you aren't doing." My thoughts? Learn how to program better, you moron.

44. What are your thoughts on supersetting the assistance work?

By all means – this saves time in your workout. You don't have to do it, but it keeps me from getting bored.

45. Is there any time I shouldn't do conditioning work?

In general, it's probably best to avoid hard conditioning work the day before a lower body day (squat or deadlift).

46. What are your rest times for your hill running? For both the small and big hill?

- Small Hill: 1 minute rest after walking to bottom of hill. As soon as I walk down the hill and get on flat ground, I start the watch.
- Large Hill: Forever – this hill is really long and steep. Just getting through the sets is tough enough. I never time myself on this.

47. Do you ever recommend using Box Squats as 5/3/1 main movement?

Yes. You can use box squats instead of free squats.

48. What do you think about instinctive training? I hear a lot of talk from experts about the merits of this style of training.

In theory, I think it does hold water. But in practice, for most people it's probably counterproductive. Now this doesn't mean you can't adjust your training day to day a little bit — to account for feeling better (going for more reps on a final set) or feeling worse (just doing the required workout and leaving). But to rely entirely on your instinct requires two things:

- A person that is smart enough to assess his or her own training and monitor their body.
- A person that is strong enough to bypass most traditional training programs that have been proven to work effectively since the dawn of the barbell.

These two things are rarely found in the same person. The smart ones are usually never dumb enough to push the insane limits of their body. They may be strong in their gyms but never really strong in the eyes of the elite (or even the "sort of strong but probably never really been accused of taking anything"). They always kind of swim in the kiddie pool, safe in the piss warm water of mediocrity.

But the super strong ones are never smart enough to stop the insanity. These guys get shit on by the "smart ones" but usually only behind computer monitors because, well, these guys would probably kill them. (If their bodies can hold up long enough to fight.)

So to recommend instinctive training really isn't the best idea. What you need to look at is your training program. A good training program will allow you to progress with the ebbs and flows of your day and how you feel; a poor training program rarely gives you an "out" — you better be on your best game or expect to be highly disappointed. If you're following such a program, either write better programs or find a new mentor.

But here's a closing rant: one thing that no one talks about is how walking into a weight room tired, over-worked, stressed, and fucked up but then succeeding is a true lesson in mind strength. I don't always recommend it, but at certain times of your life you've got to quit being such a slave to your pussiness and step up and see how well you can do under shitty conditions.

People have always been working labor jobs for long hours. There are single mom's working two jobs and still finding time for their kids. There are soldiers that fought for our country that were hungry, tired, thirsty, and with pieces of steel stuck in their bodies, but somehow they were able to pull it together in combat. Why can't you get your shit together for an hour and do a couple sets of squats?

49. What are your thoughts on using kettlebells (Russian or otherwise) for assistance work?

This is fine – make sure you are still getting some assistance work for your upper body (chest, shoulders, triceps, lats) to keep getting stronger.

50. What are your thoughts on the Reverse Hyper? If my gym doesn't have one, should I quit that gym? Is my training going to be a bust?

The importance of assistance work is almost always overstated. It's important but it seems like it's all that people care about. It makes up 90% of their training time, 95% of their thoughts and 100% of their log posts. That's not good.

I explain why assistance work is important in my 5/3/1 book and it's pretty simple. Reverse Hypers have been kind to me — I don't know if I gained huge increases in my squat and deadlift but my back was never hurt and always felt good. So maybe for me this exercise worked more as an injury prevention movement? There's nothing wrong with that either because you can't train if your back is fucked.

One of the best things about the R.H. is that it allows you to train your lower back and hamstrings without a bar in your hands or on your back — very little stress to your body. The same can be said with glute ham raises and belt squats. These exercises would be staples in my weight room if I was a football coach and needed a great in-season workout for older guys.

For sets and reps — I like using a higher volume on this so 3-5 sets of 15-30 reps. My back would be burning and cramping from this but for me it always seemed to work better than lower reps. I did this once or twice a week as my 2nd or 3rd exercise for the day.

51. One of the training forums I'm participate in talk a lot about Finishers. What are your thoughts?

Ahh, finishers. The cool thing about them is that they're fun and probably one of the few feats of mental and physical strength that most of us will ever go through, especially in the safe, comfortable lives that most of us lead. Think about it, it's not like we have to chase down our food or run for our lives on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, the finisher has been sullied by hardgainers and other random skinny punks that put one in every damn workout and can't figure out why they can only train two times a week when they're 15 years old. The role of the finisher in the weight room is one you have to be careful with; you can't use one every time you train or you'll burn out quicker than Ryan Leaf. I've done some really stupid shit, mostly involving squats. In college, I did 330lbs x 30 reps; I was supposed to do 3 sets of 10 reps with 330 and decided to just get the shit over with.

As a sophomore In high school, we had to do 1.5 times our bodyweight in the squat for as many reps as possible. Thankfully, depth wasn't crucially important, so I ended up cutting most of the reps fairly high but ended up doing 255 for 44 reps.

These days, most of my finishers are based around some hardcore conditioning: hills, Prowler, sled work, etc. Now I do these activities all the time, but it's how you do them that makes it a true finisher. Usually, I'll have some kind of stupid or crazy goal once a month involving the Prowler or The Big Hill.

The Big Hill is one of two hills that I run — obviously, The Big Hill is a motherfucker. The current record for sprints up The Big Hill, six, is held by yours truly. Now I only bother to count the records of people who have some kind of distinguishable muscle mass, not distance runner types that aspire to look like David Beckham. Anyone can run, but not everyone can total Elite and run.

But the goal this summer is to do 10 sprints up The Big Hill. As a few of my friends can attest to, The Big Hill will put tangled dreadlocks on your balls before it drops you to your knees. Now there is no rhyme or reason to the conditioning finisher. There shouldn't be. There's no progression. There just IS. So if you're looking for guidance on what to choose or how to choose, start looking inside your mind. Or just get a sicker mind.

I usually think of some really crazy stuff when I'm walking my dog or sitting on the phone at work, having a riveting discussion about the complexities of band tension. I suggest when ideas come to you, write them down and when the time is right (this simply means, "whenever you feel like it") try them out. But to sum up, for the most part, finishers are part crazy, part fun, and all stupid. But these are some of the best and most memorable feats of strength that we will ever go through. The problem with weak people (or unsuccessful people, really) is that they're too scared to ever attempt a finisher in their training or their life.

Whether or not you put this in your workout is usually based on how far out from a contest you are (don't use these things if you're preparing for a meet or a show) or how crazy you want to get. Most of the time, the really, really good ones are done with a training partner who is just being a dick, or starts talking trash. But like Kenny Rogers once told me in a drunken stupor, you gotta know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em.

Giving into peer pressure as an adult is pathetic.

52. In your opinion, what is the most important book on training? What book or books do you think everyone should own?

This is simple – Starting Strength by Mark Rippetoe. This book teaches you how to squat, deadlift, bench press, clean and press. If you can perform these exercises correctly then any program that is not awful can work.

53. What do you think of Zercher squats?

If I read an article on training and see a picture of someone doing a Zercher squat or a mention of a Zercher squat, I stop reading immediately.

54. What are your thoughts on pull-throughs as an assistance exercise?

When I was first introduced to pull throughs, I was incredibly underwhelmed. To get any sort of effect, the reps had to be pushed very high and the weight was frustratingly limited due to the fact that you can't load the exercise with any more weight than you can get into position with. But I did them anyway, because a lot of strong folks swore by them, and I assumed they must have some magical properties of some kind.

Looking back now, I should've just stuck with the staples: good mornings, glute ham raises, reverse hyperextensions, back raises, and straight leg deadlifts.

The kettlebell and dumbbell swing are very good alternatives, though. Not only do you get low back, hamstring, and glute work, but your traps get some healthy stimulation as well. The big problem that I see when people do them is they don't do enough good quality reps; their upper backs aren't strong enough to stabilize the downward swing of the weight and they use way too much upper body English.

55. What, if anything, do you do on your off days?

You can do something active if that is your cup of tea, or if you are like me and really do nothing but read, write, play music, watch movies, etc. in your spare time you can do a few things to help recovery. I generally like to do some light stretching for the hips and hamstrings, PVC pipe rolling on my IT band and some lacrosse ball work on the piriformis. This may take 10-20 minutes depending on how motivated I am. In general, it's best to do something – walking and some light recovery work (as listed above) is your best bet.

56. In your opinion, what is strong?

Strong means different things to different people – this is obvious. Different physical activities demand different kinds of strengths; a gymnast is going to be different than a powerlifter is going to be different than a downhill skier. But if your goal is to be strong, you have to define it yourself. What is strong to you? It could be a 400 squat, 300 bench and 500 deadlift. It could be based on your bodyweight; 2x bodyweight squat, 1.5 bench and 2.5 deadlift.

In my opinion and take this with a grain of salt, a strong person can total USPF elite wearing a belt, knee wraps, wrist wraps and a singlet.

57. What is “in shape” mean to you?

This, like the previous question, is really based on your goals and your given sport. But in my humble opinion if you one can run The Big Hill for 10 sprints, you are definitely in shape. Again, this is the big hill I live by and really not applicable to anyone else. But the point is you can't say “I'm in shape!” without first defining that statement.

58. What lifts are most important for a football player?

A study done years ago at the Air Force Academy and one done by Ethan Reeve showed that there was a high correlation between the athletes that power cleaned the best and their place on the depth chart. Reeve also pointed out that the athletes that squatted the deepest also fell into this category (although this is more of a judgement and Reeve acknowledged this.) Whether or not it means the athleticism of the athletes led to better numbers OR the act of getting better at these lifts made the difference is something to consider. Whatever the case, those were the results.

59. When performing a rep max, should I have perfect form?

No, not unless you're wearing equipment (bench shirt, suit/briefs).

I've talked about this quite a bit and have asked a lot of different people the same question; if you're doing a rep max, whether it be for 10 reps or 1 rep, things might end up getting a little ugly. Now this doesn't give you license to lift with poor form or to forget about some simple technique cues that are essential, but please don't think that things are going to be picture-perfect throughout the set.

For example, if you're going for a true 5RM, there's a good chance your fifth rep is going to be a little rough and might not be perfect. That's what it takes to dig down and muscle some weights up.

Now I can already hear the histrionic wailings of the Weak Point Brigade that will challenge me on this point, so let me be clear: I think good form is a great idea. But these are the same people who will tell you to arch your lower back when you deadlift, which is great advice when you're showing your 60-something year-old mom how to pick up a potted plant; the reality is that no one that pulls big weights with a conventional stance has a perfect low back arch. So I'm not sure what they're selling you.

I just see too many people that ask me (and many others on forums) to evaluate their form during a rep max. There's a time and place for everything, and during a rep max of any kind is not it.

The problem with this kind of technique micromanagement is that people wind up getting too scared to go up against a big weight for fear that their form might not be textbook perfect and then, when they come up on their toes a bit or their head dips down, the Weak Point Brigade emerges and starts evaluating, nit picking, and worst of all, offering advice.

60. What's a good way to increase the size of my shoulders?

After you perform your main 5/3/1 sets of military press do the following with little rest (about 30 seconds) between sets.

- Press x 10 reps
- Side laterals x 10 reps
- Rear laterals x 10 reps

Rest for a couple minutes and repeat 2-3 more times. Be sure to use a light weight for the presses; the first set may feel light but after a few rounds of this, your shoulders will be very pumped and tired. This is also a great way to keep presses in your training and not go too heavy.

61. What are some easy ways to gain weight?

If you are looking to gain some weight, there are two very simple ways to do this. It is imperative that these two things are done in addition to whatever you usually eat. So keep the main foods the same and add one of these into your diet.

- Drink a gallon of milk a day.
 - After each meal, drink a protein drink mixed with milk, bananas and ice cream.
- With this option, try to get 4 solid meals a day (thus 4 shakes a day).

If you choose to drink a gallon of milk a day, start off by trying to drink a half gallon and work your way up. It's best to pour the milk in a glass and drink it like that. Try to drink 2 large cups of milk an hour. Don't be overwhelmed by the size of the gallon – just try for 2 big cups an hour and you'll be on your way to a gallon a day.

62. What is an easy way to lose weight?

By far, the easiest way to lose weight is to drink a 50g protein drink (mixed with water) prior to ANY meal that you eat. This will ensure that your protein consumption is high and will also limit the amount of food that you eat in each meal.

63. What is your opinion on rack pulls?

This is a classic case of an idea that works beautifully in theory but, at least in your case, fails to pay off in the real world.

The theory behind rack pulls is that they allow you to use more weight than you normally can handle in conventional deadlifts, which helps target certain sticking points, namely the lockout position—a real sore spot for many lifters. Sounds good, huh? Like I said, it's a swell theory.

The problem is, I'm not sure how effective this is for most people. I've seen (and experienced) many extreme rack pulls that rarely carry over to the actual deadlift. Personally, I've actually pulled over 900lbs from a rack and could barely lock out 700 in the full range deadlift. Now, perhaps this 900lb rack pull allowed me to lock out the 700, but I have a hard time believing that.

I think part of the problem is how rack pulls are performed in training. Most of the time these are done for sets of 1, working up to a 1RM. That's fine and dandy if you want to test your rack pull and see where you're at. But all that does is test you, not build you: if training to a 1RM was all you needed to get stronger, then all you'd have to do is enter a meet each week and max!

- Question: How many times have you seen a lifter hit the weight room and work up to a max single on the bench press? And do this every single workout? And where is this person a year from now?
- Answer: He's the same. Or he's hurt, or overtrained, or worst of all, he's sitting at home arguing on the Internet about strength training.

The rack pull needs to be treated in the same way as we treat other assistance work, but with an added caution: there's a difference between rack pulls and back extensions, and doing multiple sets of 10-20 reps of back extensions isn't nearly as stressful as doing the same thing with rack pulls.

Having said that, perhaps doing repetitions on some of the popular 1RM exercises like rack pulls will help develop and strengthen the areas that they're designed to help. Doing some sets of 5-10 reps certainly won't hurt you, and will probably develop some much-needed muscle mass.

But these need to be programmed into your training with caution, son. So let's say you're running my 5/3/1 program and wish to add rack pulls into the training. Because it's a bigger assistance exercise, we can easily account for it with some minor changes:

- Deadlift: 65% x 5, 75% x 5, 85% x 5 (don't go for max reps on the final set)
- Rack Deadlifts: 4 x 6-8 reps at 80% of rack dead max
- Glute Ham Raises: 3 sets of 10
- Ab Wheel: 3 sets of 20

As for setup: where the bar is positioned during the rack pull is largely going to be determined by your power rack. Racks with large spaces between holes obviously limit you, although you can put the bar in the rack and adjust the height of your feet with mats or plates. Truth is though, that's a major pain in the ass, so just pick a setting below your knees and tug away.

Notice I said **BELOW** the knees. I'm not a fan of very high rack pulls (above the knees) namely because, a) it ends up being yet another faggity ego contest, b) the bar bends and ends up being an even shorter rack pull and, c) the body position during the rack pull is vastly different than when used during the full range deadlift. In other words, try to find a position below your knees. The most important thing to remember is this: The rack pull is not the end itself, but a means to an end. Don't be one of those guys that plays for Team Rack Pull and shits the bed when it comes time to pull from the

floor. No one cares what you can tug from pin #9 (with straps); we care what you do from the floor with just a belt.

64. I need some advice on the bench press – got anything for me?

Let me start off by saying that the two most important things to improve your bench press are:

- Proper programming.
- Gaining weight.

Although I'm a bit biased when it comes to programming (see my 5/3/1 Manual as an example of what I consider to be proper programming), just make sure you have a goal and a well thought out (and well mapped out) plan.

Now with the gaining weight issue — I'm expecting someone to hop onto the discussion thread to beak at me about some mythical lifter in an imaginary gym in North Dakota who benches 450 while weighing 135lbs or something ridiculous. Even if this super-stud is anything more than a figment of your prepubescent imagination, never use the exception to prove the rule

To all the calorie-phobes out there, here's a relevant (I promise) story for you: strength coach Will Heffernan was recently challenged to bench press 180 kilos, which for you Americans who've never bothered to venture beyond our borders is close to 400lbs. Six weeks prior, Will had benched 350lbs. During the six weeks leading up to his 400lbs. attempt, Will trained his bench only two to three times, but simply ATE his way to achieve a bigger bench press.

Obviously, Will reached his goal (or I'd have been lying about the whole relevant story thing) but he is clearly not alone. If you want to get stronger, especially in the upper body lifts, you're going to have to gain some weight. Remember what your primary goal

is. Your goal is that you want to increase your bench press. You can't then go and put a bunch of limitations on your goal, or you'll simply end up sabotaging yourself.

Psychologically, you're just making it much easier to not reach your goal and have a great excuse already in place to fall back on. Simply put, you're afraid of success and want to fail. So if you want to man up and increase your bench, eat more and train smart.

Now as far as assistance lifts are concerned, you have to look at the bench press and see what muscles are involved in making you stronger. Primary muscles would be the chest, shoulders, and triceps. Secondary muscles would be the lats, upper back, and biceps. Now since I'm a big fan of training efficiency, I always try to pick exercises that provide a lot of bang-for-the-buck.

- Dips — Weighted and non-weighted. I have a raging man-crush on this exercise and feel like it is one of the better exercises I've ever done for my upper body. Also, I get an absolutely obnoxious pump when doing it, so it's great to use before you go out on Friday night.
- Dumbbell Bench Press — not much to say about this one except PLEASE use a full range of motion with this. That's why you're using dumbbells.
- Military Press — I think this is so important that I use it as a core lift in my own training (and the 5/3/1 program). Strong shoulders are paramount for a strong raw bench press. I always do them standing (that's how you pee, so that's how you press), with NO WIDER than a "thumbs width from smooth" grip, and a false grip. These are done to the front of the face.
- Bradford Press — Begin by un-racking a barbell much like you would during a military press. Press the barbell so that it's a couple inches over your head. At this point, lower the barbell behind your head. It should now resemble a behind the neck press. Press back up so that the bar is a couple inches over your head, and bring the bar back to the front military press position. This would constitute one rep. By not locking out the weight, you're putting the stress on your shoulders and keeping it off your triceps. This is best used for high reps (8-15).

- Weighted Pushups — You can do these while using Blast Straps, pushup handles, or just by placing your hands on the ground. Weighted pushups can be done a variety of ways: chains across the back/neck, bands in the hands/across the back, plates loaded on the back, or using a weighted vest (or a combination of the above).

One of the more popular variations of the weighted push-up looks something like this:

Perform three pushups with your bodyweight. Stay in the top push-up position while your training partner loads two chains (zig-zag) across your shoulders and back.

Perform three more pushups, hold the position again and add two more chains. Keep adding pairs of chains until you can't complete the reps.

At this point, have your training partner take off two chains and continue doing three reps until you finish with your bodyweight.

Now for your upper back and lats, you have to understand the difference between raw benching and shirt benching. When you bench with a bench shirt, the bar is brought out to you farther and the bar touches much lower. When using a shirt you must have strong (and big) lats first, and upper back second. This is because the bar is more "in the lats" than upper back when using equipment. Now with raw benching, you must have a very strong, stable and large upper back. This is because the bar will touch higher and you should be using a narrower grip — you must be "riding" high on your upper back for optimal support and strength. You don't want to flatten out.

While face pulls and rear raises are good exercises, their limited loading potential makes them more akin to rehab and structural integrity. These are still important. For my sake and your integrity, please don't be that guy trying to max out on the face pull or perform rear delt raises with the 80lb bells, complete with super bent arms and the momentum of a swinging Richard. Please, just don't.

For benching, I've found the rowing variations for building the upper back to be optimal. While I love pull-ups and chin-ups (I always do these, no matter what) it's rowing for

your bench that will make a big difference. The key is to row HIGH to your body, with your elbows slightly out. Don't row to your stomach. I recommend using the bent over row, dumbbell row and the T-bar row. For biceps — Do barbell curls. To sum up — Get stupid strong up front, and big and stabile in rear. Power in the front, bodybuild the rear.

65.Box Squat vs. Free Squat – who wins?

My no BS, non-PC answer is this: free squats will trump anything in the weight room for sports. The recovery time is slower than box squats, but that should tell you something- it's a harder movement and requires more muscle, coordination, strength, etc.

This is easily seen by leg (quad and hamstring) and glute development of a free squatter vs. a box squatter. Box squatters usually have comparatively poor leg development. Some people will argue that you can make up for it with lunges, step-ups, or something similar. But all this tells me is that you could kill two birds with one stone simply by squatting without a box. (Remember training economy? You should, it's important).Also, remember that teaching a free squat and having athletes do it correctly isn't as hard as you're probably making it. They DO NOT have to be 100% correct with their form; I'm not even close to what most people will say is perfect squat form, but I still get a lot out of it.

I believe that it's easier to teach box squats, but most of the problems that people have squatting (besides being scared or whatever) stems from lacking the proper mobility. To me, training for sports is two things: 1) Having the mobility to get into the proper position for sporting performance, and 2) Having the strength to maintain the position or move from the position.

That's really it. If someone can perform a free squat correctly, or at least fairly correct, that tells me that they're probably mobile enough to do most anything on the court, ice, or field. (Not always, mind you, but it's a good indicator.) So perhaps those guys who absolutely suck at free squats need their training to address the other problems that they're having. I also think that three to four workouts to "find" their squat form is fine.

You can use these weeks for some lower volume/less intensity work and have them build from there.

But I'm not entirely convinced that one needs to throw away the box squat either as it does have great applications, especially for those with knee problems. And some people are just awful free squatters...AWFUL. For these people, the box is fine. Just remember that you have to treat the box squat as a separate exercise. Many lifters make the mistake of getting good at box squats, thinking that there is a carryover to free squats; it's only when they go out to free squat and shit themselves miserably that they realize that the carryover is limited at best.

That brings me to something that I've learned the hard way- the box squat transfers better to a geared free squat than to a raw free squat. I've seen this in my own training and countless others. Remember, a squat suit will stop you in the hole, much like a box would. And the suit/briefs will rocket you out of the hole, too.

So getting back to whether to choose a free squat or a box squat, the real question you have to ask is this: is it important to be good at the free squat, or is it just important that you (or your athletes) perform a squatting movement of some type i.e. box, free, or belt squat. You have to determine that for yourself, but in a perfect world, the free squat would be the number one squatting exercise for me.

66.5 reasons why chin/pull-ups rule.

- If you can't do chins, you are either hurt, fat or weak - And none of these three things are good. There is a reason why Joe DeFranco believes that chinning strength is a great indicator of speed and the above are why. There is no reason why a big man can't do chins so don't use that as an excuse.
- Do chins with a variety of grips, all the time - Don't just stick to one or two different grips. Use underhand, overhand, parallel grip, wide, medium, and narrow. Use ropes, softballs (Glenn B. style) and towels for grip strength. Don't be afraid to chin using nontraditional chin bars (chin off random pieces of

equipment or structures) – be strong in all ways, on all things. And please, don't use straps.

- Do a set of chins between every pressing set- You don't have to do a ton of reps between each set, but doing this will greatly increase your chin volume without taking any extra time or energy from your workouts. Even doing a set of 1 or 2 reps between your pressing sets will go a long way in improving your back strength.
- Use a variety of different tempos - Don't be afraid to use a little body English when doing chins, but don't be afraid to cut down on the reps and do them strict. Just don't turn the exercise into an Olympic lift.
- Use them as a warm-up and a workout- I always start every upper body day with chins. What this does is help traction my shoulders and get a great stretch; this is a great way to prepare your body for the pressing work ahead and get some extra volume in. These don't have to be for max reps as this is a warm-up.

67. Would you use the Clean and Press or Clean and Jerk in the 5/3/1 program?

You could definitely do it but I don't know if I'd want to do sets of 5 reps with this exercise. If I were you, I'd keep the same sets but cut the every set of "5" down to 3 reps.

68. Would you change anything if you were going to do a bench meet? Or doing a Push/Pull meet?

Not really. Maybe a week or two before the bench meet, I'd lay off squatting to give my shoulders a break. There is no sense in stopping training for a "one-off" meet.

69. What's the biggest mistake "sport trainers" make when training their athletes in the weight room?

There are two things that stand out:

- Forgetting the fact that strength training is G.P.P for athletes and trying to be so sport specific. There are few sports that don't require speed, agility, explosiveness and leg, back, abdominal, arm, and shoulder strength.
- Forgetting to strength train their athletes and not circuit-train them to death. This is especially true with new breed of trainer that is hopping on the MMA band wagon. Please get out of the weight room and back on your Yoga mat.

70. Please help! I don't know who to read, what to read and there is so much conflicting information out there on training? How do I separate the good from the bad?

I can tell you how to get a built-in Bullshit Detector.

Train like a motherfucker for 10 years, no breaks, no bullshit, nothing but you and the bar, the rack and some chalk

Once you do this, you'll be able to read most things about training and realize if they're full of shit or not. You'll see people widely regarded as experts as the charlatans that they really are. Without ever meeting the author, you'll be able to tell if he or she actually has calluses or if they just hide behind a keyboard. It's like this amazing veil of shit will be lifted from your eyes and everything will be clear.

Every once in a while you'll lose track, but all you have to do look at someone's shins and hands; do they look fucked up? Then listen to them.

71. Do you have any tips on Power Cleans?

First of all, power cleans aren't that hard to learn. It seems like everyone believes they're as complicated and difficult to do as organic chemistry. If that were the case, people who stock shelves at Home Depot and Lowe's would be the most amazing athletes ever. Picking something up and racking it across the shoulders is a natural movement, so don't let these experts ruin a fun exercise. Now if you're going to be a

competitive Olympic lifter it might be different, but you don't need to hire a quarterback coach in order to throw a football around with your friends, do you?

These aren't going to hurt your squat or deadlift in the least bit; for some this might actually increase their deadlift due to the extra upper back work. I usually have people do these as the first exercise of the day, right before they squat or deadlift. Most of the time people get a good boost to their second exercise due to the explosive nature of the power clean. For sets and reps, I highly recommend people use my 5/3/1 set up; it's easy to follow and you might actually get stronger.

Here are some easy ways to teach yourself how to power clean:

- First, be sure you have a little bit of athleticism.
- Please be able to show me you have some kind of muscle development and coordination and can do pushups, sit-ups, dips, and lunges (without falling).
- Pick the bar up with good form (i.e. deadlift).
- Once the bar passes the knees, jump like you mean it.
- Rack the barbell across shoulders and stand up.
- Put the bar back down again.
- Don't be a fucking pussy with this exercise or wimp it up.

72. Besides the treadmill sprints, what else do you recommend for winter conditioning?

The one thing that I think works very well is weight vest walking. This gets you outside and provides a great workout. I highly recommend the X-Vest. These things are not cheap but they are great for bodyweight work, hill walking (this will kill you) and winter conditioning.

73. What's the biggest mistake people make when doing conditioning work?

This is easy – they dig themselves into the ground each session thinking that it will make them better. Yes, conditioning should be hard but don't "max out" on it every

day. The work should be hard but you shouldn't be puking and having a heart attack every time.

Now there is a time and place for that kind of training, especially for people that have yet to tap into the mental strength that is needed to overcome the discomfort. Hell, anyone that hides behind a keyboard, a lawyer, a trumped up law or some bullshit technicality needs to go fight a war and push a Prowler. If your kids are fat and weak physically and mentally, push them hard. No one ever got worse from training to be awesome. The best thing about conditioning is that it makes you realize the two things that are most important – air and water.

But for the more experienced lifters, leave some in the tank. Your conditioning mantra should read like your training mantra.

74. What happens if you know your training session is going to suck? Too tired, too stressed? What do you do?

I'm not sure if that first part is true, but I understand the question: do you train when you know you're going to suck? Do you go home? Or do you push through it?

99% of people will try to push through it and that's fine. BUT, you have to know how to push through it. When I'm feeling run down, I always make a deal with myself before I get in the weight room. For example, let's say I have the following workout planned:

- Standing Press – 195x5, 220x3, 245x1+
- Chins/Pull-ups – 10 sets of 8
- Standing Log Press – 5 sets of 10 reps
- Prowler Pushes – 10 x 40-yard sprints, 1-minute rest

Nice plan; too bad I slept like crap, my dog shit in my bed, I found out that I have a STD, I had to ride a bagger to work, and everyone at work is on their period.

By the time I get to the weight room I feel awful, and I know my mind and body aren't

going to perform optimally. So I simply make a goal of getting through the first exercise only. No extra reps on the last set; just do a warm-up, hit the work sets, and I'm free to go.

What this does is allow me to focus on ONE thing in the workout and not feel overwhelmed that I have to do everything else. Sure, I'm tired, but even a pussy can get through one exercise, right?

More often than not, I easily get through the first exercise and start making more deals/more goals. "Just one big set of chin-ups" or "I'll do a few Prowler trips and see how I feel." Stuff like that. Or, I just go home. The point is this: you have to recognize when you're feeling down and out and accept it. Once you do that, you can confront it with a plan.

The most important thing is this: you have to have a program that allows you to have a bad day and still progress while (at the same time) allows you to have a GREAT day when you're feeling strong.

If your program is missing this, find a new one. I see a million programs that have no planned progression and no room for good/bad days. That's Programming 100 (not even 101).

75. When using Power Cleans in the 5/3/1 program, do you increase 5 or 10lbs each cycle?

I recommend increasing 5lbs.

76. Do you recommend using a mixed grip when deadlifting?

This is a simple black & white issue with me. If you're so worried about tearing a biceps that you don't want to do a mixed grip deadlift, you clearly don't want to lift big weight,

and therefore you're in the wrong hobby. You probably also own a lot of ties and drink wine- so you and I likely wouldn't get along, either.

Now if you have grip problems, I highly recommend doing a double overhand grip for your warm up sets or your Boring-But-Big down-sets. If you are still terrified about tearing your biceps learn how to hook grip!

77. Should women train differently in the gym than men?

In general, women should train the same as men. I'm not sure how the "women need special shit" myth got started — maybe because guys have "outies" and girls have "innies"? Or maybe because it doubles the number of programs coaches can sell? That said, coaching women might be different, but everyone is different to coach, regardless of gender.

The only thing that you really have to be cognizant of is that women tend to do more reps at the same given percentage of their max as men. For example, let's say a guy can do three reps at 90% of his max; a girl might be able to get six reps. That's just an example, but hopefully you get the point. I would also highly recommend smaller increments between lifts — use 2.5 pound and 5 pound jumps.

Now if they're just starting out or have an apparent weakness in a big lift (standing press is usually the most obvious) then you will have to treat these lifts a little differently until they get their feet wet. In conclusion, women should squat and bench and deadlift and press just like those with the hang low.

78. What advice would you give someone who wants to make money in the fitness industry?

The best advice is to not do it for the money; do it for the passion. People can spot a fraud a mile away. Find your voice, find your niche and do what you love. This can be said for anything in life. Once you do this everything falls into place. When money or fame or an33 extrinsic thing begins your motivation, you will always fail.

79. What's an awesome way to combat tight hips?

Bar none – do the Defranco Agile 8. Here are the 8 exercises to do:

- **Foam Roll IT Band – 10-15 rolls per side**
- **Foam Roll Adductors – 10-15 rolls per side**
- **Glute/Piriformis Myofascial release w/ static stretch**
- **Rollovers into “V” sits – Perform 10 reps**
- **Fire hydrant circles – 10 forward circles/10 backward circles each leg**
- **Mountain climbers – 20 reps**
- **Groiners – Perform 10 reps. Hold last rep for 10 seconds...push knees out with your upper arms while dropping your butt down.**
- **Static hip flexor stretch – 3 sets of 10 seconds/leg**

This is all the brainchild of Joe Defranco, not me. For more information on how to do these exercises do a Google search for Defranco Agile 8 or visit his website at defrancostraining.com.

80. I hear a lot of experts talk about terminating a set as soon as bar speed drops. What are your thoughts on this?

Hogwash! This kind of training only fits very experienced and very fast-twitch lifters. Very few people reading this fall into this category, except the experts seem to think it applies to anyone. Plus, this is a good way to NOT learn how to grind out a rep and how NOT to push your mind and body. This is another little wrinkle training “experts” like to push and write about to make themselves seem smart or on the cutting edge.

81. Why don't you like protein powders?

It's not that I don't like them, I just think people rely on them too much. Make sure your whole food intake is taken care of and then SUPPLEMENT with a protein powder. It's amazing to me how many people jump to supplements before making sure the basic whole food diet is taken care of.

82. What protein powder do you recommend? Do you advise that I use casein protein before bed (a slow release protein) and a whey protein during the day (quicker release)?

I recommend whatever protein powder your palate deems worthy. If you fall for the casein/whey thing, I have some swamp land in Florida I'd like to sell you. Don't major in the minor.

83. What supplements do you use?

I take a multi-vitamin, vitamin C and ZMA before bed. I also take digestive enzymes (these can be bought at any grocery store or supplement store). I have tried just about everything out there and your personal needs are going to dictate what you take. Those four things I take serve me well.

84. Do you teach the high bar or low bar squat?

I believe everyone is going to be different in regards to this – if a lifter squats better with a high bar, who am I to change it? It really depends on what is best for the lifter and what allows them to perform the squat properly. Bar position is a small factor in the scheme of things; as long as it's on his back and he squats correctly, I will be happy.

85. How long should you rest between the main sets of 5/3/1? What about assistance work?

You should rest as long as it takes you to perform the exercise to your full capabilities. Yes, that is a cop out answer. For a younger lifter, this is usually 3-5 minutes. As you get stronger, the rest times will increase. As long as you stay focused and on task, don't worry about it. Rest periods should only be timed if you are always distracted and need to stay on task. For assistance work, I recommend taking 1-2 minutes but this also depends on what exercise you are doing. If you are performing 5 sets of 10 reps of deadlift (Boring but Big) your rest times are going to be longer than if you are

doing face pulls. Let the exercise and your body determine the rest times. The goal is to have a quality training day, not to time your rest periods.

86. How long should a workout last?

I don't buy into the idea that a workout should only last 45-60 minutes. Of course, if you are exceeding 90 minutes of training time you may want to buckle down or cut out the exercises that aren't needed.

87. What are your recommendations for doing the 5/3/1 program during the in-season of a sport?

- Here are some basic things that I advise;
- Train two times per week.
- Lower the training max to about 90% and work up slowly
- Don't go for max reps.
- Keep assistance work to a minimum – do things for injury prevention and whatever you (or your athletes) feel that they need mentally to succeed. Don't waste too much training time on these lifts.
- Remember that the performance on game day is the most important thing.
- Remember that when an athlete feels strong and confident he will feel unstoppable in competition.
- Even when training lighter, strength gains can come.
- If you keep up the in-season training your off-season numbers will drastically improve.

Sample workout:

Day 1

- Squat
- Bench
- Glute Ham Raise

- DB Bench Press
- Chins

Day 2

- Trap Bar Deadlift
- Press
- Face Pulls
- Dips
- Dumbbell Rows

88. Do you prefer hang cleans or power cleans?

I've been back and forth with this for a while, though not sure why I've given this so much of my brain power. I don't think it really matters that much unless the hang clean turns itself into some awful movement preceded by ridiculous rocking back and forth prior to the pull. Both movements are great but the power clean leaves less room for cheating. In fact, if the bar gets to the shoulders in a power clean it counts. It takes a strong man to pull 300lbs from the ground to his shoulders regardless of the form.

To sum up – I guess the power clean is the answer.

89. Do you think a lifter can make good strength gains using the basic movements (squat, bench, dead, clean, press) and only using bodyweight exercises as assistance work?

For a younger lifter, yes. For an intermediate lifter with good relative strength, probably not. They have to load the assistance work to get some benefit. At a certain point doing sets of 50 reps on a bodyweight exercise is futile to someone that has a goal of maximum strength.

90. I just got some chains and bands – how do I incorporate this into a workout?

If you want to use them in a strength-training program, it's actually quite easy in regards to the main lifts.

- First, I assume that every lifter has each set and rep planned in his training (and based on a percentage of that lift). If not, do it. If you don't want to, then I can't help you.
- Second, realize that the lifts done with chains and/or bands are DIFFERENT lifts than the original. For example, a bench press with bands is different than a bench press. So, treat the new bench variation the same as you would a squat — with different numbers.
- Third, find your max for that given lift with the bands or chains.
- Fourth, use the new max to determine the new weights.
- Fifth, make sure you are using the same set up with each exercise — don't set up the chains or bands differently each time. Be consistent!
- Sixth, be careful using the bands for anything else. It's best to have bands set aside for main lifts and then some for assistance lifts. The versions for the assistance lifts (chins, triceps pushdowns, stretching) should be older bands that have served their time around the sleeve of a barbell.

Remember, using chains and bands is not only for dynamic work. It can be used for just about anything. Just remember what I mentioned about the strength curve and raw lifting in my book *5/3/1: The Simplest and Most Effective Training System to Increase Raw Strength*. — that is key.

91. Whenever I try to improve my conditioning I lose strength in my upper body. I know, that's why many powerlifters aren't lean, but there must be something I can do to prevent this. Any ideas? And please, don't give me that bullshit answer, "You gotta pick a goal, either improve your strength or your conditioning." That's a cop-out. Lots of NFL players are ridiculously strong and fast *and* lean.

Well, I have to say that I admire your drive and your goals, but let's look at this another way: You're trying to compare yourself and your training to that of a professional football player. That is really hard to do.

Anyway, I'm going to take a wild guess that you're probably frustrated by your declining strength over your current training cycle (which, for most people, is about two weeks before you get frustrated and move on to the next big program you read about online) and don't realize that it's going to take some time for your body to adapt to the increased work load you're imposing on it.

NFL players (or any professional athletes for that matter) don't just decide to try out for the big leagues the day they graduate from high school or college. There's an extremely lengthy, almost life-long building-up process that allows them to knock heads with the biggest and the best. Allow me to use myself as an example, so you can get an idea of what more than five years of college football is like, in terms of training load.

- January — March: Morning conditioning, usually a series of grueling circuits done over the course of an hour. Most people puked and got run into the ground. This goes on three days/week. You also lift four days a week.
- Spring Ball season: Practice begins at 6 AM and lasts for about two hours. Conditioning performed after each practice. Lifting three to four days/week.
- Spring Ball to end of School: Lift four days/week, running three to four days/week.
- Summer Sessions: Lift four days/week, run four days/week, 7 on 7 drills every day.
- Pre-Season: Two to three practices/day. Lifting is minimal due to heavy practice schedule.
- In Season: This depends on the coaches and the school. We lifted three days/week. Hard practices (hitting) on Tuesday and Wednesday, Thursday was half-pads but you still ran a lot. Conditioning was hard on Tuesday and Wednesday. Sunday was usually a one-mile run and some pool work. Every practice started with a 10-15 minute dynamic warm-up.

Now, most people that played college ball obviously played in high school first. Many times, the running was more intense and crazy in high school. Most football players also played another sport. So for about 10 years they have built up this incredible base of conditioning and work capacity. In other words, their bodies have adapted to it.

So my frustrated friend, my advice to you is to give yourself 10 fucking years of the above if you want your body to react like a pro athletes. Until then, choose ONE goal and go for it. Serving two masters isn't going to get you where you need to be. Now this doesn't mean you can't be in shape and be strong. But the trouble with wanting both is this:

What is strong? What is "in shape"?

I have very clear notions of what both of these mean to me. I know *exactly* what I think it means to be strong. I know *exactly* what it means to me to be in shape. But that's just me. What is strong to you? What is in shape to you? And more important, what does being "strong AND in shape" mean to you?

Define each of these with CLEAR numbers and performances. The more specific, the better, none of this "I wanna be strong and look jacked" crap. I know I've started to go off on a bit of a tangent here, but you always have to know what you want before you dedicate yourself to the task. Otherwise, you're just wasting your most valuable commodity: your time.

And last but not least, you better be willing to give blood to get what you want.

92. What are your thoughts on tempo training?

The spirit of this training is not a bad idea, unfortunately it has been used and abused by too many fitness experts. First, no one who is strong has ever used it. You think Chuck Vogelpohl, Ed Coan, the offensive line for the Steelers in the 70's, Randy Matson, Ulf Timmerman or Randy Barnes ever used tempo training? No. Second, your counting speed is always dictated by your bar speed. You'll be surprised at how

fast you count to five when the bar is over your chest. Third, the last thing you should be doing is counting when you are lifting. And finally, it's a gimmick. The only positive aspect of tempo training is the IDEA that one should lower the bar under control and press back up explosively. How fast/slow should a bar be lowered? Slow enough to maintain correct position and form but fast enough that it doesn't take away from the stretch reflex or exhaust the muscles to a point where the total reps become compromised. That can't be said any more clearly.

93.Prowler workout 1

- 90lbs added
- 10 - 40 yard sprints/walks
- High handle
- 1 minute rest

94.Prowler workout 2

- 90lbs added
- 10 - 40 yard sprints/walks
- Alternate between high handle and low handle
- 1 minute rest

95.Prowler workout 3

- 140lbs added
- 10-40 yard sprints/walks
- High handle
- 60-90 seconds rest

96. Prowler workout 4

- 180lbs added
- 8-10-40 yard sprints/walks
- High handle
- 90 seconds rest

97. Prowler workout 5

- 230lbs added
- 6-8 40 yard sprints/walks
- High handle
- Whatever rest you want

98. What is the best surface to push the Prowler on?

I've pushed it on turf, grass, asphalt and cement. Currently I push on cement. Turf is much easier. Grass is the hardest as it often depends on the length of the grass, dampness and how many divets you catch when pushing it. The weight that you use on the Prowler is totally dependent on the surface that you push on. The cement that I push on NOW is very different (harder) than the asphalt I used to push it on. So you have to be ready to adjust the weights according to your elements and your levels. There really is no best surface to push it on – the best surface is whatever you have available.

99. I just got a Prowler. What should I do for my first workout?

For a first workout, try loading 90lbs on the Prowler. Mark off 30-40 yards and push it on the high handles. Do this 6 times (6-40 yards pushes). Do not time your rest

periods! Just get the 6 done. If you are extremely gassed after 4, stop. No need to puke on your first workout. Use this as a starting point.

100. What technique should I use in pushing the Prowler?

There is no secret technique – if the Prowler doesn't move either the weight is too heavy or your hips aren't low enough. The Prowler has a good way of forcing you to use good technique. This isn't a squat! Just lean into the thing, drive your legs and get your ass into shape. This is about as primitive as it gets.

Author Jim Wendler is the world's proudest and happiest father to Mason Wendler. Jim is the full time DJ at Faith Forgotten Choppers and plays in his own basement heavy metal band...all by himself. S.F.F.S.



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To the rest of you heshers, miscreants, and unsavorables that help promote hard core training, true NOV lifestyles and passion for life, my hat is off to you. Keep pushing forward and never stay still. Live hard, train hard – Jim Wendler