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# DEVASTATION

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INC

COLLECTED POSTS FROM 2011

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to Devastation Inc., a blog about barbell sports. The purpose of this blog is to provide you with information about meets, books, competing athletes, training tips, and whatever else we feel is relevant. We hope to provide new lifters with enough information to be successful and compete, while providing intermediate lifters with helpful tips and tricks to keep improving.

Currently both powerlifting and weightlifting are hard sports to participate in, in America. However these sports offer incredible athletic experiences for those who practice them. We believe that competition will forge you into a better athlete, providing motivation and a deadline to achieve training goals. Through our posts we will show you how to prepare regardless of your experience level. Regardless of the sport you play or your daily activities, barbell training will make you better able to complete physical tasks.

Many of our posts will be long, and therefore spread out over the week so that you don't have to sit down and read for your entire bus ride/lunch break/class/work day. Make sure to check the site for updates to these longer posts. We will also have shorter posts, videos, and guest writers so stay tuned for all the great information delivered directly to your computer.

## **SQUAT: PHYSICAL PREPARATION**

"Take account of the difficult while it is still easy  
And deal with the large while it is still tiny  
The most difficult things in the world originate with the easy,  
And the largest issues originate with the tiny"  
-The Dao de Jing (Ames and Hall Translation)

So it's squat day and you're faced with a horrid Westside/Bulgarian/German Volume mash up and you need to be warm and ready for the hard physical task ahead of you. Let's tackle the general warm-up first before moving on to specifics. The first thing you want to do when you get to the gym is sit down in a deep squat position.

Let yourself relax into it and try and loosen up all the hip tightness caused by your overly stressful desk job (read: sitting on the couch watching tv, melting your brain). After the initial discomfort goes away try pushing your knees out or shifting your weight to one side then the other to try and generally loosen up the bottom of your squat. This step can be followed by other mobility work if your hips are super duper tight (try mobilitywod); however I typically move on to the barbell after I feel my hips are loose enough.

The first set of squats with the barbell should be done with no additional weight. These squats should be perfect. Cue yourself with any errors you are prone to, and have a partner watch you to make sure that these squats are the most beautiful thing in the world. With no weight on the bar you should be able to squat with perfect technique. If you can't there is absolutely no way you will survive when you load the bar up with all the weight in the gym and everyone is screaming at you to blow it up.

Next step, putting weight on the bar. This step is more specific to the workout you are trying to do so let's break it down. If you are trying to do some silly workout like 300 squats with 95lbs for time then you can probably jump right to that weight. For a heavy workout it's much better to make several jumps before reaching your working weight.

The classic 5x5 program might warrant 2 sets of 5 reps, 1 of 4, a triple and a double building the weight each set up to your final working weight for the 5x5. There is no magic percentage warm-up for this kind of workout and the first few sets typically follow the easiest way to load the bar without using small plates (eg. 135, 225, 315...). The smaller jumps come as the weight approaches your working weight and the reps are reduced to limit the volume of the warm-up sets.

If you are attempting a max effort squat for reps (eg. 5RM) you may need to modify your warm-up to fit the needs of the task. First comes the empty bar to grove the movement and then a set of 5 regardless of the number of reps in your effort. After those sets I will use the number of reps planned for the effort if it is less than 3 for all subsequent warm-up sets. Special note: for a 5 rep max warm up like you would for the 5x5 but add a few more doubles as needed to get to the planned weight. The reason that I use the number of reps in the effort to warm up is that it prepares the body mentally and physically for the specific task ahead. You know what each rep feels like for that number and you are able to anticipate the max set with each set of your warm-ups.

In addition to an initial guess at the proper working weight you can use the warm-up sets to determine the weight that you will attempt by feel and by feedback from spotters. As the weight gets heavier you should feel out your technique and make corrections between sets. If for some reason you just can't seem to get the perfect squat you may want to reduce the weight you had initially planned. Typically if your technique is spot on there it is usually not a good idea to raise the amount of weight for your attempt. Any increases should only happen if the weight feels like it is moving easily; here is where the spotters come in. A good spotter will be giving you technical feedback as well as an evaluation of bar speed. If the bar is moving quickly relative to how you have moved it before (here is where having a regular training partner helps) then you may be able to attempt a higher weight. Typically if the weight you planned to lift is already a pr you should avoid greed and rep out a solid personal record.

Now on to the 1 rep max; this IS your squat, the only measure that truly counts. A 1 rep max is a big deal, warming up for it doesn't have to be. In earlier posts you learned how to warm up for other attempts and the 1 rep max is very similar to these.

Again it is best to start with the empty bar and then a set of 5 with a light weight. From here the reps should drop immediately to doubles and after a few sets of those you should drop to singles. Doing one rep allows for maximum concentration of technique as well as time to mentally prepare yourself for the effort without tiring physically.

It is best to find the right amount of volume for a 1 rep max through trial and error; however there are some general rules. A less experienced lifter with a lower squat weight may need more warm-up sets, possibly with more reps, than a more experienced lifter. Although the experienced lifter will probably be able to lift more he (or she) will be more likely to perform well with larger jumps and lower volume because the technique is much more ingrained and the body is trained to warm up and get to a working weight much faster.

## **CUES: AN ATHLETE'S PERSPECTIVE**

In an athletic context, a cue refers to a word or phrase given to you by someone who is watching you lift. The cue is used to correct technique without the need for a long explanation during a lift. As an athlete you are probably wondering how you can maximize the performance boost you can get from listening to cues.

The first step to an effective use of a cue is making sure you understand the movement that the coach is trying to correct with it. Let's take the squat as an example. A common error made by novices in the squat is to not actively drive the knee outwards, causing the knees to buckle at the beginning of the ascent leading to a failed rep or injury. The cue that is usually given is simply "knees" or "knees out." In order to get the most out of this cue the athlete must know what it feels like to be in the position of knees out. Here is where asking questions comes in.

If you have trouble visualizing, physically replicating, and/or understanding why the cue is used then it will not be as effective. Usually this can be cleared up by asking a coach how the movement should be executed and then doing the correct movement with no weight. After this, when the weight is heavy, the same correction made at a light weight will transfer over to the heavy. Do not be afraid to ask for a demo if you don't understand the cue. Otherwise you just have lots of people yelling at you and no improvement.

The next step in cue use is to let your training partners know about the cues that work for you. If the only person who knows what cues you need to hear is the coach and you have to go for a max effort attempt when they're not around, your training partners can help you through the lift with the right cues. They get to take all the hard work your coach has done instructing you and remind you of the proper technique by saying a short phrase. That's pretty sweet! Just make sure they know what you are trying to accomplish so that they can cue you at the right time.

Part three is to make sure you listen to your cues. This sounds so simple that it shouldn't even be mentioned, but it is amazing how many times it is forgotten. When the weight gets heavy you need to pay attention to your cues even more because the margin of error becomes much smaller. The human mind has a tendency to shut out everything when the work gets hard and you have to fight through this to make sure you hear and respond to the technical advice being given to you. If you forget to pay attention to cues I bet you are forgetting your technique. Without this none of the hard earned strength you have built can be translated to the barbell.

## **PRING: THE EXTRA REP**

Congratulations, It's your max effort day and you just hit a new personal record. You feel pumped up, the weight was easy and you're ready to do more. Stop and think about your next move. You could try and put even more weight on and hit a larger record but you need to look at a few things before you go to that extra rep. How many reps above 90% have you done? What has your training week been like? How has your recovery been? What are your coach or spotters saying about the rep?

A general recommendation from Prilepin's chart is that you should not lift more than 4 times over 90% of your 1RM. This can act as a general guideline for your workout; however they may be times when you want to cut your reps shorter than this. If you just hit a large pr at the end of a long workout and it took you 3 lifts it may be beneficial to end your workout there.

You are probably on track to keep getting prs and you need to evaluate the risk of injury, particularly after an intense workout. If your training week has been very heavy the risk of injury to stressed muscles, joints and tendons is higher than during a light training week. Remember that a 10 to 20lb pr might be great, but you'll lose much more than that if it causes an injury.

Input from spotters can be helpful in determining if you are able to complete another rep. If they tell you that your last rep looked slow and heavy then it may be best to avoid trying even more weight. If they say that you move the weight easy and the technique was perfect then the jump might be more acceptable. There are times when you feel like the weight was easy, particularly after a big pr, where the lift was actually heavy and slow. These are the times that you need outside input. If the rep felt easy to you it may have just been due to the fact that you set a record and felt good about it. The adrenaline released during that rep probably won't be around for your next. Better to leave the gym with a new record and feeling like you have more, than to leave with an injury.

Seriously. Think about how long you want to be an athlete, think about how long you want to compete and train. The more injuries you have the more problems you have to work with. Inevitably they will happen but don't get them for silly things. If you get hurt winning a national meet you will be much more satisfied than getting hurt just so you could lift a few extra pounds when you already have a new record. If you train hard the pr will be there on your next max effort day.

## **HOW TO BE A SPOTTER**

Learning how to spot other lifters is a vitally important skill. It takes you from being an almost useless member of the gym to an asset. To be clear, by spotting I mean both being there to help in the event of a missed attempt and providing good cues while someone is lifting.

The physical aspect of being a spotter, helping with missed attempts, is an important skill to learn so that you and the athletes training with you can practice maximal attempts in a safe environment. An untrained spotter is a danger to both themselves and others. Generally speaking the lifts that require physical intervention from spotters are the squat and benchpress. This is not to say that spotters can't be useful during other lifts; however your role as a spotter may be limited to cueing, covered in the second half of this blog post.

In both the squat and benchpress there are optimally 3 spotters. Two of the spotters stand on either side of the barbell to help lift the bar by the plates. The third spotter stands behind the lifter in the squat and on behind the rack in the benchpress. In the squat the third spotter has the job of supporting the lifter's body in the event of a failure. The arms of the spotter reach around the lifter and touch the chest. Typically a spotter will hold their hands around the lifter but not touching the chest unless the lift is failed. In the bench press the third spotter stands ready to grab the bar in the event of failure.

It is important to note that the spotters should not touch the bar or lifter unless the attempt has clearly failed or is about to fail. The best way to judge this is bar movement. If the bar stops moving completely or begins to move backwards then spotters are needed. Otherwise the spotters should stick to cueing and get their workout in when it's their turn to work. Look in any collegiate or commercial gym and you will see the two man benchpress workout. One works their ego while the other works their traps. Don't let that be you.

Good cueing can be done by both a head coach and spotters. In order to provide good cues you need to know several things; first are the technical errors that a lifter tends to make during the lift, second is a knowledge of the lift in general. When you know the errors that a lifter tends to make you can help them out by gently reminding them to correct their position before they get into it, yelling is the best means of this. For example if a lifter's knees come in on the squat "knees out" is a common cue to prevent this. If a spotter constantly reminds a lifter of the corrections they need to make, they will be more likely to make and keep making the change. If all the spotters focus on giving cues at the appropriate times then the lifter will have all of their technical bases covered.

Timing cues properly is an art that you have to learn through practice and knowledge of the individual that you are cueing. Some cues, such as "heels" (to correct forward movement of the bar can

be repeated constantly throughout the lift. Another cue that keeps the lifter balanced correctly is "back" often used when box squatting; this cue can be repeated constantly during the descent of the squat in order for the lifter to achieve the proper knee angle while on the box. A cue such as "head up" (to correct a lifter who is looking down) might only need to be stated once, assuming that the lifter responds to it.

Remember that each spotter in the lifting group will be rotating through the work and you will have to mentally re-tune yourself to the cues needed by each lifter. Through constant reinforcement all of the lifters in the group can improve.

## **I WANT IT NOW! HOW TO PICK WEIGHTS**

So you want to squat like a pro powerlifter, but your last squat 1RM was 315. And now it's your max effort squat day and you want to blow things up! You are pumped and riding high on adrenaline... wait, take a deep breath. Before you go and put 405 on the bar you should think about your actual ability to lift. Are you stronger than last time? Probably, but it takes a long time to develop strength. Depending on your training level a 5 to 15lb jump may be much more appropriate. You can try and make the big jumps and may you'll make one every now and then, but most of the time you will miss. Eventually the only thing you will have trained to do is miss lifts. Presumably you are training to be stronger and that takes discipline.

Real in your big dreams and instead move towards the slow and constant progress that *will* make you strong. Consistently making slightly heavier lifts will be much more productive than making a monstrous jump every other month. In fact if you have been training for more than 6 months you probably will never make a massive jump. A large jump is more likely to cause injury if missed (that will make you weaker) or stall progress if made (which will make you frustrated and then weaker). Be the smarter athlete and move towards consistency in all things you do, the strength will come with persistence and determination.

## **BLOOD SPORT: GYM ETIQUETTE**

Imagine this scene: You walk into the gym, ready for your workout, you walk up to the platform toss your gear off to the side and then you see it. The barbell is covered in blood. More specifically, the barbell is covered in blood exactly where you are going to be grabbing it. Bummer. Epic Fail. Somebody did not respect the barbell. Because the bar is now un-tastefully

repainted exactly where you intend to use it, you cannot possibly avoid the problem. You now need to track down some form of sanitizer so that you can avoid sharing a blood pact with a complete stranger.

Today's lesson, Don't be that guy (or girl). Thank you for being kind enough to anonymously redecorate the barbell for me; however I do not appreciate it. You could have cleaned it. You should have cleaned it. Next time you will clean it. I suppose that last bit was just wishful thinking.

Really folks, you need to clean up your mess. Sometimes that bar gets a little too close to the shins when it comes up. That is ok (well not ok from a technical standpoint, but it's certainly not the worst mistake in the world to make). Just remember that when you make a mess it is your job to clean it up, not mine.

## **FRONT SQUAT: EVERYBODY LOVES A NICE RACK**

In the front squat a strong rack is crucial. There are two things that are important about the rack position. The first is that you need to have the bar balanced on your shoulders, not in your hands. The second is that you need to have a strong upper back to help hold the weight in place.

Keeping an upright posture is the best way to ensure that the bar stays on your shoulders. The best cue for this is to try and lean backwards. Don't worry you probably won't fall back (emphasis on the probably, don't be an idiot and overdo it). With larger weights your center of mass changes, and although you will never truly be leaning back it may feel like a substantial lean is necessary in order to keep the bar lined up over the center of your foot. The tendency that you need to fight with an load on the front of the body (anterior, if you want to use a big fancy word) is a lean forward caused by the bar being positioned in front of your spine. It is obviously impossible to place the bar at shoulder height directly over your spine, at least I would hope this is obvious, but the closer the bar is to being over your spine the easier it will be to keep in place.

Another word of warning, if the bar is racked too deeply on the shoulders you may be at risk of passing out due to the loss of blood flow caused by embedding the barbell in your neck. In the event that you feel feint, bail the bar. Take a minute to recover and try again. There is no need for you to pass out, it does not make you a badass, it just makes you someone who missed a rep and risked injury for nothing.

A second component to the rack position is a strong upper back. This is important in both the front and backsquats, but I'll address the backsquat in a later article. A strong upper back serves two purposes. The first is to better translate the power from your hips (the real core strength) by turning your torso into a solid block. The second is to act as a buffer to the inefficiency of the front rack position. Due to the position of the barbell there is inherently more strain on the rack position than in the backsquat. Therefore it is crucial to have a strong upper back to hold the bar into the proper position. Arm strength is mildly relevant; however if you are using your arms to hold the bar in position then you are most likely not keeping a high enough elbow position.

## **TRAINING SOLO: THE CAMERA**

Most of the year I train solo. Why? It is a combination of excessive body odor and, perhaps more importantly, distance from a coach. What is the best solution to this problem? Usually the answer is to move to an area where there is a good coach or even better a good group of athletes. Unfortunately life does not always allow for a move.

There is a good temporary solution for a lack of coaching, a video camera. There are currently many small, portable, digital video cameras that are easy to use and cheap enough to afford. For people who cannot gain access to coaching of any kind it may be best to establish a relationship with a coach that you can visit every once and a while and send them videos to review when you can't go and see them.

This process will allow for you to self critique your technique on the spot. (Make sure the camera you get can play back videos on a large enough screen). It will also allow you to send your videos to a coach for a more detailed review. You can archive the videos and go back occasionally to see if the corrects you have been meaning to make have actually been made. This keeps you accountable and can occasionally provide entertainment when you look back and realize how far you have come (or haven't).

Make sure to check out the Internet for deals on the camera, and don't buy something that you haven't held in your hands. It is important to be able to try out the camera before you buy it. Remember that you will have to operate the thing while under the fatigue of a workout. You should also be able to review your lifts on the spot in the gym, if the screen is too small or nonexistent it's not worth the purchase. You will probably need a tripod as well, unless you have friends with a lot of time on their hands or a friendly enough stalker.

## **WEIGHTLIFTING COLLEGIATE NATIONALS 2011**

The 2011 Collegiate Nationals were full of excitement, records, and mishap. The turnout was quite large for year's meet, including many of America's top weightlifters. Most notably, Kendrick Farris (85kg) and Jared Fleming (94kg) set collegiate and junior records respectively. Many of the weight classes were highly competitive, with a few of the men's classes being split into A and B groups to due the high turnout.

The competitive nature of the meet lead to many lifters attempting to use every trick in the book to get ahead. Many lifters were making every possible change to their weights both before they took their openers and during the meet. This lead to confusion among meet administrators, as well as some delays. Often time the bar would remain empty for long periods of time while administrators attempted to sort out who was supposed to be lifting and with what weight. The loaders did a commendable job keeping track of what weight was supposed to be on the bar and executed their job with speed.

The judges were not kind at this meet, enforcing the strictest adherence to the rules possible. The slightest wobble in elbow lockout was red lighted, causing frustration for many lifters. Despite these setbacks the best collegiate athletes were able to participate and demonstrate the best they had to offer. Despite the drama, the meet was a distinct success.

## **DROPPING WEIGHTS**

“ Excuse me sir, we don't allow weights to be dropped in our facility”

-Your Friendly Staff Member

In training, particularly weightlifting, weights must be dropped. Bumper plates were invented, bought, used, improved, bought, used...etc. Yet somehow you are still not allowed to drop weights. Generally speaking, patrons of commercial gyms are afraid of loud noises. More importantly, is that lawyers who work for large gyms are afraid of things that move too fast. Things that move fast are liabilities. People who move things fast are also liabilities. Everybody loves money, particularly if it comes from a lawsuit, therefore we will not move things fast to reduce this liability and retain money.

Let us take a moment to acknowledge the benefits of this approach. You probably won't lose money from a person who drops weight on himself or others. Your patrons will not be scared, therefore they will pay you money. Gaining money and not losing it, that's pretty sweet.

Are there downsides to this approach? Yes. You do not allow for Olympic Weightlifting training to occur at heavy loads, because all weights must be lowered. You also remove most of the assorted loud noises associated with powerlifting, not to mention bands and chains. If you read this blog, I hope you enjoy moving weights quickly, at heavy loads, while occasionally making noise.

It is not always appropriate to drop weights, move them fast, or make noise in general; however in the course of a worthy training routine it is usually necessary to do one, maybe two, but probably all, of these things. Find a gym that lets you do this. There will be strong people there.

## **PRESS IT! PRESS IT FOR GLORY!**

I seriously love pressing. Not bench pressing, although that can be pretty fun as well. The standing press is great for all kinds of reasons; strength, pushing mental limits, assistance for other overhead/and or pressing movements, as well as the general caveman/brute strength fun. The press can be one of the best ways to build upper body strength and integration with the abs. In order to successfully press overhead you have to have both shoulder strength and the ability tighten your body in order to provide a stable base to press from. The press can be a great way to build strength in overhead movements such as the push press or jerk as well as a nice way to avoid over training injuries in the bench press.

One of the most enjoyable parts of the press is how hard you have to work to lift the weight. One rep max presses can often take a long time to complete due to necessity of grinding out the rep. This slow movement under maximal load is what really helps to build ab and back strength that is integrated into a shoulder movement. It is also fun as hell. If you enjoy lifting weights you will enjoy the challenge of a hard press, fighting the long battle that rewards you at the end with a new pr. Of course, this can also lead to the press being very frustrating. Just remember that the ability to press large weights guarantees you will be rated by your friends as "most likely to succeed at being a caveman."

## **THE NOTEBOOK... HOW TO KEEP A WORKOUT LOG**

There are many different way to record your workouts. The most conventional way is a small notebook, just like the ones you had in middle school, or a ledger book. Any collection of lined paper capable of fitting in a workout bag should do the trick. You should be able to buy a suitable log book at any drug/office supply store. \$1-\$5 is a good price. How can you say no to that?

Recording the actual workout is the most difficult part. Not because of the complexity in writing down simple numbers, but because you need to get into the habit. It's hard to record workouts if you have not been doing so before. Luckily if you can manage a week or two of solid recording you should have the pattern set with very little effort.

On to recording the workout. Any variation of recording sets/reps should do the trick. Just remember that anything written in a logbook is for the purposes of looking back on training and making decisions about future training (more on this in a later post). Therefore it must be legible and tell you what you have actually done. If you are learning how to warm up then it's probably important to record this. Otherwise you should just record your working sets. How many sets/reps did you do at a certain weight? and for what exercises? That's the good stuff.

Other things might include how you are feeling (emotionally and physically), what the technique problems were, anything relevant to performance on that particular workout. These comments should be minimal, that poem you scribbled in the side of your log was no good anyway.

There are many ways to keep a log. Find the one that works for you. Stay tuned for ways to digitize your log and other log related musings.

## **WHY YOU NEED A WORKOUT LOG**

Can you tell me your squat pr? Of course you can. You could probably tell me your 1RM on almost any lift you do regularly. But what was it 6 months ago? What weight have you been working during your volume sets? what have you been doing for assistance work? Has it changed? Is your program working?

These are the questions that can be answered if you keep a quality workout log. Records of past work will allow you to assess the impact of whatever you keep note of. Important things to keep track of in addition to lifts are general nutrition notes, weight, extremes of water intake, particularly stressful life events, extremes of sleep, sickness. Noting these factors occasionally in your log will help you to get a picture of how you are recovering.

Let's say you are a weightlifter and you are thinking of switching to a Bulgarian style program. You can use you logs to look for periods of time when you training was similar. If you notice that your sleep is always worse during these times and that you are always getting minor colds you can use this information to plan out when you will do the intense cycle of training. It is probably best not to pair an intense training cycle with a time of the year where you are likely to be exposed to other sources of stress.

Information about sickness or severe allergies related to a particular season can be used to plan training cycles so that the cumulative stress does not cause over-reaching or over-

training. The only way to have a record of these effects is to keep a workout log with information on how you are training and how you are responding to that training.

## **LIFTING IN THE MORNING**

What is the best time of the day to train? The answer to this is usually whenever you can. However, some people may be blessed with the ability to chose the time of day when they are able to train. Personally, if I have the option of training at any time of the day I will always choose the early afternoon.

What's wrong with the morning? The first reason is that I am never awake enough to focus very well in the morning. Crawling out of bed and chugging a cup of coffee does not set me up for optimal performance. An hour, food, and a few cups of coffee can really increase my ability to focus on technique. Furthermore they can get my mind out of survival mode and into work/attack mode.

Perhaps the most important part of training in the afternoon is the movement that takes place between when I wake up and when I workout. Movement is not a reference to a specific top secret training protocol, movement is just the general walking around that happens during the day. This general movement helps to loosen up joints and will make the warmup process much easier. Early morning warmups need to be longer than usual in order to account for the stiffness that follows being inactive for a long period of time, ie. sleep.

Overall the afternoon is a much better time to train, but when I can't tweak my schedule to make that happen I take an extra long warmup before my workout and bring a travel mug full of strong black coffee.

## **HEELS! ... A SQUATTING CUE**

A common squatting fault, both in the front and back squats, is not finding the correct balance and weight distribution on your feet. In order to teach the proper technique, coaches will often use the cue "heels" to remind you that you should distribute your weight evenly across your feet. The ideal balance in a squat is to have the center of mass of you and the barbell over the middle of your foot. Why is the cue not "middle" or "balance"? There are several reasons, the first of which is that both of those are incredibly lame.

They also don't help to correct the main problem, which is that you are attempting to balance yourself and added weight over the ball of your foot. In order to correct this, the best cue encourages you to over-correct and shift the weight to your heels. Hopefully you will try, and more importantly succeed in making a change that places the weight over the middle of your foot.

It may be hard for beginners to squat to full depth due to flexibility or strength imbalance. If flexibility is an issue, cueing may not improve squat technique. Instead it is more important to get into a good stretching routine that will loosen up hips/quads/hamstrings so that you will be able to reach the bottom of a squat easily.

If strength imbalance is the limiting factor, cueing may be a good way to solve the problem. Usually people who squat on their toes are attempting to use their stronger quadriceps (the front part of the leg) to move the weight instead of engaging the hamstrings. Over time, and with constant reminders, cueing to place weight on the heels will strengthen the back of the leg

enough so that the balance comes naturally. Other assistance exercises can be used to achieve this balance; however the squat, when properly executed, will usually be most effective training tool for a beginner.

## **PRESSING: TIGHT SETUP**

Would you build a building in a swamp? No. Why not? Because it's squishy... and so are you. Don't take that as an insult, I mean to say that in comparison to bedrock you are easily compressible. What does this have to do with lifting heavy things? Everything. In this post I'll focus on how turning yourself into a granite slab will greatly improve your lifting.

When I first started pressing I never took my setup seriously. I would unrack the bar without taking a big breath and flexing my abs and upper back. Then, as I would begin to press, my body would compress lose all the hard work I was putting in to press the weight overhead. Why was I losing all this hard work? Because I did not have a solid surface to press against. As I was pressing the bar up, I was pressing my body down and moving it out of position. Energy was being lost everywhere in the connection between my main muscles and the bar. Because of the inefficiency in the transmission between my muscles and the bar, as well as the inefficiency caused by being in the wrong position to press I had to work extra hard to lift well under my potential.

How did I fix these errors? First off I learned to take a big breath and hold it *before* I unracked the bar. If I need to I can take another smaller breath before I start to lift. Secondly I learned to get my upper body very tight, again this is before I unrack the bar. The best way to do this is by thinking about pulling your shoulders back, and thinking about pulling your chest up and your ribcage down. The chest/ribcage cue can be hard to learn at first, but combined with the shoulders back it really locks the entire upperbody in place and provides the best platform for pressing.

The next, and possibly most important, technique that I have learned is to flex my legs really hard. Because you do not have to use your legs at all in the press this is the best way to provide your upper body with a solid platform to work on. Combined with the tightening of the upper body, flexing the legs can also help to engage the abs. All of these techniques will put you in the best position to press from and will keep you there throughout the entire movement.

## **TRANSITIONS**

Stop Crossfitting and start getting under the bar. Seriously. Crossfit is awesome, but one of the things that happens when you do a ton of reps at almost no weight is that your form will degrade rapidly and without punishment. What I mean by this is that when you are doing your cleans at 135, you will almost never miss. Therefore there is no feedback that will motivate you to improve technique. Will better technique increase your speed, probably but that is a long term motivation that does not tend to cause a change.

I'm going to pick on transitioning to move under the bar as today's problem. What does this mean? Transitioning under the bar is the process of finishing the 2nd pull (upward movement) and transitioning to the 3rd pull (downward movement). Crossfitters often do not display any ability to transition under the bar. Their cleans are pulled almost to standing shoulder height, received, and then followed by a quarter squat so that everybody can see it

was a power clean. Yay! You can lift a bar a bunch of times. Unfortunately this means that when you attempt to do a full clean (or snatch) the ability to stop pulling at the right time and start moving under the bar has not been trained. In fact you have trained a movement that is counter to this.

What does this mean? It means that you will often see failures that happen when an athlete attempts to rack the bar at their standing height and then ride it down. Spoiler alert! This can't happen at a heavy weight. What usually happens is that the second pull turns into an upright row in an attempt to get the bar high enough to rack resulting in a fail. Usually followed by an excuse about how said athlete breathed in gluten/sugar/fast food within the last month. Sorry for the low blow there, but I know you've seen it (if you haven't it was probably you).

How do you fix the problem? Practice. Alright I'll go into detail. There are a lot of ways to fix the problem, many of them correct. I'll say a few, but this is not intended to be a definitive guide to how to fix transitions. One of the simplest ways is to stop doing the power movements of the Olympic lifts for a few months and only do full versions in all workouts. This may or may not help your transitions depending on how much you focus on technique. A specific drill that may help is a tall clean. For videos and detailed explanations, try Google or better yet find a coach. Basically the tall clean involves standing upright and dropping into the receiving position of a clean. This isolates the transition from the top of the pull (standing) to moving under the bar and ending in the receiving position of the clean.

## **WEIGHTLIFTING APPAREL: SHIRTS**

This post is not about the latest fashion in training apparel, it's about what you should be wearing to train hard. I'm sure you could go out to some boutique store, or even a big name brand, and find some performance apparel line promising to help you train harder and smarter. But what do you really need to wear to train at your best?

The best option for a lifting shirt is something that made from thick cotton. The design on the shirt won't do anything, but stay tuned for Devastation Inc. shirts. The reason a thick cotton shirt is best is that it offers the best warmth while lifting. A thicker shirt will also be less likely to tear when you are cleaning, squatting, etc. Synthetic shirts should be avoided if possible. Many of these shirts, particularly the tight fitting compression style shirts will cause the bar to slide, for example when squatting. This can be dangerous if you are attempting heavy weights.

If you need more warmth than a t-shirt can provide, a sweatshirt is your best investment. Once again a thick cotton pullover is your friend. Keeping your body a little warmer than you think you need too will help to make sure that all your joints are at their best. The heat allows joints to be more mobile and therefore decrease your chances of injury.

## **BACK RACK ATTACK**

Where are your elbows on the backsquat? Are they pointing down to the ground? If so, you have a wonderful technical deficiency to correct. In order for you to be able to carry the weight optimally during the backsquat, you must have your elbows pointed backwards (although not parallel to the ground).

Why? In order to fully support the bar, your elbows must be angled backwards so that they create a shelf for the bar to sit in. When your elbows drop, it allows the bar to roll down

your back. A higher elbow position will feel much more stable and will make it easier to feel balanced under the weight.

If you have trouble getting your elbows into the right position then mobility work is a must. I know that I have to do shoulder flexibility work so that I can move weight overhead and lift more in both the front and back squat. A temporary fix while you are waiting for your hard mobility work to pay off is to widen your grip on the bar. This lets you point your elbows back further, although it may make it harder to keep your back tight. I find it much easier to squat with a wider grip on the bar, and with a little focus the loss of back tightness won't effect your lifts.

## **HAMMER PANTS**

As it is starting to get colder in some parts of the country, I think it's appropriate to talk about gym apparel again. Warmup pants are a necessity when the temperature goes down. Why? I always wear mine to protect my knees. A warm knee is a happy knee, a happy knee is a safe knee. As the temperature outside goes down, longer warmups are needed in order to be safe while lifting heavy weights. The warmer your knee is to begin with, the less likely you will be to hurt it when you forget that your warmup needs to be longer now that it's cold outside.

What does wearing warmup pants do? It keeps your knee warm, of course. When the knee joint is kept warm it is more pliable and therefore less likely to tear under load. Pants, in addition to knee sleeves/wraps, are crucial in keeping your knees warm, safe, and happy. Even if the temperature inside the gym is appropriate, even a short walk to the gym will probably be enough to make your knees cold enough to be injured. Don't be that guy, wear your warmup pants and keep your knees safe. I usually keep my pants on for most of the workout just to insure that my knees stay safe and warm.

## **HAPPY HALLOWEEN**

Be afraid, be very afraid. It's Halloween and that means candy time. As you gorge your otherwise healthy body on the sweet poison know as candy, remember to roll your rear off of the couch and into the gym. Candy can be a useful training tool for quick energy; however it can also be a horrible destroyer of the immune system and reduce the energy that you have. Not to mention the extra padding it will put on your normally rock hard abs. Now go put on your superman suit and squat till your eyes pop out.

## **RECOVERY IN THE GYM**

How are you feeling today? I'll feeling pretty slow and weak. Why? Because I just had a week of max effort training. All of that intensity work has left me tired and tight. There are quite a few ways to recover from a week of intensity both in and out of the gym. I know you're thinking that it shouldn't be possible to recover in the gym, but not only is it possible I would say it is crucial to learn how to recover in the gym.

In order to counteract the tightness and soreness that results from a period of hard training, light barbell complexes are your best friend. I find that my shoulders take the biggest beating after heavy snatch and jerk training. I'll use a complex of 5 Sotts press from the back in a snatch grip followed by 5 Sotts press from the front in a jerk grip. I usually use just the barbell and I go for a few sets of that until I feel my shoulders have loosened up. Overhead squats are

another another good option because they are a great flexibility movement that loosen up the legs and shoulders.

I will add in these light complexes before and after workouts when I'm feeling very fatigued because they help me stretch and increase blood flow to fatigued areas, helping recovery. Experimentation is your best friend with these complexes. I'm still looking for the best way to help me recover in the gym and the only way to improve is to try different movements. Try it out for yourself and see how in the gym recovery changes your performance.

## **HAPPY THANKSGIVING**

All strength athletes should be happy to participate in the largest annual ritual animal sacrifice in America. You are guaranteed that there will be plenty of food to fuel your squats. I love turkey day because it lets me stuff my face with lean meat, veggies, and tasty carbs. Turkey is great for gaining mass because it gives you a dense source of protein that goes down easy with high calorie foods. Protein + calories = more muscle, assuming that you are doing adequate training for your caloric intake.

I suppose the major problem that people have on Thanksgiving is the amount of dessert that you are likely to consume. I don't think that this is a problem at all. In fact, if I have been refraining from deserts to avoid all the inflammation and immune system suppression that sugar brings, Thanksgiving is a welcome treat. I'll be stuffing my face with sugar laden pies, cupcakes and cookies. I'm hoping that this one time gorging event won't suppress my immune system too much, but I know that it will give me a huge amount of calories to work with. I know, I know sugar is the devil, but it can be very helpful in the short term for mass gain.

Between the massive amount of dinner food I will consume and the delicious desserts, I'm hoping that this turkey day will bring me a good bit closer to filling out my 105kg weight class.

Enjoy stuffing your face, don't forget to drag your bloated body back to the gym later in the week.

## **SLEEP**

I need more sleep. How much more? Enough to let me sleep without setting an alarm, probably 8 to 9 hours during heavy training. The extra sleep will help me recover from the heavy training I have been doing recently. Recovery is good, its better than training sometimes. Everyone says sleep is good for recovery, but how? If you asked that question, pat yourself on the back; I know I just did. 8 to 9 hours of sleep helps me recover by providing a period of time where my body can focus on digestion of food and tissue repair. Because I'm not doing anything else, my body takes the time to digest what was probably a massive pre-sleep meal. In addition to this digestion, all kinds of hormones are reseed into my bloodstream to facilitate the recovery of my muscle and tendon tissue that was damaged during recent training sessions.

Perhaps the most underrated facet of sleep is its ability to facilitate emotional recovery. Ya, emotions, I know you and I don't have them because we are big bad weightlifters, but emotional energy plays a large part in lifting near maximal weights. Hopefully I will be able to due a more in-depth post on this later; but the short story is that all of the near max and maximal lifting that you are doing requires a huge emotional effort, and you need to let your body recover from this psychological strain so that you can keep throwing up the big weights. Sleep helps your nervous system tissue recover from stress. Easing the body into a relaxed state can help your performance and keep you sane during hard training.

I like to train hard, so I need to dedicate myself to getting more sleep so that I can recover and train harder. It would be nice to find a way to add more hours to the day so that I won't need to sacrifice some things to get that sleep, but you can't win all the time.

## **SWEET QUADS**

"Yo bro, check out my sweet quads!!"

Did you just say that? Are you obsessed with making your quads bigger? I bet you are, and to a certain extent so am I. But what we need to remember is that the quadriceps are not the whole story. Squats, deadlifts, cleans, jerks, snatches, ~~cardio~~ all use the anterior part of the leg; however you need to train the posterior to execute these lifts at full efficiency.

To use a great buzz phrase, the *posterior chain* is crucial for maximizing the force production of the leg and maintaining proper posture. Today I'll focus on the hamstrings, why? Because my hammies are weak. To fix this I always end my workouts with some exercise that hammers my hammies. My personal favorite is the back extension machine. I'll focus on keeping my back right while pulling through my heels as hard as I can. This usually results in a great burn, particularly when done for high reps with a 100lb dumbbell in hand.

Are your hammies weak? How do you train them? There are plenty of great hamstring exercises think about which one works best for you, post to comments if you care to share.

## **NEW ENGLAND CHAMPIONSHIPS**

The New England Weightlifting Championships were held in Danvers, MA at North Shore CrossFit. Although the meet was limited to lifters registered in the New England LWC, there was a very high turnout. North Shore CrossFit's facility was large enough to accommodate the approximately 80+ lifters who competed. The meet was so large that 2 platforms were used to allow the meet to proceed at a reasonable pace.

For each session, the lifters were split by weight class groups with the lighter half on the first platform, and the heavier half on the second. Due to the two platform setup, there were an increased number of misloads; however the loaders and judges did a commendable job of controlling the confusing setup. The warmup facilities were quite expansive; giving plenty of room for the large number of lifters to prepare. There were some complaints of poor quality barbells in the warmup area, but no lifters appeared significantly effected.

I will post official totals when they are made available. I can tell you that there was quite a large spread in the lifters. It was great to see so many beginner and first time lifters competing, with enough experienced lifters to provide stiff competition for the top competitors.

## **SUGAR WATER**

Do you you like sugar? How about water? Today I'm going to talk about breaking my own rules. Usually I avoid sugar, especially soda, as much as I can. However, the one exception I make for our delicious friend commonly known as soda is during a long workout. Occasionally I will have workout that last around 2 hours, during this time I often need a pick me up for quick energy and moral support. For this purpose candy works just as well as soda, but I find that liquids go down easier while training heavy.

Now I think of a soda as pretty much any commercial drink that has calories, as well as those that don't. I know you're probably thinking that my beautiful tautological argument may not be

the most descriptive, but let me explain. I think of a soda in the conventional sense of colas, root beer, etc. that probably represents how most people think of sodas. But wait, there's more! I also think of juice as a soda. Why? Because most commercial juices are processed in some way that adds natural or artificial sweeteners and therefore they start to resemble the "conventional" soda in some pretty scary ways.

Perhaps by biggest fear of all soft drinks is the zero calorie beverage. I refuse to drink anything that you would expect to have sugar because I know that the sugar been removed by some witches brew of chemical reactions. Perhaps most relevant, these drinks don't do what I want them to do, which is to provide me with a burst of energy to finish a long workout. In order for sodas to be effective for me, i need them to have sugar so that a) my mouth will detect it and B) my stomach will have something that it can absorb quickly. Studies have shown that even the presence of sugar in the mouth can improve athletic performance. Easily digestible sugars like the ones in soda will enter the bloodstream quickly and bring up levels of blood sugar which can help you to feel more alert.

One final note, the best kinds of soda to drink during a workout are those that are flat. Personally I don't mind a lightly carbonated drink, but some people really dislike any carbonation while working out.