

Circa Maximal Phase

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Success in powerlifting requires a process known as Periodization. This simply is a yearly plan divided into several phases. The final phase is, of course, the competitive phase. Many coaches fail to plan the training of their lifters correctly, resulting in premature peaking and a less than top performance at contest time.

The next time you're at a major contest, listen to all the gym lifts that were done just prior to the contest that somehow are reduced 50-100 pounds at the contest.

While we at Westside use the three methods of strength training (the dynamic, the maximal, and the repetition method), they are applied in a yearly plan consisting of many microcycles.

The circa-maximal method involves training with loads that are close to one's 1-rep max. The reps may be performed without a prolonged rest period.

The circa-maximal phase is not to be confused with the supramaximal phase, which can involve forced repetitions. We never do these. They are designed to build muscle, which is already a byproduct of our training. Cheating is also a supramaximal method. Although this overloads the body in some areas, it neglects other areas. Ballistics is the third supramaximal method. This we do while speed benching with great success. It consists of lowering the bar very quickly with about 60% of a 1-rep max, catching it 2-4 inches off the chest, and reversing it as quickly as possible to the top.

Here I introduce a 5-week phase called the circa-maximal phase. In the literature the weights used during this phase are in the 90-97.5% range of a 1-rep max. The reps aren't forced, nor are they assisted by the lightened method, and they aren't performed in a limited range of motion. Rather, full range movements are done.

Four lifters experimented with this training phase: Todd Brock Dave Tate, Rob Fusner, and myself. They had official squats of 810,820,875, and 900. After completion of this phase the average gain in the contest squats was 36 pounds (30-50 pound range).

The training was done in a wave cycle, moving up for 3 weeks and then starting over the fourth week. Bands were attached to the squat bar. For 6 weeks, the weight on the bar was 365 (weeks 1 and 4) for 8 sets of 2 reps, 385 (weeks 2 and 5) for 8 sets of 2 reps, and 405 (weeks 3 and 6) for 8 sets of 2 reps. This represents two waves. The band tension on the box was 70 pounds at the bottom and 115 pounds at the top.

Tension is calculated by standing a 2 x 4 vertically on a scale under the bar with the bands attached to the Monolift. Read the scale with the bar at shoulder height and then at the height that it would be while sitting on the box. Subtract the bar weight and this will give you the tension of the bands in pounds at the top and bot-tom of the squat. The first 6 weeks look like this:

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Top	480	500	520	480	500	520
Bar Weight	365	385	405	365	385	405
Bottom	435	455	475	435	455	475

Now weight plates are added.

	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
Top	540	570	590
Bar Weight	425	455	475
Bottom	495	525	545

The tension on the bar is 115 at the top and 70 at the bottom.

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	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12
Top	645	675	695
Bar Weight	425	455	475
Bottom	555	585	605

Now we enter the circa-maximal phase. It is 5 weeks. More bands are loaded on.

	Week 13	Week 14	Week 15	Week 16	Week 17
Top	685	715	735	685	715
Bar Weight	425	455	475	425	455
Bottom	585	615	635	585	615

During this phase the tension on the bar is 260 at the top and 160 at the bottom.

During weeks 18 and 19 a deloading process is implemented. For week 18 the bar weight is at its heaviest, 475, and is reduced to 425 week 19. The band tension is reduced from 260 at the top to 115 and reduced from 160 to 70 pounds at the bottom. This period is to restore quickness and acceleration.

The following week, the average increase in the squat for the four participants was 36 pounds, and remember the weakest squatter had an 810 squat. This is a very respectable jump for the high caliber squatters that were tested.

Don't let the amount of band tension plus bar weight fools you: the average box squat record among those tested is 750 pounds. Also remember that this training is always done off a just-below-parallel box.

During the circa-maximal phase, the literature recommends the percents to be in the 90-97.5% range.

During our circa-maxima] phase, our percents on the bottom are about 77.5% (585 pounds) and at the top 97.5% (735 pounds), as advised in Supertraining by Siff and Verkhoshansky.

Why does this system work?

- Training with near-max weights will undoubtedly make one very strong.
- It doesn't tax the CNS because a wave form of periodization is used, going up for 3 weeks and starting over with week 1 weights, roughly 77.5%. We know that if weights of 90% and more are used for 3 weeks or longer, the CNS will surrender to the stress. That is why it is necessary to reduce the percentage for one or more weeks.
- By using a large percentage of resistance with the bands we have achieved a method of forcibly stretching the muscles during an active contraction, which produces a greater force than would be developed with

just bar weight. The bands magnify the role of the reflexes through yielding to overcoming the load.

- The final 2 weeks area deloading phase, which carries with it a delayed training effect.

In summary, this is a 5 week circa-maximal phase that is introduced only after a 12 week preparatory phase, followed by a 2 week deloading phase, which acts as a restoration process as well as testing the ability to accelerate and reverse a load.

The special exercises that we used on the speed day were reverse hyper@5356,359 and 6,491,607b2-extensions, pull-throughs, glute/ham raises, sledwork, top half of deadlift for high reps, and ab work.

The speed day/circa-maximal phase day was Friday. Max effort day was Monday. The test subjects switched a max core exercise every week, followed by 2-4 special exercises.