

ADVANCED SYSTEM FOR BEGINNERS

By: Louie Simmons

I hear all the time that Westside training is for the advanced and that only top 10 lifters can do the training that is required at Westside. It is true that our training is advanced, but it is also great for beginners. Why start out wrong, or start with a program that will yield only small results?

Our stats show that we have developed 62 Elite lifters. Many of those got their start at Westside and became world record holders, for example, Heath, Patterson, Fusner, Dimel, Halbert, Vogelpohl, and many women.

It's true we have many advanced methods--for all ages. It's also true that I totaled Elite in 5 weight classes, all USPF meets, and never heard of chains, bands, circa-max, pendulum waves, or delayed transformation. But I had the common sense to read and learn.

What Chuck Vogelpohl did to make his first Elite total in 1988 is the basis for what he does today. Because the Westside system is mathematical, it is based on a percent of your limit strength. It can be used by a 300 squatter or a 900 squatter. They would both train with the same `!percent`!. They would use a 3-week pendulum wave. The percents range from 50 to 60%. A 300-pound squatter would use 150-180 pounds on speed day: week 1, 150 for 12 x 2 reps; week 2, 165 for 12 x 2 reps; week 3, 180 for 10 x 2 reps. These weights will ensure correct form.

This will build speed strength, a very important element of total strength development, best taught early in the career. Short rests (45 seconds) between sets are used. This is the interval method. The short rest will build general physical preparedness (GPP). It will also build mental toughness.

For the novice, it is important to build the weak links in the chain.

If this is not addressed at an early stage, poor form or, worse, injuries will

occur. This will certainly cut a career short. Much of the training volume should consist of special exercises. If your squat stops making progress, more

squatting will not help. You must work the muscle group that is lagging.

A novice must have good coaches; notice that I said `!coaches`!, not `!coach`!. When a lifter reaches a high standard, it does not mean he can coach.

At Westside we have many great lifters that rose from nothing to greatness. As

I taught the Westside training system to our lifters, they were learning what

constitutes good form, what volume to use, and what exercise is best for a particular body type. In essence, I taught them to lift as well as to coach.

Every lift is thoroughly coached at Westside. We constantly analyze each other before something becomes a problem.

It is important for beginners to learn everything about training.

At meets our new lifters all have good form. This is not the case with most

beginners at meets. We insist that beginners squat wide and bench close.

This ensures that the correct muscle groups are developed. For squatting

it's the posterior chain: hamstrings, glutes, calves, and spinal erectors.

Someone with little knowledge will try to build the quads to increase

their squat. But this will reduce hip flexion, resulting in difficulty

reaching a parallel position in the squat and destroying the lockout

in the deadlift to the point where they can't make the top 100 in the

weight class below them.

When we bring a new face in, we don't try to train his squat

like Chuck trains today, but rather how he started out, plus chains.

We update our training continuously. No longer do we use a 5-week wave,

but rather a more efficient 3-week wave. In Chuck's early stages, he

used 50-60% for a 3-week wave. For example, when Chuck's squat was 600

at a meet, he would do the following:

week 1: 50% (300) for 12 sets of 2 reps, 60 sec rest

week 2: 55% (330) for 12 sets of 2 reps, 60 sec rest

week 3: 60% (360) for 10 sets of 2 reps, 60 sec rest

On week 4 Chuck would start over at 50% and repeat the 3-week pendulum

wave. As his meet squat increased, his workload would slowly increase.

When Chuck could squat 600, his squat volume was 7200 pounds: 300 (50%)

for 12 sets of 2 reps = 7200 pounds; 360 (60%) for 10 sets of 2 reps =

7200 pounds.

When Chuck's squat was 700, his volume was 8400 pounds: 350 (50%)

for 12 sets of 2 reps = 8400 pounds; 385 for 12 sets of 2 reps for week 2; 420 (60%) for 10 sets of 2 reps = 8400 pounds. It took 1200 pounds of squats to push his squat from 600 to 700.

When Chuck made his first 800 squat, the work load looked like this:

week 1: 400 for 12 sets of 2 reps = 9600 pounds

week 2: 440 for 12 sets of 2 reps to raise volume

week 3: 480 for 10 sets of 2 reps = 9600 pounds

When training at 50-60%, the work is equal for all. Up to this point, Chuck used 3 sets of 5/8-inch chains placed correctly on the bar (see the Reactive Methods video). As you can see, he slowly raised his squat volume systematically, along with other special exercises: Reverse Hyper, pull-throughs, back raises, abs, lats, sled pulling, etc. Chuck's extra workouts went from one a week to four over the course of 5 years. The extra workouts raise work capacity and increase flexibility, mobility, general physical preparedness, and special physical preparedness (SPP).

A beginner should use chains to accommodate resistance. This builds a strong start to enable one to overcome the additional resistance that the chains provide. Chains will also help eliminate bar deceleration.

This program can be used for someone who squats as little as 100 pounds.

Remember, it is based on percents of a 1-rep max.

Chuck's squat was 865 when we introduced bands to his training.

After a year, his squat jumped to 1000 at 220 pounds, but this was after

many years of intense training. It's simple: Chuck raised his work capacity through box squats, special exercises, and extra workouts and through restoration work.

I started Chuck out at the beginning. He was not born squatting 800, but systematically rose to world record status. Someone who does not squat 3 1/2 times body weight should not do the circa-max phase, nor do they need a 3-week delayed transformation phase. At Chuck's first meet (1986), he totaled around 1600 at a light 220. Today his total is 2319 plus best lifts of 2419 in the same weight class. This is a portrait of training adaptation. Not only is the volume increased but also the training has become much more sophisticated. The form in all lifts is constantly improved.

Everyone likes the bench, so let's look at George Halbert's history at Westside. We saw George bench in Columbus for 2 years and make zero progress. He was stalled at 475 during this time. We convinced him to join us. Like most beginners, his bench form was terrible. It took a couple of years to correct it, both with technique and exercises. George's pecs were much stronger than his arms. We changed his arm position and concentrated on his triceps. After 1 year, his bench jumped to 628 as a 275 pounder. He learned from Chuck to watch his diet, came down to 198, and set the world record three times in one meet, ending with a 683.

This was done mostly with chains. At first, George was taught a

lot of exercises. Later on, he began to teach us, much like Chuck did in the squat and deadlift. I have many books about training adaptation, but at Westside I have watched it as well as participated in it. George started at the lowest level and started over, but correctly this time. Like any beginner, he started doing lots of triceps so they would do their fair share and take the pecs out of the lift. He found out how to push the bar straight up and eliminate pec pulls and shoulder problems.

If you follow the writing in `!Powerlifting USA`!, you will see that the training constantly changes year after year. Training has become much more complex, but it's much easier today than 15 years ago. We have eliminated the useless work, and as we have gathered more information, it is much easier to progress. The poundage barriers have fallen: in our gym, 700-pound benches and 1000-pound squats are common. It took George Halbert several years to go from a 500 bench to 700, yet Paul Keyes, a newcomer who trains under George, went from a 585 bench to 750 in an astonishing 51 weeks, and is still progressing. Matt Smith came to Westside with a meager 1800 total. In 4 years, he took that to 2400 by training under our more experienced lifters. Now Matt has totaled over 2500. Matt's training made it possible for the astounding progress of SHW Tim Harrold. Tim went from 1800 to 2400 in 2 years. What we learned from working with Matt made it possible to take a novice to prominence and at the tender age of 20. This made Tim

the youngest to bench 700 and total 2400.

I hope those reading this can clearly see that Westside uses an advanced system for the beginner. Why start out wrong? Or why do the same program for years just to total the same numbers? Westside teaches (i) correct form, (ii) raising GPP and SPP, (iii) raising work capacity, (iv) how to teach others, (v) knowing when to wear stronger gear, (vi) how to separate different types of training and to know the effect of a particular training load, (vii) finding the proportionate training load that matches your maximum strength, and (viii) how to organize training for an annual goal.

We have developed 63 USPF Elites at Westside, many participating in their first meet under Westside's supervision. If only I had the advantage of starting out under Chuck Vogelpohl or George Halbert or Joe Bayles, Matt Smith, Mike Rugeira, and so on. In the 1970s it was Tom Paulucci, Doug Heath, Gary Sanger, and Bill Wittaker who helped orchestrate the early Westside system. Then in the early 1980s, I turned to the top former Soviet sports scientists such as V. Zatsiorsky, T. Bumpa, A. Medvedev, P. Komi, N. Ozolin, A. S. Prilepin, R. Roman, and of course Mel Siff, whose `!Supertraining`! manuals have brought much to all of the United States.

Even though we have rivals, we can learn from everyone. Bill Crawford has done several seminars for our lifters. Jesse Kellum has offered much to use, and Bill Gillespie has voiced his views on

benching several times.

Beginners should learn form first, then add chains and, later on, bands. There should be no circa-max squatting until you can squat 3 1/2 times body weight. Learn to use light equipment and then graduate to stronger gear. Lift in positive federations or you will be frozen in time, just like they are.

There is no reason that a beginner should not start with an advanced system. Everyone sends his son to Bobby Knight's basketball camp. I've seen lots of lifters come and go. Don't be one of those.

Start right and you won't incur injuries or fail to make progress and be forced to stop lifting.

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