

DEADLIFT TRAINING-part 3

Louie Simmons

The back has much potential, which is seldom reached. For such a simple lift, the deadlift can be complicated to train. If one only deadlifts, progress will stall or injuries are certain. No one is totally built to deadlift. The lower back can be overtrained if one bends over too much, or it can be undertrained if the legs are used too much. If sumo deadlifts are done constantly, the back will become weak while the hips will be overused.

My friend Sakari, from Finland, has surveyed the top 15 deadlifters in Finland and discovered that more than 60% of the deadlift training for sumo pullers is special exercises. At Westside we have found the same. Let's look at some of those exercises.

There are many styles of good mornings to choose from. Matt Smith does mostly concentric good mornings. He fixes a set of chains hanging from the power rack, with the loop of the chain 3 feet off the floor. He suspends the bar in the chains. He ducks under the bar and muscles up the weight. Once your style is developed, continue to use that style, and as the weight goes up, so does your squat and deadlift. Matt's best is 860 pounds. A final note: don't swing the weight. If you do, you may start the load with the bar behind the knees. This is a squat, not a good morning. Remember, the bar must be in front of the knees to be a good morning. The concentric good morning builds little muscle mass.

The most common good morning at Westside is the bent-over style with a 14-inch-cambered bar. First stand up with bar. Sink the chest to round the back slightly. Fill the abs with air and bend over with the glutes pushed out to the rear as far as possible. When going from the eccentric phase to the concentric phase, try to arch the back as you complete the lift. Don't go too low: On EMG

testing, the spinal erectors will shut off and the low lumbar will be activated. This is dangerous.

The next type of good morning is the arched-back style. This is my favorite. I like the Safety Squat bar for this exercise. I don't wear gear or a belt. Push the glutes to the rear as far as possible. Very little leg bend is used. Overarch the back. In the bottom, pause for a split second, push your head into the pad by picking up your chin, and come up. When I break my arched-back good morning record, I break my squat record. The camber of the Safety Squat bar places the center line of the bar well in front of the knees.

Chuck Vogelpohl and many others do a combo squat/good morning. Just bend over into a good morning, then drop into a parallel squat and return to the starting position. This can be done with or without a box. Try to keep the reps to lower than 3 and no more than 6. Whether you wear a belt and/or suit with the straps down is up to you and your ability. We use many special bars for squats as well as good mornings. We also sometimes raise the heels by 2 inches; this puts extra work on the lower back. Raising the toes 1-2 inches puts pressure on the hamstrings. The legendary Paul Anderson was doing all the varieties of the good mornings I have talked about.

A training partner of Paul Childress let me in on a little secret to building some very strong erectors. Place one foot on a 2 x 6 board. Do 3-5 reps in either the bent-over or arched-back good morning. This will really isolate the spinal erectors and hamstrings. If it sounds like Westsiders do a lot of good mornings, we do.

For other sports teams, try doing walking bent-over lunges with a Safety Squat bar. I've had NFL football players, top soccer players from the U.K., professional rugby coaches from the U.K., and MMA fighters do this, and it kicked their asses in a good way.

Very low box squats are also used to build a deadlift by building a strong lower back and hips by isolating these crucial muscle groups. Some men who are very flexible will squat off a 6-inch box, although most use a 10-inch box. Reps of 1-5 works best. A strong squatter will do 60-70% of their contest squat. Use groove briefs or a suit with the straps down.

Don't forget to use as many different bars as possible to break records. After doing a max effort workout with a special squat or good morning or even a box, rack, or regular deadlift, there are very specialized exercises that must be done. The following describes some of them.

In the 45-degree back raise, work up to a hard set of 3-5 reps. A decent goal would be 200 pounds for 5 reps. Lock the low back statically and squeeze the glutes as hard as possible. We use our own C/H/G design, with a 3-foot-wide pad. After all, a wider base is best. If your base is narrower than the top, it is unstable, and so is any coach who preaches this style.

Pull-throughs are very productive. They can be done with a Jump-Stretch band or a low-pulley machine. Do high reps, 10-15. When doing heavy weight on a low pulley, it is hard to keep your balance because the weight on the cable may exceed your body weight. Another way to do pull-throughs, the original way, is with a kettle bell. Use a shoulder-width stance. Place both hands on the kettle bell. Swing it through the legs until the hamstrings and glutes stop the bell. This sets the stretch reflex into action. Very quickly, swing to the front, to waist height or higher, and repeat for 6-12 reps depending on the weight. Do 3 or 4 sets. These can be done with one arm, two arms, or alternating hands.

Try some one-arm deadlifts. Sumo style works best. Use straps or a hook grip. They work muscles you didn't know you had. Reps work best, 3-5. Herman Gonner has done 727 pounds. Zercher lifts will build every squat and deadlift muscle in your body, with the exception of your hands.

Westside does a lot of grip work with various devices, such as the Rolling Thunder from Ironmind, the G-Rex Grip from Sorinex, and the Telegraph Key, and by holding the bell end of a hex dumbbell.

Pay attention to stretching and joint mobility work. Ab work is also essential. I prefer the stand-up style. Kettle bell swings work the abs well. Some Westsiders do weighted sit-ups, flat or decline. We also use a device of Pat Roberts that has helped a lot. It's a wheel with metal foot straps with which you walk on your hands or do push-ups. We also do a lot of static holds with the wheel. It not only builds the abs, but it works the upper and lower back. An added plus for me is that it works my groin and legs.

One other very important machine, the Reverse Hyper machine, will not only build the hamstrings, glutes, and spinal erectors but also traction the low back by rotating the sacrum and rehydrating the disks. (The Reverse Hyper machine has two U.S. patents, a third patent pending, and a U.S. trademark.) This machine is used at least four times a week. On a strap Pro model, Chuck's normal weight is 480-520 for 3 sets of 10 reps. On the same day, Chuck will also do 3 sets on a roller Pro model. The usual weight is 360 for 10 reps. This workout is done Monday and Friday. On bench days, he performs 2 sets of 15 reps on just one machine with about 70% of the weight of the heavy day. Also a lot of leg curls are done with the roller Pro model.

Always rotate a core exercise each week. A good morning, a low box squat, a rack pull, etc., can be rotated. Switch the special exercises as often as necessary. One exercise may make the difference between failure and success. So pick wisely: not the ones you like, but the ones that work. P.S. Congratulations to Nick Winters, who became Westside's 16th 700-pound bencher on September 10.

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614-801-2060
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