

SPEED WORK

Louie Simmons

At Westside we have a speed day for squatting, deadlifting, and benching. This is also referred to as the dynamic method. That is, we use submaximal weights with maximal speed. It is designed to develop a fast rate of force in a minimal time.

Dr. Ben Tabachnik, Ph.D., has said that it is common for athletes to become easily adapted to quickness exercises. This must be addressed either by varying intensities or by changing the apparatus you are using.

We do both, by using a 3-week pendulum wave, mostly with weights of 50%, 55%, and 60%. This also entails changing part of the resistance by adding chains or bands. This is essential to completely develop speed strength, i.e., starting and accelerating strength.

Speed Benching

Speed Bench with Bands. These should be done for 8 or 9 sets of 3 reps. Use 45% of your 1-rep max on floor press. The bands should provide 40 pounds of tension on the chest and 85 pounds of tension at the top.

Speed Bench off Power Rack Pins. Set the pins at chest level. Lower the bar to the pins, relax for a second, and then blast the bar to completion. This is relaxed-overcome-by-dynamic work. Use bands or chains.

Buffalo Bar. The same can be done with a Buffalo Bar. It has a 2-inch camber. Bill Gillespie of the Seattle Seahawks used this method and the previous one to their fullest and so far has a 782 bench in a poly to prove it.

Floor Press. Chuck Scherza uses the floor press for his dynamic work. His bench has gone from 525 to about 700 with this method. By the way, Chuck had triceps surgery after he did the 525 bench.

Incline or Decline Press. Incline and decline press with a bar can also be used. Use Jump-Stretch bands to accommodate resistance and to build starting and accelerating strength. You can even use bands with dumbbells by placing the band around your back and looping the ends over your palms before you pick up the dumbbells, like Clay Brandenburg does.

Lightened Method. This is done by attaching bands at the top of a power rack or Monolift to reduce the bar weight at the chest. We attach Jump-Stretch bands at the top of a 7-foot rack. Blue bands reduce the weight by 150 pounds at the chest, green bands 95 pounds, and purple bands 65 pounds. Chains can also be used. Weight

releasers can be used on dynamic day.

Ballistic Benching. This is a very productive method to develop starting and accelerating strength. To do ballistic benching with barbells or dumbbells, simply lower the bar as fast as possible and reverse it as fast as possible. Do these only on speed day not on max effort day. Do not touch your chest.

Here are some guidelines to follow for speed work for the bench. Rest 45 seconds between sets. Use proper form. Use bands, chains, or weight releasers to cause a reactive method effect. Although you pause on floor presses and on power rack pins, never pause on your chest. When resting a bar on your chest, many of the muscles will retain muscle tension. This will dampen the stretch reflex. When the bar is resting on power rack pins after an eccentric phase, the entire body can relax, then explode, much like a boxer throwing a jab.

Speed Pulls

Bands. The most common method is placing mini-bands over the bar. Depending on how explosive you are, train with a bar weight between 50 and 55% with about 100 pounds of band tension at the start and 220 at lock-out.

Light Bands. Again use bands over the bar, but use a band tension that is light at the start and roughly 100 pounds at the top. Bar weight is 70% at the start.

Lightened Method. Attach blue bands over the power rack pins at 5-6 inches off the floor. This will cause the bar weight to be close to zero at the start. At lock-out, the true bar weight will be realized. Use 70% of a 1-rep max.

Chain Pulls. Attach 5/8-inch chains to only the front of the platform and drape 5-foot lengths of chain over the bar. This will provide a movable static-overcome-by-dynamic effect. Set the chain evenly over the bar. Adjust it to fall off the bar at your mini-max. The bar weight should be 60% of a 1-rep max.

All speed work should be very fast. If a Tendo unit is available, 0.9 to 1.2 in/s is optimal.

Speed Squatting

For speed squatting we, of course, use the box squat method. Usually we train with 50-60% of a 1-rep max in a 3-week pendulum wave; that is, we jump 5% a week, then return to 50% and start again. Bands or chains are always used.

Bands. Attach the bands to a regular squat bar for 8-12 sets of 2 reps. The weight is basically 40% of the total load. The band tension is 10% on the box and 25% at the completion of the lift.

Chains. Attach 120-160 pounds of chains to the bar. (See the Reactive Method video for the correct setup.) The chain will deload while you are sitting on the box. Set the chain to reload at or near your mini-max. This will teach you to explode through that sticking point.

Bands and Chains. The combination of bands and chains gives a completely different feeling. The bands provide an overspeed eccentric phase and an equally engaging resistance. The chains provide an abrupt loading.

Weight Releasers. This is an excellent reactive method. Increasing the eccentric load causes one to reverse the action on the concentric phase with the same force, but with less resistance. Lower the bar with 25-30% more supplied by the weight releasers.

Other bars can be used on speed day. I use the Safety Squat bar on speed day quite often, as does Dave Tate and others at Westside. Gritter Adams uses the Safety Squat bar exclusively for his training, including the circa-max phase. Paul Childress, a 1085 squatter, uses our 14-inch cambered bar for long periods of training to give his shoulders a rest. The Buffalo bar, the MantaRay, and Dave Draper's device can also be used, as well as belt squats. Remember to switch exercises often to prevent adaption to training.

To supplement speed training, a variety of jumps should be used. Westside's Plyo Swing, standing long jumps, bounding on one or both feet, 10-yard sprints, and box jumps are also a good warm-up for squatting or deadlifting as well as a method of developing explosive power. I suggest that every serious lifter buy books on jumping ability. Two that I recommend are *Explosive Power and Jumping Ability* and *The World Atlas of Exercises for Track and Field*. These books will show exercises that are related to Olympic lifts. I am not fond of the Olympic lifts for power because at points of the lifts there is no muscle tension. However, the track atlas shows many valuable exercises that will benefit all lifters as well as other athletes.

A college freshman in track who visits Westside can jump on a 49-inch box. This is in large part due to the fact that he can sit on his heels and jump to his feet with 225 pounds, at 6'3" and 230 pounds.

Weights are first in training. One should squat 2 times bodyweight before doing all-out plyos. I am proud to remind many football strength coaches that we can jump with them, but they can't lift with us. Explosive

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weight training with a variety of exercises will boost plyos as much as plyos will boost sports excellence.

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