

RACK WORK

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When one thinks of rack work, Bob Peoples comes to mind. He was a powerlifting pioneer. His 725 deadlift at 185 in the 1940s and 1950s is legendary. Bob did heavy rack work from different heights for squatting as well as deadlifting. He would also use a special device that would lift a heavy weight up to lockout. It would lower itself, and Bob would do eccentric work without the help of spotters.

Bob was very innovative when it came to lifting. His most famous lifter was Paul Anderson. He made lifts that even today would stagger the mind: 1160 in the 1950s. Paul also did a lot of partials for his squatting ability. He made squat racks that were welded to the bar. When he got under the bar, the squat racks were lifted as well. Paul did a lot of concentric work. This means that he would crawl under the bar and lift it without first lowering it eccentrically.

Paul would attach strong chains so a bar would rest in the chains at different heights off the floor, and a squat, bench, deadlift, or standing press was performed. We use the same system at Westside. They are referred to as suspended chain squats or good mornings. I have seen several Olympic lifters from East European countries do squats, pulls, and good mornings off power rack pins. I wonder if our Olympic lifters do this type of work.

A man that used a power rack to build amazing bulk and mass was Anthony Ditillo. His training was documented in Perry Rader's old and original *Iron Man* magazine. He would place the bar on a set pin and from a dead start press the weight over, lower it back to the pin, and after a second or two do a second rep. He, like many, worked out at the local YMCA, the Elizabeth, NJ, YMCA. He would also work at his father's pool hall and candy shop. Maybe that's where he gained his unbelievable mass. No, it was the rack work.

Reading about Ditillo and his training partner Dezzie Ban, I also did a lot of rack work. I have always said that first you need a training partner, and second, a power rack. Ditillo was outrageous at 5 foot 5 inches and 330 pounds at this best. A lot of his partial movements were done with an isometric hold for 1 or 2 seconds. He would then lower the bar to the pin and rest a second, and a second partial rep was done again with an isometric hold. His system built a great amount of starting strength at different angles, and also isometric strength at the top of each rep where motion was no longer possible.

Anthony Jr. has told me his father's best was 455 for 3 reps seated and 500 for 3 reps standing and 600 for 1 rep close grip to the forehead.

Through the years after studying these men and the weightlifters from the former Soviet Union and their variations of rack training, I have combined the old ways with the new. By using a power rack to start at any level I wanted to, I found I was able to complete almost any weight I could separate from the pin. Many modern lifters do heavy rack work and swear it works for them. I asked Chuck Vogelpohl why he does monstrous weights in the rack, sometimes up to 1100. He said it teaches him how to strain. But like many, he will never do a regular deadlift like the 1000+ rack pulls he does on a regular basis. I have observed a lot of rack pulls from all pin positions and have found that the posture of the lifter is always different from the way he would be pulling off the ground to that same height as the pin. The human body will always find the most advantageous way to do physical work. This is referred to as the kinesiological pattern, or simple biomechanics. The strongest muscle groups, the legs and back, have a big role in effective biomechanics. The body will naturally seek the most advantageous leverage to lift the most weight. This is the reason a lifter can lift 800 pounds to the knees and fail, but if the bar is lifted off a pin at the same level he can easily lift the same 800 pounds. This is simply the body's ability to effectively master motor skills. Unfortunately, when you lift the barbell off the floor, your posture is quite different. One reason is the distance the bar has to travel to reach a sticking point. Another reason is bar speed. These two factors almost always cause a miss.

Whatever your style is, when lifting the bar off the floor, at the knee or lockout, every lift must be the same. But how? How can you lift overloads, like a power rack allows, but with the same form? The answer is band pulls off the floor.

We do our deadlifts three ways. One way is off the floor with bands over the bar. For speed work, a doubled-up mini-band over the bar is used. At the floor it provides 100 pounds of resistance, and at lockout, 220 pounds. A lifter at Westside made 475 plus mini-bands for a gym record and at a meet did 675. I made 535 plus mini-bands and made 715 at the meet. Matt Wenning has done 545 with a sumo style and 770 conventional at the meet. Matt gets a great carryover. One reason is that he is not very good at sumo style deadlifting, but it works all his weaknesses. He pulls conventionally at meets.

To work heavy weights at the knee or lockout, place a second band over the bar to accommodate a large amount of resistance at the knee or higher. A pair of light bands over the bar will add 100 pounds more at the top, a medium band 150 pounds, and a strong band 200 pounds. This allows you to work the lockout without changing your body position, which would normally occur with rack work at different pin heights.

Because of different body types and leverages, lifters have the ability to produce either a maximal or minimal force at the start, middle, or lockout. You have all seen this or experienced this. One lifter can be very strong at the start only to fail at lockout, while another lifter will

struggle to lift the bar off the floor, but will lock out the weight easily. Changes in joint angles will alter the conditions of muscular work when muscle length and the angle of the pull is changed. This subject is discussed in *Supertraining* (p 100).

We have made new-found progress by doing rack pulls with plates 4-6 inches and 2 inches off the floor with a pair of light bands folded up four times over the bar. The tension is very great. I have witnessed an 800-pound deadlifter pull only 495 with light bands. However the lifters' form is very similar to a regular deadlift, especially off low pins.

If your rack pull records are 600 on pin 1, 650 on pin 2, and 700 on pin 3, it took three workouts and three different starting positions. Now it can be done on one day with one workout and with a more reliable deadlift form. We are concentrating on the accentuated areas where maximum force occurs close to a particular joint angle. This system of variable resistance is a contrast method where the load is very different at different joint angles.

We combine many training systems. This falls directly into the conjugate system, which follows the objective of improving several motor skills that mimic the competitive lifts. It is said to be less effective with highly skilled lifters. Westside, with presently more than 75 Elite lifters, and the Dynamo Club of the former USSR, which had more than 70 highly skilled lifters, have found this to be just the opposite.

Try band pulls off the floor or the rack to push to new heights. Bob Peoples, Paul Anderson, and Anthony Ditillo have paved the way with their early pioneering research. I plan to carry on their efforts and turn a vision into a reality.

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