

Off-Season Training

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I have been asked many times what we do in the off-season. However, we don't have an off-season; this would waste part of the year's training. We are a private gym and only powerlifters train here, with the exception of NFL prospects or sports teams that come to visit from around the world. But the fact is, some group is always training for a meet. This means that their training partners must train with them regardless of their level of preparedness.

I copied the Bulgarian system for our max effort days. Just like the Bulgarians, we like to max out on an exercise that we have established a record on, for example, floor press, Safety Squat bar, low box squat, or pin 2 rack deadlift. We may not be able to set a new record, but we do as much as we are capable of on that day. I am talking about the lifter who is going to the meet and also his training partners, who are not going to a meet. I believe this is a main reason that our group at Westside is so strong.

If you stop training for 2 weeks, you can possibly lose 10% of your strength. Who can afford to do that? A 1500 pound total would mean a reduction of 150 pounds. A 2300 total would show a loss of 230 pounds. We can't afford this. Can you?

Unlike the top Bulgarians, we do several exercises with which we can max out, but very seldom the three competitive lifts. We do squats with many different bars (Safety Squat bar, Buffalo bar, cambered bars) and with different apparatus (Manta Ray, front squat harness, bands, chains).

For benching, it's the same process. Any of the following are done: 3 or 5 in. cambered bar, E-Z curl bar, dumbbells at different angles, board press with one to five boards, benching with five different band tensions, full-range band press, full-range chain press with three to five sets of chains, benching with the lightened method, foam box pressing with real weight and bands over the bar.

Our deadlift training is coupled with our squat training. Rack pulls, band pulls, lightened method deadlifts, and a variety of good mornings are used.

Remember, when training with those who are going to meets and going through the circa-max phases, the other training partners must train along with them. The lifters who are not competing sometimes are training harder than those who are because of their level of preparedness. One can't be at his or her best at all times. But one must train as hard as possible all the time, year in and year out.

We must always raise our general physical preparedness. This is a must if you want to reach the top in any sports endeavor. The training must be very dense. This simply means that one must accomplish a lot in a training session, with short rest periods.

Martin Runney said a pyramid is only as tall as its base. This is also true in any sport. Too many pay attention to special strength preparedness and not enough to general strength preparedness. This means that many of our max effort days are devoted to special exercises such as sled pulling. We do a wide variety of sled pulling: walking forward with the strap hooked to your power belt, walking backward with the strap hooked to your power belt, walking forward with the strap held in your hands at knee level or lower, and walking forward with the strap held in the hands, doing pressing motions, curling, pec work, or static holds in all positions. Upper body static holds will build upper body size, because you can breathe while holding statically for long time periods. This is great for football or hockey. You can also walk backward doing high pulls, upright rows, bent over rows, or external rotation exercises. We also do chins and dips; we have a machine that reduces your body weight while you do these exercises.

We try to build muscle mass all year long as well as work on explosive speed and absolute strength, in addition to perfecting form in all three lifts. In a yearly plan that truly works, one must increase speed, work capacity, and of course absolute strength. With the conjugate method, all this is possible. There is truly never an off-season if you are aiming for greatness. If you don't train for 2 weeks, your strength can drop 10%. If you don't do sled work or tread sled work for 2 weeks, your work capacity will fall greatly. Even your flexibility will suffer if not maintained.