

Strength Training Methods

as told by Westside Barbell's Louie Simmons

There are three main methods of training for strength. The most recognized is the maximal effort method. This method produces the greatest strength gains by improving intramuscular and intermuscular coordination. For near-max weight, 1 or 2 reps are used. For circa-max training, 2 reps are used. For true max effort training, 1 rep is best. If you can do 3 reps in a single set, this is referred to as the method of heavy efforts, which we at Westside find inferior to the 1-rep true max. Note that the max effort weight may not be an all-time record, but the most that can be lifted regardless of your level of preparedness.

The second method is the dynamic method. This method is used to replace a max effort workout. Submaximal weights are lifted with maximal speed. Remember, $F = m \times a$. This method indirectly builds strength by increasing a fast rate of force development and explosive strength. Bands or chains must be used to reduce bar deceleration. Bands will also increase the eccentric phase, which helps build a superior stretch reflex phase. Reps must be low (1 for pulls, 2 for squats, and 3 for benching). Never go to failure. You must stop if the bar speed decreases. The bar weight or band or chain resistance must vary to cause a change in metabolic reactions and intramuscular coordination and changes in biometrical variables. This is discussed in *The Science and Practice of Strength Training* by V. Zatsiorsky. The bar speed must be about 8 meters per second or more. The sets are no less than 6 and no 90 seconds between sets. This single method literally changed Westside Barbell in 1983, and we have refined it for 24 years.

The third method of training is the repetition method. *Super Training* by Mel Siff talks about many methods of training. Repetitions to failure are to be done to complete failure with no assistance from a training partner. This system is also used with machines. This is a waste of time. Machines should be used for rehab or prehab only. They work mostly on the peak contraction principle. This system is designed to focus the efforts on increasing muscular strength at the weakest point of the strength curve. However, by itself, it does not accommodate resistance. At Westside, we use the repetition method to near failure for several sets. Does this method work? I would not be talking about it if it didn't. George Halbert has also experimented with this system. Remember, George has broken 11 world records in three weight classes. We use several different training systems and rotate them. The first I got from East German shot-putters. Do 4 sets of dumbbells with a weight you can do cold for 4 sets of 15 reps. For example, I did 24 reps with 100-pound dumbbells. I started with 70s and now use 85s for 4 sets of 15 reps cold. George started with 85s but could not do them. After about a month, he uses 110s for his sets. Remember, pick a weight you can do fairly easily cold for 4 sets of 15 reps. Do the sets before the dynamic and the max effort day and, also, before the dynamic squat day and the max effort squat/deadlift day. If this is too taxing, do this 3 times a week. For a second workout, do 2 sets of 15 reps with a power bar, 4 times a week. Again, use a weight that you can do cold, no warm-ups. I use 185 with one set with a close grip, index finger touching the smooth part of the bar, and the second set with a max or wider grip. Each workout, alternate doing wide or close grip first. Just like the dumbbell sets, change from flat, to incline or decline, to seated. I have seen amazing results. If you burn

out on dumbbells, go to barbell sets. As you can see, these workouts are moderate. They increase muscle mass and work capacity. Not only powerlifters but also football, baseball, rugby, and almost every sportsman can benefit from this method. Again, do the sets at the beginning of the workout. This means before speed squats, max effort squat and deadlift, speed bench, or max effort work, and without a warm-up.

For rehab and prehab, we do dumbbells for time on a stability ball. A bench will also work. Pick 3 or 4 weights and do slow reps for a time record. I have done 40-pound dumbbells for 13 minutes and 100s for 2 minutes 45 seconds. Don't do continuous reps. Rest at the top or bottom position and change the style of pressing, e.g., elbows out, elbows in, hammer curl press, reverse grip press. On max effort day, do 3 sets of max reps for a 1-set or 3-set record. First do a good warm-up before doing the max sets. When I could bench 500 without a bench shirt, I would use 100-, 125-, and 155-pound dumbbells. Our 550- 625 raw benchers use 125-, 155, and 175-pound dumbbells. George Halbert trains the bench 6 days a week. His speed day and max effort day are as usual. His approach is to train pushing exercises on one day and pulling exercises on the next. Tony Ramos and "Dollar Bill" use the same system. There are two extra days of pressing. These extra pressing days are either decline or incline dumbbell presses. They are done for 4 sets of 15 reps with an optimal weight. This is not too hard or too easy. When he's not pressing, George does pullovers at various angles, barbell rows, dumbbell rows, pull-ups with added weight, or dips or chins with reduced bodyweight on a special machine. When he's not doing dumbbells or some type of back exercise, George also does a lot of cambered bar presses or uses an "arch" bar. This bar teaches you to use the upper back and to rotate and stretch the bar apart to utilize the triceps. As you can see, George uses the repetition method extensively in his training. Westside is almost solely dependent on special exercises, using the repetition method to near failure for many sets.

Remember, you must use all three methods to build strength: the dynamic, max effort, and repetition method to near failure. All of these are used during a weekly, monthly, and yearly plan at Westside.