

## The Forgotten Weapon Louie Simmons

No, I am not talking about flying stars or throwing knives. I am referring to the deadlift. Westside has 15 men who deadlift over 800 pounds. One man weighs 256 and is a mere 20 years old. Plus we have five women who have deadlifted 500 pounds or more. What type of training does it take to do this? Two types: hard and smart. We first analyze the lifter's body structure. What exercises worked best for our former lifters with the same body proportions? Which muscle groups play a large role in deadlifting?

Let's start with some of our workouts. These are done on Monday, which is max effort day at Westside.

### Workouts

Stand on a 2- or 4-inch box with either a sumo or conventional style. This is intended to teach one to use more leg drive off the floor. Many will use too much back while standing on boxes; this is not what is intended, although it happens. Standing on boxes will build a strong start and also the finish but with pulling a longer distance. You will learn how much carryover will apply to your regular deadlift.

I have witnessed lifters using rack pulls forever. I prefer to do rack work with the plates 2, 4, or 6 inches off the floor. My best official conventional deadlift was 722 pounds. My best rack pull 2 inches off the floor was 705 pounds. Many will do high rack pulls with 200 pounds more than they can pull off the floor. I think this is counterproductive. Chuck Vogelpohl would pull extremely heavy rack pulls, over 200 pounds more than his 835 deadlift. I asked him why he did them. He replied that it taught him to strain. I thought for a minute and said to myself, if anyone can strain, it's him, but maybe that's why he is so strong. So you choose, but remember, lifters that are great in a particular lift most of the times have a great structure for that lift.

I feel that rack pulls with strong band tension over the bar work best. We use up to 350 pounds of band tension over the bar. A max deadlift can move very slowly, and rack pulls with band tension will teach one not only to strain but to think while straining maximally.

Pulling off the floor with bands for speed works well and is done immediately after squatting. Here are some references. I used 345 pounds of bar weight plus 100 pounds band tension at the floor and 220 pounds at lockout. I also made 715 at a meet at 57 years old and 215 bodyweight.

If one can pull 600 pounds with the same band tension, this will produce a 800-pound deadlift. Note: the 345 pounds was for 6-8 sets of 1 rep. The 600 pounds is a max single. This is the deadlift training we do at Westside. We deadlift at least once a week and sometimes twice.

### Special Exercises

When we're not deadlifting, we are doing good mornings or a form of squatting. Here are some examples of good mornings.

1. Good mornings with straight legs and back arched
2. With legs bent and back arched
3. With legs bent and back rounded
4. With legs straight and back rounded
5. With toes or heels elevated: this stresses the lower back and hamstrings
6. Walking good mornings: bend over while stepping forward for a predetermined distance
7. Back Attack, which is a good morning machine
8. Concentric good mornings with different bars starting from the bottom and rising to completion.

Note: we use a wide variety of bars when doing good mornings.

**Special Squatting on Boxes.** Low bar squat with a variety of bars; front squat; Manta Ray; Safety Squat bar; and cambered bar with a 2- to 14-inch camber.

My all time favorite and I feel a major part of our success is the Zercher squat. These are done off the floor or in a rack with a wide or close stance. This exercise will build every muscle in the body.

**Small Special Exercises.** Belt squats, glute/ham raises, back raise, 45 degree back raise, Reverse Hypers, inverse curls, rowing of all kinds, shrugs, pulling a sled with weights, lots of abs, leg raises, sit-ups, standing abs, pull downs, and side bends. The hamstrings and abs are the most important muscle groups. If your hamstrings and abs are strong, your lower back will survive the rigors of training.

### Deadlift Form

What is good form? Ask your doctor and he will tell you one thing, but remember your doctor does not know powerlifting. The safest method for an untrained person is not the best for a highly trained powerlifter. If you look at the greatest deadlifter of recent years they don't appear to have a safe form.

Vince Anello, John Kuc, and Brett Russell would pull with their heels close together almost stiff legged. Even many sumo pullers will round their backs to increase leverage. Jim Cash would push his knees inward while his feet were turned outward to prolong leg drive. Fred Hatfield, who was known for his squatting, pulled like an Olympic lifter at the start with a very straight back. Ed Coan would sumo but straighten his legs soon after the bar lifted off the floor. Mike Bridges, I felt, had an impeccable form with incredible strength.

So what's my point? If you train all muscles properly whatever your style, you will succeed if you can hold onto the bar.

### Mental Training

I feel you must be positive, be confident in your ability, and lift within your ability. Don't worry about others; make a plan and follow it. If you don't have a plan, you plan to fail.