

THE SQUAT

The squat has always been referred to as the king of all lifts. If you don't have a big squat, you ain't squat. At Westside, we have three lifters who squat more than 1100 pounds and 12 who squat more than 1000.

Everyone knows that we box squat. It's the best and safest way to squat. If one wants to box jump higher, sit on a box and jump onto a second box, and you will achieve the highest jumps possible after eliminating the first box at a later date.

Many have opinions on which is the best method to squat, the Olympic style squat versus the power squat. I know this: the top Olympic lifters are normally 20 to 24 years old. The top powerlifters are around 40 years old. Chuck Vogelpohl has squatted 1150 at a body weight of 264 at over 40 years old. Amy Weisberger is 41 and just squatted 590 at 147 body weight. Chuck totaled over 2600, and Amy 1440. So give me the power squat.

You will gain body weight with the power squat, and a wide squat will build more muscle where it counts. But what about the other methods of squatting?

Belt squatting is not only a proven method of developing a strong lower body but also very therapeutic for the spine because the belt is positioned around the waist. Belt squats will traction the spine and correct pelvic tilt. When your back is taxed too much, you can work the legs. They are great for static work or teaching one to jump.

The front squat is essential for leg strength and maintaining a correct back position for pulling. This was Eddy Copplin's favorite exercise for deadlifting, having pulled 826 at 186 body weight. It builds the spinal erectors as well as the legs. (We use a front squat harness.)

The Manta Ray device forces one to do a super-Olympic-style squat. The Manta Ray will cause the bar placement to be 2 or 3 inches above the top of the shoulder, causing the lifter to stay very upright. I

suggest that Olympic lifters implement this into their training as well as the belt squat.

The rackable cambered bar is great to save the shoulders of large or simply tight lifters. Holding the hands 10 to 12 inches lower than normal lessens the stress on the pecs and delts. This will save a bench career. The Buffalo bar has roughly a 2-inch camber, but that is enough for some lifters to relieve stress on the upper body. A cambered bar will shift the weight somewhat forward while squatting. We also use the cambered bars with the front squat harness. The more combinations you use, the better you will squat.

We use many forms of reactive and contrast methods, meaning chains, bands, weight releasers, and the lightened method, or as Pavel Tsatsouline refers to it as the future method, i.e., lifting a weight now by lightening the bottom portion that is lifted in the future.

Westside has also found success by box squatting off a dense foam pad or by standing on foam pads, or both.

Are there other forms of squatting done at Westside? Yes. The Zercher squat. Ed Zercher invented this exercise years ago. I was first intrigued after reading about Robert Barnett doing the Zercher lift, where one squatted down and hooked the elbows under the bar and stood up. Mr. Barnett was capable of doing 5 reps off the floor with 395. His body weight was 165 and he could deadlift 675. He did this around 1966. After getting out of the army in 1969, I started doing Zercher squats off the floor. My best was 320, and I made a 670 deadlift in 1973 at 181. When I moved up to 198, I couldn't lift the bar off the floor because I had become too thick around the waist. I started doing a Zercher squat. I would lift the bar, which was on a low rack pin, in my elbows and go as low as possible. I used two versions: One was to lower the bar until it sat on my knees. The second was to lower the bar out over my knees as low as possible, then drop my hips as low as I could to stretch the lower back and then stand up. With this method, I made 500 at an all-star wrestling convention. At the time I made an official 710 deadlift at 198. This was around 1978. I tore my right bicep almost completely off at the

1979 USPF Senior Nationals. After that, I could no longer hold the bar in my elbows with heavy weights.

I don't know what took so long, but I finally made a Zercher harness that allows one to use huge weights and to lift the bar off the floor. Amy Weisberger's best deadlift was 468 after a 21-year career at Westside, but after a 4-month cycle of adding the Zerchers, after squatting a 590 world record she then pulled a 485 personal record and then a 500 deadlift, all this at 41 years old. The only alteration to her training was the addition of the Zercher lifts off the floor, out of the rack, and in a bent-over good morning version.

Chuck Vogelpohl also made an 835 deadlift for an all-time personal record, then tried 875 but missed it at the knees. This Zercher harness is unreal. If you want to try it, look for it on the Westside Barbell web site.