

## Training Strong Legs for World Records

By: Louie Simmons

It was around 1970, and I was reading Muscle Power Builder and articles by members of Westside Barbell in Culver City, CA. George Frenn was discussing how important strong legs were to breaking squat records. He recommended several exercises and methods that he and Bill "Peanuts" West had developed over the years. They pushed box squatting on different height boxes, good mornings, and even calf work to develop their immense back strength. They were responsible for the first 800 pound squat, by Pat Casey.

I realized they knew what they were doing. An old friend, Roger Estep, made the trip to Culver City and gained priceless knowledge. He brought back what he learned and shared it with a West Virginia group, later known as the Wild Bunch: Luke Iams, Jack Wilson, Chuckie Dunbar, and the rest of the guys in New Martinsville, WV. After talking to Roger, I was convinced.

About 30 years later, we at Westside in Columbus, OH, continue to improve on what Bill West's boys were doing by adding science and technology to the system.

We know that the best way to squat is to box squat, but what about building brute leg strength?

**Belt Squatting:** this requires a special belt-squat belt. The weight hangs from the belt, allowing only the lower body to do the work. You may have seen our belt squat machine in our squat video. Belt squats can also be done on an incline; don't lock out your legs.

**Incline Squats:** do these with a MantaRay or on a flat surface.

**Safety Squat Bar:** do these on an incline or on a flat surface.

**Regular Barbell Squats**

**Front Squats - Free Squats:** do these for high reps: 50-500 reps.

**Hindu Squats:** this is a variety of wrestling squat.

**One-Legged Squat:** do these with one leg supported behind you on a bench. This is also called a sprinter's squat. You can also hold on to a support for a little resistance. The hardest one-legged squat is done by balancing yourself unassisted.

When doing any type of squat, wear shoes with heels occasionally; this places the work more on the quads. Also squat as deep as possible. Depending on the amount of resistance, the reps are 5-12 per set. All of the above squats can be accomplished by holding a barbell or dumbbells.

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One of these is Zercher squats. Their inventor, Ed Zercher, intended for the bar to be lifted off the floor in the crook of the elbows. At 181, I made 320 off the floor and an official deadlift of 670 in 1973. But at 198, I could no longer bend over far enough to hook the bar in my elbows. At that point, I placed the bar on the power rack pins and squatted from there.

Squatting can also be done to develop flexibility.

Lateral Roll Squat. Start by squatting down as deep as possible. Next, roll your bodyweight to the right leg in a lunge position, then shift to the left leg, and stand up. Squat down again and repeat in reverse.

Frog Squat. Squat down with your hands over your head. Then place your hands between your legs and touch the floor.

Side-Stepping Squat. With a jump, step out laterally with both feet while descending. Stand up and repeat.

Uneven Squat. While squatting, place one foot on a box about 6 inches high and do full squatting.

The variety of squats presented here are intended for flexibility and agility. Something that most lifters are lacking. Many of these squats are illustrated in *Twisted Conditioning* by Bud Jeffries (1-866-strnger). This book has training tips for powerlifting, strongman competitions, and no holds-barred fighting such as Vale Tudo, of which I am a big fan.

Other leg developers are pushing cars forward or backward and walking with a heavy wheelbarrow. Jesse Kellum likes this type of training at certain times of the year and his legs are just about as strong as I have seen. At Westside we use sled pulling extensively.

Here are more exercises for the posterior chain:

- Walking Lunges: these can be done with a barbell or dumbbells.

- Glute/Ham Raises: we do hundreds of these at Westside.
- Reverse Hyper@5356,359 and 6,491,607b2 Machine: this builds the hamstrings, glutes, lower back and spinal erectors, plus acts as traction.
- Inverse Curl: this is a form of glute/ham raise. The glute/ham bench is elevated in the back by about 30 inches. Do a partial leg curl and a back extension at the same time. Hold at the top position (do not push with the toes). This exercise works the hamstrings at the hip and knee insertions simultaneously. A standard leg curl will not do the same.
- Leg Curls with Bands: do these seated on a bench in front of a power rack. Secure a band to the bottom of the rack, hook the band with the back of you ankles, and pull your feet under the bench.
- Pull-throughs: use a low-pulley machine with a single handle. Grab the handle with both hands facing away from the machine. Walk out until there is tension and squat down. Let your hands go through your legs. Remember to keep your arms straight, then stand up and repeat. This is a great hamstring and glute builder. If done with straight legs, it will build incredible lower back strength.
- Dimel Deadlifts: use a shoulder-width stance and grab the bar with your hands outside your legs. First stand up with your back straight and arched. Maintain this position and drop the bar to just below knee level by squatting down. Quickly return to the top. Do 15-20 reps for 2 sets. These can be done up to 4 days a week, but only for 2 weeks at the most. These are named after my dear friend Matt Dimel. They pushed his 820 squat, which was stalled for over a year, to 1010 in 16 months. The same exercise raised Steve Wilson's deadlift to his all-time best of 865.
- Deadlifts behind the Back: this will build great leg strength for deadlifting. If you have large hamstrings, this exercise may be difficult. Also, the great Finn, is experimenting with these to get some leg drive back into his deadlift.
- Wall Squats: Jesse Kellum suggested that I try these. This is static squat where you slide your back against a wall to an angle where you want to work your legs and hold from 15 to 60 seconds.
- Plyometrics and Jumping: Paul Anderson was doing jumping exercises in the 1950's. He would jump onto boxes of different heights to build explosive leg power. Norm Schomanski, our great Olympic lifting champion, also did a lot of jumping. He was reputedly able to jump onto a 4 foot high bar top at a local tavern. The benefits of kinetic energy on the

lowering phase is that it produces a phantom loading effect on the landing. I highly suggest you do a lot of research on plyometrics before using them in your training. They must be used correctly.

- I hope some of the exercises mentioned here can raise your squat and deadlift. Some of the exercises are very old, and some are relatively new, but all are proven to work. It's up to you or your coach to place them where they can do the most good.