

What A Gym Really Needs

By: Louie Simmons

There are franchises and there are gyms. Westside Barbell is definitely a gym. What's the difference? A franchise is a place where they sell baggy pants, T-shirts, protein powder, and a whole bunch of junk you don't need. You can't make noise (don't even think about cursing), and chalk is forbidden. They have lots of mirrors (all you weirdo's who look in them for hours, you know who you are) and bodybuilding magazines featuring lots of girls and lots of bull.

So what does a gym have that's so important? First is attitude. Everyone must have the same goal, which is to get stronger. We don't care if you are trying a 300 bench press for a PR or a 600 PR.

And what about equipment? Machines are a waste. They work on the theory of peak contraction, which simply means you must start at your weakest point; this is stupid and very dangerous. Machines build no stability. Also, how can one machine work for two people if one is strong at the bottom of a lift and his partner is strongest at the top? It's impossible.

I want to say something there about high-intensity training (HIT). Many football teams are using the HIT system. Well, my friends, intensity are not a feeling but rather a division of percent-of-a-one-rep- max zones. Doing one set to failure does little for speed strength. If you have a player do 20 reps with a barbell to complete failure, how long does it take him to do a second set? Under 35 seconds I hope, because that's how long a football player gets to rest between plays. I was talking to an NFL strength coach recently who said that college programs using HIT are sending him linemen that can't vertical jump 19 inches or squat 300 pounds! Chuck Vogelpohl's brother, who trains with us, is a center and weighs 305 at 20 years old; he has a vertical jump of 31 inches.

What does a gym need for bench pressing? First is a power rack with pin holes every 2 inches on center, or 1 inch on center if possible, like ours, for doing rack lockouts. If the hole spacing is greater than 2 inches, the weight reduction necessary between using one set of holes and the next is too great to work within our strength curve.

For board presses a gym needs two, three, and four boards glued or nailed together. Doing a board press is not the same as doing a rack press. When doing a rack press, the contact is only with the hands. When board pressing, the weight is transferred through the boards into your chest, shoulders, and arms.

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If you want reversal strength, and who doesn't, the contrast method is a must, for example, sleds and parachutes, which sprinters use, that break away while running to help create the over-speed effect.

Explosive and accelerating strength can be developed with the aid of weight strippers or the Release device. By lowering extra weight on the releasers and then concentrically raising a lesser load, explosive strength can be increased.

By using chains that are connected to the bar, we can create a deloading effect on the eccentric phase through the chains piling on the floor. This process exactly duplicates the strength curve as it relates to the bottom of the lift. Reloading of chain concentrically again helps to maximize the complete range of joint motion, thus accommodating resistance very effectively.

Flex bands work much like chains in as much as they unload tension upon lowering, with a regaining of tension in the concentric phase. A greater amount reversal strength can be obtained not by lowering a heavier weight, which leads to a decrease in reversal strength, but by a moderate increase in downward velocity. This is kinetic energy, which can be transferred to the storage and reuse of elastic energy, for the concentric phase. This was discussed by Zatsiorsky in Science and Practice of Strength Training.

A great piece of equipment is a McDonald cambered bar. If you are an advanced bencher, you may have to place a 2 x 6 or two 2 x 6s on your chest to reduce the stretching from 5 inches to 2-3 inches.

A 7-foot EZ-curl bar can also be a great benefit.

A set of rings resembling gymnastic rings to do push-ups and pull-ups with, from a variety of angles, is tremendous for building extra muscle.

For squatting and deadlifting, again weight releasers, chains, and bands should be used extensively on max effort day and speed day. An assortment of boxes to squat off of is vital. Also, a Manta Ray, a Safety Squat Bar, and for most powerlifters, a front squat harness are needed to change body leverage artificially.

Don't worry if you are weak on one or all of these devices. On the contrary, this is precisely why they will work for you. For example, Don Damron would use the Safety Squat Bar for a minicycle and his squat and deadlift would jump about 20 pounds every time. A lifter needs many weapons in his arsenal to increase his or her lifts, as well as to prevent boredom.

Another bar that we use quite often is the Buffalo Bar by Ironmind. It is very strong and cambered, enabling one to do good mornings easily.

Don't forget to include bands, chains, and weight releasers to affect your leverage in different ways. Sometimes use lots of chains and a light bar weight, or do just the opposite, a light amount of chains and a heavy bar weight. The Russians did a lot of slow lowering with 80%, taking about 6 seconds, and raising up 60% very explosively with the use of weight releasers.

Belt squats are the perfect way to work the lower body without trauma on the spine. They are also very therapeutic. If you suffer from a back injury, you can still build your lower body with belt squats. This exercise can realign the vertebrae by its traction properties.

A glute/ham bench is an absolute must. The hamstring is the muscle group that can make or break your squat and deadlift progress. Five women at Westside have squatted or deadlifted 500 pounds or more, and every one of them laid a heavy foundation on a glute/ham machine. Doris Simmons made a 341 squat and 349 deadlift at 105, and Amy Weisberger has done a 445 squat and 430 deadlift at 123.

A Reverse Hyper@5356,359 and 6,491,607b2 will build your glutes, hamstrings, and lower back like nothing else. There are many men who merely increase the weight on this exercise near a meet. Billy Masters, who squats 900 pounds, does just that. The Reverse Hyper@5356,359 and 6,491,607b2 is very therapeutic for the low back because it rotates the sacrum on each rep.

A pulling sled will do unbelievable things for your squat and deadlift. Jim Voronin was stuck at a 683 deadlift forever. We advised him to stop deadlifting and start dragging a weighted sled. In 4 months he did a 750 deadlift!

It also helps to be well read. You need a good library to understand how science and exercise fit together. Forget most of the books written by Americans. To start, call Bud at 313-425-2862 and ask for The Managing of the Weightlifter, Multi-Year Training In Weightlifting, and The Fundamentals of Special Strength, all translated from Russian. Zatsiorsky's Science and Practice of Strength Training can be obtained by calling 800-747-4457. Books by Tudor Bompá are good, such as Strength and Power in Sports. These books will help you understand weight training to a much greater extent.