

## The Squat Workout

By: Louie Simmons

When I write about training, I am reporting the results of our top lifters. So far, 16 have squatted over 800, six have squatted over 850, and one has done 1010, Matt Dimel.

The system used is a mixture of the dynamic method and the maximum effort method, greatly influenced by the conjugate method, which emphasizes the parts, not the whole. We always raise work capacity through special means consisting of a large array of exercises.

The squat is trained with a barbell two times a week. Friday for speed work with a large training volume and with medium intensity (50-60% of a contest squat) done off a box at or slightly below parallel. This is followed by special exercises for the back, hips, hamstrings, and abs. A second workout is on Monday. It is designed for maximum strength, hence the term 'maximum effort method'. Once again, exercises for the back, hips, hamstrings, and abs are worked after attempting record poundage on an assortment of core exercises.

All of our squats are done on a box. There is nothing dangerous about box squatting. When someone writes about the dangers of box squatting, it is apparent to me that the individual was never taught to box squat correctly or never taught at all.

The Washington Huskies have had great success with our program for 8 years, yet they would never box squat. I told them that if they came to Westside and learned how to do them, they would always do them. When the coaches returned home, they put their athletes to the test and found that those who could not learn how to squat by regular squatting discovered how to in half an hour by box squatting.

This is how: with the feet pointing straight ahead and much wider than shoulder width apart, push the glutes to the rear (always sit back, not down) until you are sitting on the box. Your shins will be past vertical (knee joint more than 90 degrees), something that is impossible with regular squatting because you would fall over backward. However, this position is made possible with the box, thus overloading the most critical squatting muscles. There is absolutely no pressure on the patella tendons by doing this. Note: Dimel came back to do 903 at the 1993 APF Senior Nationals after tearing off both knees; all his training was on boxes.

Why does this box style of squatting teach one to squat properly. Because after squatting back so far and releasing the hip and lower oblique muscles, you must first raise the head to raise out of a deep squat. If while descending into a

squat, the glutes go back first, then the head must move last. Right? The opposite of this eccentric phase is an concentric contraction, or raising. It only stands to reason that the head must raise first, and the glutes will follow.

We see many lifters get bowed over coming up from a squat because they push with their feet first instead of their head. We are trying to raise the bar, so why not push against the bar first?

Static work overcome by dynamic action' builds explosive strength best. This is precisely what a box squat provides. In addition, you are always breaking parallel. One can also train much lighter; 50-60% of a contest max is all that is necessary to make progress if you keep the lifts explosive and accelerate the bar.

As always, 20 out of 200 lifts should be above your training weight for any particular workout. This should occur when the percentage reaches 55 or 60%.

To clarify, we use a 5 week wave', starting at 50% for week 1, jumping 2.5% each week until 60% is reached, and then starting over. The graphical representation looks like a wave, thus the name.

The box allows one to max out and to determine your new strength level without the aid of contest gear — wraps, straps, and a big psych. There should be two maxes: a test max and a training max. The contest max requires a large crease of adrenaline, thus causing psychological regression of the central nervous system. This is course, why on max effort day we switch a core exercise such as good mornings or a special squat or deadlift every 2 weeks. This enables us to max 52 weeks a year.

It is easy to keep track of your current squat max without maxing out in gear. Bob Youngs has gone from a 570 to a 720 squat in 10 months without doing a regular squat in training. Here's how. Bob made a 500 box squat record. At a meet, he did 590. He later recorded a 540 box and at a meet did 670. For his third meet in training Bob hit 585. At the meet 720 was strong. When Bob does, lets say, 610 off parallel box, we are confident that his meet squat will be up at least 25 pounds, just as his box squat indicates. Some lifters will get a large carryover and some a small carryover, but it should stay consistent with the individual.

Now lets get to workout. On Friday we do the speed work. For example, for a 600 lb. squatter, start with 50% for 12 sets of 2 reps with 45 seconds rest between sets. Stay with 12 set of 2's for 3 weeks, jumping 2.5% each week. At 57.5 and 60%, drop the sets to 10; 60% of 600 is 360;  $360 \times 10$  sets of 2 reps = 7200 pounds. This is equal to the total volume of 12 sets of 2 reps with 50%, or  $300 \times 24 = 7200$  pounds.

We follow a modification of Verkhoshansky's method of reaching total volume. As you can see our bar volume stays the same, but as we wave up every week 2.5%, we greatly raise the volume of special exercises until it is highest at the 60% week. Then it dramatically drops down and is raised gradually as the wave is again increased from 50 to 60% over the next 5 weeks.

The assistance work is glute ham raises, reverse hypers, pull-throughs, back raises, and a large dose of ab work as well as pulling a weighted sled.

With this system an 800 pound squatter can keep his strength where ever he wants. How? If that 800 squatter trains with weight ranging from 375 to 450(50-60%), he will maintain a 750 pound squat. Then he can push it up in one wave, or about 5 weeks, to a new max.

We think the two most important elements of squat training are the separation off the box — explosive strength — and accelerating strength and, second, raising work capacity through special exercises. Remember to try a new box PR every 8-12 weeks. If you fail, ask yourself why. It must be a particular weak muscle group, so increase the work for that muscle group.

If you use Weight Releases, this is the day. We suggest adding 10-20% to the bar weight for the eccentric work. Rubber bands or chains can be added as well, or possibly both devices. When using chains, when you are standing up, about 3 links of the chain should be touching the floor so that when you are seated on the below-parallel box about half the chain is unloaded (lying on the floor). Your top weight with chains while sitting on the box will be approximately 62.5%.

Joe Amato and Dave Tate made squats of 865 and 870, respectively, by using a top weight of 465 plus 160 pounds of chain. When sitting on the box, half of the chain weight (80 pounds) adds to the 465 bar weight, equaling 545 at the bottom, which is 62.5% of 870.

The second squat workout day is Monday. It is known as the maximum effort day. This day benefits the deadlift as well as the squat. It consists of maximum squats for 1-3 reps with a Safety Squat Bar, Manta Ray, front squat harness, etc. All squats are done on boxes of different heights: well above parallel (17, 16, 15 inches) or well below parallel (10, 9, 8 inches). After maxing out for 2 weeks on a particular squat, we switch to a variety of good mornings, such as arched back with a close or wide stance, bent-over good mornings with a close or wide stance, with legs bent to different degrees, or a combination good morning/squat, which is a favorite. The latter is done by using a shoulder-width stance. Bend over to above parallel to the floor, then round over and sink into a very deep squat, arch, and return to a standing position. Very heavy weights can be used.

Rack deadlifts from two or three positions as well as deadlifts standing on a platform 2-4 inches high are done for a max single. These deadlifts also help us monitor our progress when we try a new record.

Rotate from a squatting or back-arching core exercise every 2 weeks to a bending-over exercise. This would include good mornings and special deadlifts.

One needs to use a wide variety of core barbell exercises to identify weaknesses. Special exercises are like football plays or different punches in boxing; one finds one that will crack the defense of your opponent. Then, of course, that play or punch will cease to work and a new play or punch will need to be found. Eventually you can come back to the original play or punch with newfound success.

On Monday, maximum effort day, you must max out on a core barbell exercise, followed by 3-5 special exercises similar to the ones done on Friday, the dynamic day.

There are two types of maxes: one in a movement (squat, bench, deadlift, snatch, clean and jerk) and one on a muscle. Hamstrings can be maxed with glute/ham raises, pull-throughs, stiff-legged deadlifts, or arched back good mornings. Spinal erectors can be maxed with back raises or reverse hypers@5356,359 and 6,491,607b2, and traps by shrugs or high pulls. Of course, no muscle can be completely isolated, but you can come as close as possible. These exercises are done for 6-12 reps, or sometimes to failure (the repetition method). Each lifter must determine the number of sets for his or her physical preparedness. These exercises must be rotated when they cease to work, that is, when there is no pump or strength gain. All muscle groups must be worked in this manner, known as the conjugate method. This method has proven effective not only for strength gains but also as a means of restoration.

Close to an important contest, 10-14 days out, we lower the core exercise top weights, but maintain and sometimes increase the special exercise work. Remember, it is the hamstrings, lower back, hips, and abs that do the squatting, not the quads. It is important to know what squats to increase a squat.

Note: don't think of heavy and light workouts, think fast and slow. Fast will develop explosive strength and acceleration. Slow, with super max weight (over 100%), will develop max force. They must be trained in two different workouts. Always train the barbell exercise first, then special exercises in a priority system: what needs the most work train first; what needs the least work train last. It is best to divide the workout into two sessions, separated by at least an hour break.

If you follow this approach to training, you may be 'on deck' while we're squatting.