

## Training The Back

By: Louie Simmons

At Westside we do an enormous amount of back work. This consists of upper and lower back work.

The upper back plays a large role in all three lifts. For squatting, the farther back the bar sits, the greater the leverage. Notice that I said back on the back, not down. At Westside we do a lot of upright rows to thicken the traps. We also do inverted flies with dumbbells, and we use a machine called The Hurricane, a multipurpose device for an assortment of exercises. These really add mass to the entire upper back.

We also do dumbbell power cleans, sometimes very heavy for low reps. We have a high school discus thrower who does 4 sets of 4 reps in the one arm power snatch with a 100 pound dumbbell. By the way, we don't do the Olympic lifts.

Rows of all types are done at least three times a week. The guys who only bench do rows just about every workout, which is four times a week. The full powerlifters do even more rows per week. Chest-supported rows are a mainstay. Very heavy weights are used by most. Among the rows that are performed are the old-fashion t-bar rows with different handles, wide-bar and V-handle rows, one-arm rows across the body, regular barbell rows occasionally with bands, and one-arm dumbbells rows.

Chins are great either with weight or without. But to be honest, we don't do them very often.

Everyone does lat pull-downs at Westside, but the Westsider with the strongest lats told me pull downs don't help his lat strength as much as rows.

This is the majority of our upper back work. We also do a lot of band work and sled work for the upper back. Also, any time you do overhead pressing you are working the upper back. We do most of our overhead work seated.

Most articles on deadlifting address upper back work to assist the deadlift. That, of course is good, but the lower back is injured more often than all the other back muscles combined.

At Westside we do a lot of 45-degree reverse hyperextensions. This style hits dramatically not only the lower back but also the hamstrings. They are done very heavy on either squat day or max effort day for the squat and deadlift. Six to ten reps are performed. The number of sets depends on your level of physical preparedness. We do 2-6 reps.

We do a lot of work on a good morning machine appropriately named the Back Attack. This machine makes the strictest good morning possible. It anchors the feet with rollers and has an ab pad to feet the legs straight. A roller for the upper

body makes it comfortable. Of course, we add bands to the weight. With heavy weight we do 6-10 reps.

We have been using the Reverse Hyper machine since 1975. It builds not only the lower back, but also the hamstrings and glutes. The real secret of this machine is that it tractions the vertebrae while you use it, so it builds strength and works as restoration at the same time. We do these at least four times a week; twice heavy and twice light. Chuck Vogelpohl and I use the Reverse Hyper machine heavy before and after squatting on Friday mornings. I do them light on Friday evening. This is repeated on Monday, max effort day. On Tuesday evening Eskil Thomasson and I do heavy again because they traction the back so you can do them repeatedly throughout the week. The reps range from 8 to 12 on heavy workouts and 15 to 30 on light workouts.

Zercher squats will build all the squat and deadlift muscles, especially the lower back. This exercise was intended to be done off the floor, but I could do them off the floor only when I was a 181(I did 320 pounds). Bob Burnett reportedly did 390 for 5 reps in 1967 and made a 675 deadlift at 165 pounds. We now do Zercher squats with a strongman rack. They can be done for 1-3 reps. I prefer high reps, 8-12.

Pull-throughs with straight legs really hit the lower back. High reps are best, 10-20. for more variety stand on a box, or do a semi-squat to activate the hamstrings.

We do a lot of rotational exercises on the Land Mine. This is a popular exercise for wrestlers and mixed martial arts fighters. If you don't have a Land Mine, place the end of a 45- pound bar in a corner, grab the other end (use a handle if possible) and rotate the bar overhead from one hip to the other. For a better workout, superset these with either Reverse Hyper machine , rows, pull-throughs, good mornings, or lower back exercises. This will enable you to rotate the back in four directions and give you an unbelievable pump. This exercise has pushed up our deadlifts at Westside.

I hope you can see how all this works together with our rack pulls, band pulls, etc. and all the special squats that we do. There are a vast number of back exercises for the upper and lower back that complement the three powerlifts. One of the above exercises could be the difference between success and failure, by constantly rotating exercises, big and small.