

The Conjugate Method

By: Louie Simmons

When lifters repeatedly use the same simple method of training to raise their strength level, they will eventually stall. Like the scholar who must utilize many sources of information to achieve a higher level of knowledge, the lifter must incorporate new and more difficult exercises to raise their standards. Many have the theory that to squat, bench, or deadlift more, you simply have to do the three lifts. If it were that simple no one would need special exercises, machines, or systems of training. But we know this is not true.

Because lifters have different body types, they may excel at one lift but struggle with another. The great Lamar Gant was the only lifter I have known who held the world record deadlift and bench at the same time. There are men who hold three world records in the deadlift, yet can't make the top 10 bench list. Their muscles in the upper body are, I'm sure, as strong as anyone's, but they are limited by body structure, e.g., short torso, long arms. Many of us are affected by this. But is there an answer?

In the early 1970s, the Dynamo Club in the former Soviet Union had 70 highly skilled Olympic lifters. They were introduced to a system of 20-45 special exercises that were grouped into 2-4 exercises per work-out and were rotated as often as necessary to make continuous progress. They soon found out that as the squat, good morning, back raise, glute/ham raise, or special pulls got stronger, so did their Olympic lifts. When asked about the system, only one lifter was satisfied with the number of special lifts; the rest wanted more to choose from. And so the conjugate system was originated.

When you have a body type that lacks say, the muscles that squat and yet you squat on a regular basis, then a coupling of special exercises for the glutes, hamstrings, hips, and lower back are needed to fortify those areas. These special exercises will enable you to raise your squat once more.

Think about it if you read only one book, no matter how many times you read it, you will only learn so much. If you only squat, you will get only so strong because no new stimulus is introduced. This may not happen in the early stages of training, but as you become more advanced, you will need a more strenuous method of training. This training will indeed help your motor potential and help you to perfect your technical skill.

Before I present some examples of conjugate training, think about this. How much could you bench press the first time you tried? 200? 300 perhaps? Now how did you achieve that level of strength without ever having benched before? You did it through simplified training such as pushups and pull-ups. Those of you

who could bench 300 the first time will never double that amount without doing specialized work to raise your strength, right?

Here are some ex-amples of the conju-gate method. Glen Chabot bench presses only twice a month. Both times he uses a close-grip style He can do 405 for reps in the low teens. His best single close grip is 635 without a shirt. In be-tween each workout, he rotates heavy dumbbell work on a flat or incline bench or very heavy bodybuilding exercises for lats, delts, pecs, and triceps.

This linking of special exercises has given Glen a 705 bench press at 275. Glen does not arch when he benches and has fairly long arms. He realized that he needed a special program to fortify his pressing muscles. This is a simple but very effective training program.

A more complex system is Kenny Patterson's. He will do floor press, chain press, board press, incline press, and over-head press, just to name a few, rotating to a different- exercise each max effort day. On the dynamic day, Kenny uses three different grips on the bench press and uses 60% of his no-shirt max for 8 sets of 3 reps. He adds a lot of triceps extensions with dumbbells or the barbell, rows (one-arm, two-arm, chest-supported), pull downs, delt raises, and forearm work. This is a more complex system than Glen's, but it suits Kenny's needs. Kenny is a legitimate 700 bencher, having done it several times across the country.

Mike Ruggiera and myself just made 900 squats. It was a 50pound increase for him and a 40-pound increase for me, yet we did not do a single regular squat in between meets. We do box squats on speed days with a large amount of bands and weight. We also use the Re-verse hyper machine and do glute/ham raises, pull-throughs, and abs. I pull a weighted sled before my squat workouts.

On max effort day, we do good mornings (five varieties), belt squats, speed deadlifts (60% for 6-8 singles), and Safety Power Squat Bar squats to different box heights. Mike also pulled his first 800 deadlift, without having done any conventional squats and no big deadlifts. After squatting he does deadlifts for singles with 60% for speed, and three days later he maxes out on special work: this is the conjugate method.

To push up a squat, heavy good mornings or squatting with different bars is done on max effort day. The different bars make squatting very awkward and extremely hard to do, much harder than a regular squat. (The same is true of box squats; they are harder than competition squats.) On max effort day we may do a type of squat on week 1, a good morning on week 2. and a front squat on week 3, each exercise contributing to the next week's exercise, which in turn will build a bigger squat by strengthen-ing the weaker muscle group and perfecting form.

The training is linked together, enabling you to raise your total. For instance, to build the glute and hamstring area, push up your reverse hyper®5356,359 and 6,491,607b2 extensions as hard as possible until your progress slows. Move on to pull-throughs for a week or two, until progress in these slows as well. Then go to glute/ham raises, and again push as fast and hard as possible. Then pull a sled walking forward to build the glutes/hamstrings. It is possible to continuously gain strength in any body part by switching special exercises. As the effectiveness of the exercise decreases, switch to another one. By training in this manner, it is possible to raise all types of strength throughout the year.

On max effort day the entire volume consists of unidirectional loading. One training workout con-tributes to the next. Keep in mind that if you train a lift at 90% or more for more than 3 weeks, your central nervous system is negatively and your progress will go backward. But by switching exercises each week (for the high-level lifter), you can use 100% and more each week. The sequence of exercises you use does not matter, as long as the load is maximal. The time it takes to do a maximal effort, for example in a low box squat with a Manta Ray, takes at least as long as max deadlift or squat. This is called “time under tension”.

The conjugate method also improves SPP (special physical preparedness e.g., speed deadlifts, plyometrics) and GPP (general physical preparedness; e.g., sled drag-ging). This is the most effective method to gain strength continu-ously throughout the year, with no ridiculous off-season. No one can afford to take time off. By maintain-ing the speed work for the three lifts and increasing general wonk (e.g., upper and lower body sled work, lats, abs, and triceps) you won't go back-ward. There are many methods of training, but by incorporating the conjugate method, you can't miss.