IRON SPORT
STRENGTH METHOD

WRITTEN BY STEVE PULCINELLA
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OR

I SWEAR, GOD AS MY WITNESS I WILL BRING A LEGAL SHITSTORM DOWN UPON YOU THE LIKES OF WHICH YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN.

Cover art & book design by
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Please do NOT bother consulting your physician before embarking on this routine or any other training program. Most doctors generally don’t know jack shit about strength training and could not possibly begin to fathom your burning desire to be huge and superior.
About the author: Steve Pulcinella

Iron Sport Gym owner Steve Pulcinella has been involved in the ‘iron game’ since he was very young. As a young boy, watching the “Worlds Strongest Man” contest on The Wide World of Sports in the 1970’s fueled and cultivated his fascination with weightlifting.

Since the early 1980’s Steve has been a student of strength building and has competed in just about every strength sport there is.

After winning many powerlifting titles as a teenager Steve went on to win the 1993 North American Strongman Championships. He then got a chance to live out a lifelong dream in 1994 when Steve was invited as the sole competitor from the United States to the World’s Strongest Man contest in Sun City, South Africa.

He has also had a twenty-year run as a professional in the Scottish Highland games and has tossed weights and cabers all over the world on his way to winning over 40 professional titles.

Now in his forties and retired from competition he can still be seen as a writer on EliteFTS.net, training hard in his gym, and helping others in the gym every day.
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T here is often one event in each person’s life that profoundly changes him and reshapes his entire future. It could be something small and seemingly insignificant to the onlooker but can be very traumatic for you. These life-altering events could drive you to commit dastardly acts of violence and turn to a life of crime, or they could make you strive for greatness and show everyone that you have what it takes to rise above.

I honestly didn’t know where to put this story in the book, or even if I was going to use it. But it was so pivotal and such an historic event in my life that I decided that I had to open the book with it. I have probably only told this story to a small handful of people in my life, usually because they think it’s funny as hell and laugh at me and that brings me back to the day it happened and how much it sucked. But you threw down your hard earned cash to buy this book, so I figure it’s time to make the story public. This sad tale will also explain where a lot of my drive, rage, frustration and bitterness evolve from.

I always considered myself a well-adjusted, happy child. I was well-liked, had no problem making friends, and was always athletic enough to be picked among the top of the pack when choosing sides for whatever sport we happened to be playing. I was never a small kid, as you can imagine by looking at me now. I was kind of big for my age, but not what anyone considered fat, especially not by today’s standards of childhood obesity. When I was in junior high school we were unfortunate enough to have a particularly sadistic gym teacher, the kind of typical dickhead gym teacher you see only portrayed in teen movies. He would bully us, torture us, prey on the weaker less athletic kids, revel in our pain and make us feel like shit as he just stood there and laughed about it. I’m talking about the kind of mental abuse that sent a lot of kids home crying and into therapy. This was the late 70’s so it was the era before all school children were ‘special’ and were just considered pains in the ass. We all hated this teacher and most of us vowed that when we got older we would come back and throw him a vengeful ass kicking in his tight coach’s shorts.

During my eighth grade year our gym class was doing track and field events for a few weeks in the spring. At the
end of the marking period we had one day where we would have a mock track meet and the gym teacher would assign us to compete in different events. I was excited about doing the shot put since I was the best shot putter on our school’s track team. And I was about to showcase my skills to the chicks in my class, there by impressing them… or so I thought. Instead of letting me excite the ladies with my skills at tossing a steel ball, this horse’s ass teacher assigns me to an event called the FATTY FIFTY! Yeah, that’s right, THE FATTY FAT FUCK FIFTY! An event he made up in which kids who were too fat to do any real events would race each other in a fifty yard dash… if they could even make it that far.

I was emotionally crushed. I can still recall feeling the rage building up inside my body, my ears were hot to the touch. FAT? Yeah, I was a big kid for my age but I was not what you would call school clothes in the ‘husky’ section. The first of my two worthy opponents was a kid named Larry who was basically the biggest pussy in our was Kieth, a kid I went through elementary school with who was a total glandular case; he walked properly. In this day and age be excused from gym and labeled bastard gym teacher was always trying to climb ropes and play dodgeball until he if it had an escalator attached to it. So I was left with little choice. I had to line up in the starting blocks against these two blobs and race them. As I glanced over at my competitors to either side of me I just kept thinking, “Really? Is this how people see me? I’m in the same league as these two fucking losers?” It was really depressing.

The gun sounded and I shot out from the starting line like a slightly chubby, thoroughbred race horse and got an early jump on my fellow fatties. I figured if I was going to race these two lard-asses I was going to bury them, so I ran as fast as my thick little legs could move. I knew I was putting distance between myself and the two of them quickly because the sounds of their wheezing and man-boobs flopping was getting fainter in the distance. But then I noticed something else: the entire class, including the jerk-off teacher, were laughing their asses off at us. That infuriated me most of all; I was now a fucking clown to be mocked, and the girls that I was hoping to impress were pointing and laughing at me instead.

I won the race by about forty yards, and I just kept running all the way home and didn’t come back. I was so embarrassed that I just went up to my room and cried. I made a decision that day to pull myself together, change my future and seriously start lifting weights. My brother and cousin were already lifting and I was told I wasn’t old enough but now I was ready. I vowed to someday see that moron gym teacher years later and just stand in front of him looking like I was carved out of granite!
That teacher is now retired, and I guess his wife left him and took him for everything he had including his teaching retirement money because he now cuts deli meat at the grocery store. One day I plan to stroll in there, order a pound of bologna and when he hands it to me I’m just going to rear back and throw it as hard as I can, directly into his face and say, “I don’t like the way you sliced it. Now do it again, jerk off!”
already building some mass

age 14

age 17, trying to grow a doug young beard

age 19

pa states at age 19

This is not a man you want throwing cold cuts in your face.
he genesis of the Iron Sport Strength Method has been a long process of trial and error throughout the many years and the many eras of my own strength athletic career. I spent many years building muscle via bodybuilding style training, years of straightforward powerlifting, years training for strongman competitions, then changing my focus once again to train for Highland games, and now in retirement I’m back to a bodybuilding style.

Over the years I would take different pieces of the different routines that I have had success with in each sport that I was training for and put them all into the template that you see in this book. It’s very basic and very simple, just like me. I like things that are no nonsense and I don’t see any advantage to getting too fancy and scientific with your training. My training and coaching style has always been very straightforward, I just put my head down and work hard, if something tries to stand in my way, like an injury, I usually try to just run through it. Like a football running back is taught, even if that linebacker has you wrapped up, never stop pumping your legs until you hear that whistle.

The ideas in the book you are about to read are my own personal observations and opinions gathered up from my own hands-on experiences comprised from over thirty years of training, competing and coaching as well as being a student of all things strength. I have always stressed to people throughout the years that there are a lot of WRONG ways to train, but there are also a lot of RIGHT ways to train. If you ever run into a coach, a trainer or just some jackass at your gym that tries to tell you there is only ONE way to do something in the gym, immediately stop listening to him and walk away. Unfortunately, in the world of strength training, you can read one book and be an expert, but if you read them all you will be confused. There are a lot of one book experts and confused people out there. Hopefully some of the things you read in this book will help you sort through some of that.
Always remember, as much as advertisements in magazines and TV would like you to believe, there is no great secret of the pros, magical method or even a pill that will assure you everlasting results. Your success has to come from within, and it's up to you to unlock your ability. This book is merely ONE tool in an arsenal of many tools that will hopefully take you one step further on your journey into the world of strength training.

My own early influences in the world of strength came from an era and men that were well before my time. I was always drawn to big work horses of the 1960’s and 70’s who not only were very strong but who also looked strong. Men who spoke with their actions and not their words. Men like Norb Schemansky, Bruce Wilhelm, Ken Patera, Bill Kazmaier, Gary Gubner, Bob Bednarski and Doug Young. The one thing I really admired about lifters from that era was that they all trained in a very simple fashion, no tricks or gimmicks, just straight forward, heavy, hard training and eating big. I embrace that mindset for my own training and the training of my clients. Why over-complicate things when the formula for strength is so very basic and primal? Trust me, if you threw out all the new school strength training gimmicks and the time wasted over-thinking intricate training methods and just buckled down to some basic hard work and ended up as strong as Ken Patera in his prime, it would be a VER Y good day for you.

ARNOLD

When I started on my road to bodily hugeness I read Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Education of a Bodybuilder. I know what you are saying: “But Steve, Arnold was a bodybuilder, what does he have to do with strength training?” What can I say? I liked Arnold. So sue me. His story mostly appealed to me because Arnold was very young when he started training and I could identify with that. Being a total newbie to the whole lifting scene this book pretty much taught me the most basic and fundamental lesson that any lifter or athlete ever needs to know.

The book was an autobiography of Arnold’s life through his bodybuilding years. The important lesson that I learned from Arnold was that even at a young age his ability to outwork everyone else around him quickly separated him from everyone else. His unwavering drive and disciplined approach were a constant theme throughout the book. The older lifters that were overseeing young Arnold train would tell him to “slow down, you are over doing it, don’t train so hard”. But Arnold never listened to that nonsense. He had a clear vision of where he was going right from the start and he knew what it took to become successful. When I read this I was young and impressionable and that sounded simple enough to me. If it was good enough for Arnold, it was good enough for me; so that’s what I did. I didn’t buy a hundred more books looking for a second opinion. I was already armed with all I needed to know.

I started to see myself five and even ten years down the road as a huge and powerful mammoth of a man and threw myself head first into my training. I started separating everything in my life into two categories: things that were going to help me reach my goal of getting huge, and things that had nothing to do with getting me huge. I starting making choices in my life based on those categories. Would partying, drinking and skipping workouts to hang out at the corner hoagie shop all night with my friends make me stronger? Would staying up all night talking to a girlfriend on the phone make my bench go up? It wasn’t hard to answer these questions. I just started only doing the things that would hopefully, one day, lead to success.
By the time I was fifteen I was just about living in the gym. My only friends became the adult men in the gym that I was training with and learning from. I wanted desperately to be bigger and stronger than everyone, and I was willing to work as hard as anyone on earth to get there. Other people in the gym all saw their lifting as a hobby. They all seemed to have other interests and family obligations. I knew as soon as I started that I was about to make strength training my entire life. Even to this day, being in my own gym twelve hours at a time, for many years, I haven’t seen many people train with the urgency that I did in those early years. The ability to really push yourself comes naturally when you have true desire and pure passion in your heart. My training became very personal; it was mine and nobody could take it away from me. The weight room was the place I felt most comfortable in. I didn’t worry about anything there; I had no girlfriend, teacher or boss hanging over me busting my balls there; I didn’t second guess myself there, I just trained with confidence and positive energy.

SAMSON

I had a lot of different things inspire me as a youth. Even as a young child I was drawn to and had a fascination with physical strength. I remember watching that old biblical epic from the early 1950’s called Samson and Delilah with my father on our awesome 17” color TV that sat on top of the much less awesome, old black and white TV that we had. The movie starred barrel chested actor Victor Mature as Samson. It was your typical 1950’s, low budget, terrible special effects, corny movie, but I loved it. It totally appealed to me for three reasons in particular:

Reason One: Samson was the strongest man in the world! Nothing could be cooler than that. In the movie he was even cocky about it.
Reason Two: Samson kicked ASS! He beat up an entire army with just the jawbone of an ass. Needless to say this was not a properly equipped army. I think this impressed me because, being a kid from Philly, it was expected even at an early age that you would need to be able to kick some ass now and then.

Reason Three: Chicks totally dug Samson and his massive barrel chest. Two sisters basically fought over him throughout the entire movie, which eventually led to his downfall. Even though I was probably six years old when I saw this movie, that really appealed to me. A team of physicians would later tell my parents that I was born with high testosterone levels.

**WORLD’S STRONGEST MAN**

Another one of my early inspirations came from watching the very first World’s Strongest Man contest on TV as a kid. The contest took place in 1977 and I was fascinated by how huge, strong and mobile the top guys were. I remember thinking what a huge accomplishment that would be to stand there, on TV, and battle it out for what I think is the coolest thing you could ever be called… THE WORLD’S STRONGEST MAN! These days the modern version of the WSM is on cable TV just about every day and it is still inspiring young kids all over to want to be strong.

So there I was, a young kid with basic training information and the drive to work my ass off. Little did I know at the time, those two things are all anyone would ever REALLY need to succeed in athletics, as well as business and life in general. Although you should never stop learning, sometimes too much information can really mottle you.
down. You start to lose focus in what you really should be concentrating on and end up all over the place second
guessing yourself. The internet and the information age has confused more young people than it has helped I’m
afraid. When you have tens of thousands of people, telling you different things, and you have no idea who the real
experts are, it can be pretty daunting to tell which direction you should go. Don’t get me wrong, I love the internet
and text on my cell phone more than a thirteen year old girl now. But I’m thankful that I grew up an era before
the (mis)information age.

**I personally always liked reading about and talking to older lifters. They all really had essentially the same way of thinking about training that appealed to me. Heavy training all the time.**

How else were you going to get strong? High percentage training was how they all did it. They worked through
weak points and injuries rather than around them. When the great Olympian Norb Schemansky was asked by
a younger lifter, “How do I get my press up?” Norb just gruffly responded, “Press more.” When he was asked,
“how can I get my squat up?” Once again he simply said, “Squat more.” That blunt attitude kind of gave Norb
the reputation of being a dick, but he was giving his honest answer. Was Norb wrong? Absolutely not, because he
was world champion, and that’s the way HE did it. If you want to get strong, there is no better person to ask than
a guy who is or was strong and knows what it takes to get strong.
STRENGTH METHOD  THE IRON SPORT

CABER TOSS 2010

56LB WEIGHT TOSS FOR HEIGHT 1998

ICELAND 2000
Before I go into the actual training template I want to just throw some of my very own Pulcinella factoids out at you. These ideas and observations are my own thoughts, gathered up from a thirty plus year career of training, coaching and owning a gym. Some of these ideas may be new to you or they may be something you have heard a thousand times. But you are now going to hear them from me.

The simple recipe for getting stronger: The formula for building strength in the human body is really not that difficult. It’s a very simple recipe: Hard work over a long period of time = Strength. The “hard work” seems like the part a lot of people can handle; it seems to be the “doing it for a long time” part that most people can’t wrap their heads around. Don’t fall into the trap of getting discouraged or frustrated after only a short period of time. Remember, unless you have some kind of debilitating disease everyone has the ability to get stronger. If you aren’t getting stronger consult an expert and find out what you are doing wrong . . . or go to a doctor and see if you have a debilitating disease. From what I have seen I would estimate that one out of every fifty people that join my gym actually stick to it. The others quickly fall by the wayside. Why? Mostly by just not having the will to stick it out for as long as it takes. We live in the “I gotta have in now” age. You better just drive those thoughts out of your head now and get with the recipe.

OVER TRAINING

You hear this term a lot, way too much actually. I hate the term myself. All these book learned, internet gurus have everyone thinking that it’s easy to over train and retard your progress. They are turning everyone into pussies who can’t get strong. Though it’s true that you can overdo it to a point, I’ve noticed that the people who are usually worried the most about OVER training are always the same people that are holding back so much that they end up UNDER training. I personally would rather train too much than not enough. You need to push it a little now and then and find out where your limits truly are so you know how to really gage your training.
The very essence of building strength in the human body is the simple reaction of your body responding to the amount of work it’s being called on to do. When you first start weight training your body can only handle small amounts of work, but your capacity to train quickly increases over time. If you do not increase the workload and intensity of your training accordingly your progress will stall over time.

Here is a good example: One day you get a job swinging a sledge hammer in a gravel pit. (I know, what a shit job right?) You will quickly see that on your first day on the job you find it impossible to swing this hammer for eight straight hours. Your body fatigues quickly because this amount of work is new for your muscles and central nervous system. The other guys on the job all have no problem swinging the hammers all day long and they are much older than you. Some of them even look like old men. Now did all this work “over train” these guys? Did their bodies break down and get weaker? Hell no. Their bodies were tempered and strong from the years and years of heavy work loads. Their muscles responded and they became much stronger. Strength training works on the same principle. Your work loads and training volume just have to be ramped up slowly over time and your body will be forced to adjust.

**SUFFER AND SACRIFICE**

*Never be afraid to suffer and sacrifice. Every great achievement in history took a fair amount of suffering and sacrifice.* Embrace these things because it means you are no longer in life’s comfort zone. Nothing great has ever been achieved within the comfort zone. If you are lucky, like myself and many others, you’ll be bitten hard by the “Iron Bug” and no amount of brutal training will seem like sacrifice at all. Your training will become your own personal journey and you will enjoy every step along the way. You will hear out of shape people say things like “I really admire your drive and determination to workout so hard and so much.” I’m always thinking, “Hell man, there is no place I would rather be than in the gym busting my ass. I see going to the gym as a treat.” Determination to me is going out to a bar on Friday night and spending money I don’t have on booze, smelling cigarette smoke all night and feeling like shit all the next day. Because I sure as hell couldn’t do that every week.

**SIZE**

*The fastest way to break a plateau and get stronger is to simply get bigger.* When I was a teenage lifter I knew that I wanted to be strong and hoist massive weights. When I looked around, the people that seemed to be lifting the most weight were gigantic 300 plus pound guys. It wasn’t too hard to figure out that in order for me to get stronger I would have to get bigger. Besides, who the hell doesn’t want to be big, right? If your goal is to stay in one particular weight class and keep getting stronger you will reach a certain point when that will get infinitely more difficult. I don’t know about all you but I want to keep on growing until the day that I die like an alligator. Have you ever seen those nature shows when the guys are out in the swamp and they come upon a huge gator and they say, “look at the size of that thing, it must be forty years old!”? I want people to see me years from now and say, “Look at the size of Pulcinella, he must be eighty years old!”.
EATING

The nutrition aspect of weight training, whether it be training for power, training for sports, bodybuilding etc, is always very confusing to even the most experienced lifters. Again, it’s confusing because there are a lot of wrong ways to eat and diet and there are just as many right ways to eat and diet. But there are a few simple scientific rules that you must know. If you can’t gain weight you simply aren’t eating enough. I don’t care how much you say you eat; you need to eat more. If you cannot lose weight you are eating too much. It’s the simple rule of thermodynamics and it doesn’t lie.

Can you get strong without having to eat a super clean well maintained diet? If you couldn’t there would be no sport called powerlifting. Sorry to say it, powerlifters (and I used to be one too) but it’s the only sport that the morbidly obese actually excel at. I’ve seen many top lifters eat nothing but garbage fast food and lots of it and go out and break world records. Would they be better and stronger by eating a better diet? I’m pretty sure, but I’m just trying to illustrate that if you are only focusing on getting strong, don’t care how heavy you become and don’t mind sweating while you tie your shoes, go for it.

Nutrition is also one of those topics where if you research it on the internet you will quickly become confused. There are thousands upon thousands of diet gurus that are all at their desks right now trying to write the next Atkins diet book and make a billion dollars. On this topic I say once gain, stick to the basics. Eating for strength is not as critical as it would be for a bodybuilder looking to get his bodyfat to 5% and still hold muscle. Your only goal should be eating a reasonably healthy diet with an emphasis on a high protein intake. If you want to get bigger, eat more. If you want to get smaller, eat less. Don’t over-think it. Let your results guide you. I’m not suggesting that every lifter should strive to be a fat ass. Fat doesn’t lift anything; the muscle does the lifting. So for your health’s sake try to bulk up without putting on too much excess flab. Plus hopefully you’ll remain attractive to the opposite sex.
TECHNIQUE

When I was growing up there was no internet where we could just YouTube thousands of videos showing us proper form or websites where we could read millions of free articles. We had a few sources for training information. There were books and magazines in which you could only read written descriptions and look at still pictures. You had your gym buddies that were trying to instruct you and half the time they were as clueless as you were. Or you had to just experiment and hopefully figure it out on your own. I didn’t have the option of contacting Larry Pacific via email and asking him to take a look at my squat and send him a video.

Today you have websites like EliteFTS.net that post articles only written by accredited experts and host an ever growing catalog of outstanding training videos. You also have many coaches at your finger tips that will do online coaching with you as well as meet you for a personal session. If you are totally new but interested in learning proper technique for powerlifting or olympic lifts I suggest you plunk down the money for a solid training routine and a personal session with a good coach. Don’t try to re-invent the wheel. You could save yourself years of wasted effort in just one session sometimes. I have done sessions like this with many people whose overall training improved dramatically in just one day. Some of them have been experienced lifters who were quite strong already but just needed a tweak here or there.

On the other side of the coin, don’t get so hung up on perfect technique to the point that it starts to hold you back in your training. I have seen guys in the gym constantly “experimenting” with their technique for years and never really getting to some down and dirty heavy work. I used to train with another big pro strongman heavyweight at my gym named Walt Gogola. He was like me, he liked to train heavy in the same “grip it and rip it” style with whatever form we could muster up. We used to train along side some other guys who were always trying to do everything completely precise that it used to frustrate the hell out of us. That’s when we came up with the slogan “LESS FORM, MORE POWER!” We would scream it at these guys when they would be trying to perfect everything while we were busy trying to lift heavy weights.

MOTIVATION

This is an essential component that everyone needs to succeed in any kind of endeavor. The good thing is that it doesn’t matter what motivates you as long as it is something that can keep you driving hard for a long time. It really has to be a lifelong pursuit. I have seen plenty of guys and girls pick such short range goals as their motivation like a wedding, one of those tough mudders or the “I just want to look good for bathing suit season” crowd. That’s all well and good, but then after the wedding they never set foot in the gym again.

When my cousin Dave and I started lifting weights as teenagers we only had two goals in mind: to get as huge as humanly possible and to get girls. Those two things became life-long pursuits that still keep us going to this day, well into our forties. An example of this motivation can be illustrated in this story I told at a seminar I spoke at recently. One day a few buddies and I were out doing some throwing practice for the Highland games. We were tossing the 56lb weight for distance and I was throwing pretty consistently at around 38’ on most of my throws. A group of teenage girls happened by and asked if they could watch us. Then suddenly, as if a switch were flipped,
with the girls looking on, I started dropping bomb after bomb in the 42’ to 43’ range and my friends were blown away. The main reason they were blown away was because the world record for that event at the time was just a little over 42’. After the girls left I was back to throwing 38’ to 40’ again. What had changed? I guess I had a lot more motivation showing off for a few girls than trying to impress my fat buddies.

I used to use that same motivation in the gym too. When I was training at a health club years ago and going to attempt and particularly big lift I would go into the cardio room and grab a couple women and make them come in and just watch me. I knew that if girls were watching I was not about to give up on a lift; my ego would never allow that. Hey, whatever gets the job done right? The key is to identify what motivates YOU and really exploit it to the hilt. Use whatever tools are in the toolbox to enhance your training.

**ATTITUDE**

When I talk to people about training, attitude is one thing I’m always stressing. To me, the right attitude is the number one factor that all winners have in common. You’ll never have success in the gym, business or life if your mind isn’t right. Your attitude in and out of the gym is really a big key to your overall success. In the gym it is important to have a plan of action, and hopefully it’s a good plan, but the planning and preparation come long before you step foot in the weight room. I see people all the time who stagger into the gym half asleep and put in a half-assed effort into a half-assed routine that they are thinking up as they go along. The minute they step out of the gym that will be the last time they think about their training until they show up again in a few days. That’s how the people on the express train to Loserville do it.

When your attitude is correct you will have a well thought out training routine that is programmed at least a week into the future. You should know the exact weights, sets and reps that you are going to be doing that week so that you start to picture your workouts in your head. You will have one full week to fully visualize just what your squatting session will look and feel like long before you even get under the bar. You should be thinking about what you are about to do while you drive to the gym, really start seeing it in your head like a movie. Your mind and body will be ready, there will be no surprises awaiting for you, all the thinking and planning has already been done for you and your only focus will be to ATTACK THE GOD DAMNED BAR!

The other definition of having a proper attitude is your mental approach to your training. You need to have confidence in the gym and train like it’s your job and a job you know how to do well. Get in, get started and get it done. It’s not clowning around time, it’s not about grandstanding and patting yourself on the back after every set, it’s not time to visit and have fun with your buddies. It’s YOUR time and it’s time to go to work.

**CONDITIONING & HIGH INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING**

You see the terms “conditioning” and “High Intensity Interval Training” (or HIIT) a lot nowadays. That was something you didn’t hear much among lifters in the old days of weightlifting. But today conditioning has become a staple in the training of the modern powerlifter, Olympic lifter and strongman. Lifters have since learned that you will have the capacity to train harder, and thus move bigger weights, as well
as recover faster if your body is in better general condition. It may not directly affect your performance in your actual sport if you are, for example, shot putter or olympic lifter, because of the quickness of the event, but it will definitely indirectly help you by enhancing your training.

The differences between “cardio” and interval training can be explained like this: when you drive your car at a constant speed of 55mph on the highway the engine runs very efficiently and will use less fuel. When you are starting and stopping as in city driving it will burn more fuel. Steady state cardio is like highway driving: the more you perform the same kind of cardio the more your body adapts to it and your cardio work will lose its effect over time. Interval training is like gunning your engine from 0-100MPH and then stopping the car and doing it over and over. You are bringing your heart rate up very quickly and then resting and letting it come down a little, then repeating that over and over. Your cardio vascular system gets a better workout, your work capacity is increased, plus the calories burned per hour is far more effective with HIIT than it is with steady state cardio.

I’m not even going to go into all the ways that you can do HIIT conditioning workouts; that would be a book in itself. HIIT can be a simple as doing sprint intervals, running stadium bleachers, running hill sprints, sled drags, sled pushes, tire flips etc. It doesn’t require any specialized equipment or cost you any money. Just be creative and work it hard.

SUPPLEMENTS

Once again, to carry through with my theme of “why do you think you need all that if they didn’t have it in the 1960’s and were stronger than you?” I will give you my personal thoughts on supplements. The supplement business is a big money, 99% hyped up crap and advertising bullshit industry. You do not NEED these products to become huge, strong or cut. Most of these hyped up products didn’t even exist before a couple years ago and everyone lifted just fine and made gains. Do not fall into the pitfalls of spending all your hard earned cash thinking these products are making any noticeable difference. If your gym buddy tells you that some expensive product that he just started taking is the greatest thing that ever happened to him and he is having skin splitting pumps it’s because he is way too embarrassed to say, “Wow, I can’t believe I just spent $200 online and this stuff does nothing.” Take note that almost every time a gym buddy tells you how revolutionary some new product is, he isn’t taking it after a month and never talks about it again.

I’m really addressing more the exotic supplement market and not protein powders and things in that category though. I more or less consider that a food. It’s best to use a protein supplement only when you can’t get your hands on real food. There is no substitute for the muscle building properties and nutritional effect that you get from eating real food.

Again, sitting around staring at advertisements of jacked up bodybuilders being paid to be photographed with some wonder pill supplement is just another thing to make you second guess yourself and cloud your vision. Keep your head on right, focus your energy into training hard and eating a balanced and clean diet and you’ll be light years ahead of the game.
TRAINING PARTNERS

Training partners can be the best thing for your training but it could also be the worst thing. In all my years of training I have had successful periods of training while going it alone and I have had periods where I really enjoyed having a partner. The key to a good partnership in the gym is you both (or all) have to bring something to the table. I have seen two guys training together where one guy is serious and is the brains of the partnership and the other guy just seems like dead weight who is just along for the ride offering nothing to the relationship. That partnership is not good for either guy really. I’ve also seen guys drag their kids or their girlfriend to the gym and try to force them to workout at the risk of their own personal training. It never works out for either party.

What I personally like in a training partner is somebody that inspires me, not by yelling at me but by challenging me to step up by his or her own effort in the gym. There is nothing that makes you train harder every session than a good old fashioned ‘pissing match’. I’ve done this in the weight room and I’ve done it out on the field with my event training partners. Every workout eventually gets to be a competition, not always so much to lift more than your partner or get more reps than him but to maybe match or surpass his intensity and effort. The best part is that you both win. You pushed and inspired each other to new levels never before seen because you were both on the same trip.

INJURIES

One of the biggest obstacles that you will be faced with in your pursuit of being a massive and strong human being is going to be injuries. I have always said if you think you are training hard and you aren’t tearing major muscles and tendons now and then, you aren’t training as hard as you think you are. Injury is just par for the course in the world of high level strength training, but it’s how you handle getting injured that will separate the champions from the pretenders. If you train with the specter of fear of getting hurt in the back of your mind you will fail. That is a fact. One important trait that every top lifter possesses is fearlessness under the bar. The minute you start training scared is the minute your lifts will stop going up.

It is well documented that I have had a lot of sports related injuries. Between the years 1999 and 2011 I have had ten surgeries, a broken leg, broken bones in my feet three times and multiple other muscles tears. The key point I’m trying to illustrate here is I HAVE ALWAYS KEPT COMING BACK HARDER AND HARDER! I know it’s hard for some civilians in the ‘small’ world to fathom this, but the glory far outshines the pain for some of us. Do you think Joe Namath would trade his Hall of Fame NFL career to have healthy knees right now? I highly doubt it and given the chance of doing it all over again I know that Broadway Joe would do it all the same way, just as I would.
CATEGORIZING INJURIES

Let me give you some examples of how I categorize and handle MY injuries:

Torn callous or laceration: rub some chalk in it, or in some cases use athletic or duct tape. Keep training as usual.

Muscle pull or strain: Finish the workout as planned, ice the area later if I get a chance. Usually by the time I get home I forget all about it.

Minor muscle tear with bruising: Finish the workout, maybe work around the tear, make sure I ice it when I get home.

Major muscle tear with severe pain: Throw shit around the gym, curse a lot, train a different lift other than the one that I had planned to that day. Take liberal amounts of Ibuprofen, ice and possibly whiskey when I get home.

Minor connective tissue injury (e.g. in torn meniscus or optic nerve): finish workout and see doctor when I get a chance, schedule surgery if needed. Tell surgeon to hurry it up because I have to keep on training and I have meets coming up. Do not show up to any follow up visits nor listen to the doctors’ advice on how long I should stop training.

Broken bones: I used to go to the hospital for broken bones but I don’t like being confined to casts so now I usually just tape them up and keep training as best as I can.

Major connective tissue tear (e.g. achilles, biceps or quadriceps tendons): Fly into an unnecessarily violent rage, cause structural damage to the building that I happen to be in, run to my surgeon, get the surgery, formally announce my retirement from competition, claim I’m giving away all my equipment, burn my kilt, sink into a deep depression, take all my pain killers in one night, train like a bodybuilder for a while, disregard any of my doctors recommendations, finally realize that I am in fact going to make a full recovery then stage a triumphant comeback! (I have lived out this scenario about five or six times so far.)

Yes, I’m a bit of a psycho. In fact I might look downright insane to some people. I’m sure you would think the same thing if you saw what a lot of other strongmen and lifters go through as well. The fact is, I personally know athletes who are way worse than me and have come back from more than what I have. I’m really not trying to illustrate that I’m some kind of hard ass, tough guy here. I’m just trying to show you that if you expect any kind of success when strength training or any athletics are concerned you can’t give up and have to just fight through these injuries and treat them as merely minor setbacks. If you want to preserve your body for your old age you would be a lot safer playing chess.
The Iron Sport Strength Method

The origins of the method are in the style of training that I used in my 30 year career as a powerlifter, strongman and Highland Games athlete. I have had many test subjects between myself, training partners, and many people that I have trained over the years. Through all of this research I have concluded a few things about it.

The Iron Sport method is not a good routine for total beginners; you really need a base of strength and some experience with the exercises for this routine. I’m thinking a year or so of strength training at least. I just feel that it is too advanced for someone just coming out of the box so it’s perfect for someone who is ready to take that next step from beginner to intermediate.

As with any new strength program you embark on, you will need to give it time. Sometimes it takes you three mini cycles (four week cycles) to really have it dialed in. Building strength is a very long process, no routine is the magic bullet and there are no short-cuts. Three months is not a long time to see if a program works; realistically a year would give you a better idea. But I know in today’s “gotta have it now” mindset a year seems like a lifetime. This may be bad news to some of you, but gaining strength isn’t going to happen overnight. No matter how bad you want it, try to be in this for the long haul.

This method is for raw lifters (meaning without powerlifting gear). This routine doesn’t lend itself to very advanced gear lifters. I consider belt, knee and wrist wraps still raw.

It is an excellent, short term plateau buster. I have had amazing results helping people get through some stuck lifts in just one or two months with this routine. Results may vary depending on the individual and how you are actually programming it.

It’s not necessary to have a lot of specialized equipment for the Iron Sport Strength Method to work. It can be done in a sparsely equipped home gym.
I have programmed this training for everyone from master lifters, to women, to college athletes, to people who claim they are hard gainers, and it has always produced personal records in everyone. How? It forced them to dig deep and work heavier and harder than they were used to. It also gives the lifter a lot of high percentage work as well as some overload work which forces the body to respond in a positive way.

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE IRON SPORT METHOD**

You have a simple three or four day a week routine, with the three powerlifts being three of those days plus military presses as the fourth day. You will work the routine in four week cycles. Each week will be a different set and rep scheme. This is what your four week template looks like:

**WEEK ONE:** work your way up to a max single, then back it down to 80% of that lift for 3 sets of 5.

The max single you hit this week sets up your whole four week mini cycle. It is also the number you will shoot to eclipse each month. The 80% sets will require 100% effort in most cases.

**WEEK TWO:** With added chain weight on the bar, work up to a max triple. Then take off chain weight and do three sets of as many as reps as you can perform with just the bar weight. You will most likely get anywhere from 5-8 reps on most of these bar weight only sets.

I do realize that it is just not feasible to always have chains at your disposal but there is no reason you can’t substitute bands. I just prefer the feel of the chains better and they are more forgiving. But bands are cheap and portable enough that anyone could have them in their arsenal.

**CHAIN WEIGHT**

This is usually how I program chain weight for people:

- If you can only perform between 90-135lbs in a certain lift I would use 20-40lbs total chain weight.
- If the lift is between 135-185 use 40-60lbs total
- If the lift is 185-250lbs use 60-80lbs
- If the lift is 250-350 use 80-100lbs

And go on from there. Chain weight is not too hyper critical after you have over 500lbs in bar weight, but it is more critical if the lifts are a lot lighter as in a beginners bench press for example.

**WEEK THREE:** Perform ten singles with 90-93% of week one’s max single. Shoot for doing your singles with short rest periods.

There are certain cases where I will have an athlete who just cannot handle this amount of high percentage work. What I have them do is perform the first mini cycle through at 85%, the second cycle at 87%, the third at 90%
and then try to eventually increase it to 93%. Much stronger lifters will find it hard to go above 90% and make all ten lifts. It is ok to adjust the percentage down in those cases. The key here is to make all ten lifts. You will also notice that reps 1-3 are difficult, reps 4-7 feel great, then at rep 8 it gets challenging and you are forced to really dig deep.

**WEEK FOUR:** Take 60% of your 1RM from week one and set up moderate to hard band tension. Work up the bar weight to where getting five reps is difficult and do it for 5 sets of 5.

This week is NOT a built in deload week. What we usually do is reserve week 4 as a deload or speed week if needed. Most of the people I train get better results if they go through three or four months before they deload and nobody has totally broken down down yet.

**IF YOU DO NOT HAVE CHAINS BUT DO HAVE BANDS:**

I understand a lot of people might not have a couple hundred pounds of chains at their disposal, and they are far from portable. But I am sympathetic to your plight so I came up with this version for you. There is really no reason why you can’t buy a few sets of bands. I suggest getting three pairs: a light pair, a medium pair and a strong pair. They can add hundreds of variations to a lot of exercises and be an effective tool. They don’t cost much and they are very portable. They work with barbell exercises, dumbbell exercises, bodyweight exercises and even machines. You really can’t beat them.

**WEEK ONE:** Work your way up to a max single, then back it down to 80% of that lift for 3 sets of 5

**WEEK TWO:** Attach moderate band resistance to the bar and work up your bar weight doing triples until you reach a max triple. Remove bands and do three sets with bar weight only for as many reps as you can do.

**WEEK THREE:** Perform ten singles with 90-93% of week one’s max single. Shoot for doing your singles with short rest periods.

**WEEK FOUR:** Take 60% of your 1RM from week one and set up moderate to hard band tension. Work up the bar weight to where performing five reps is difficult, and do it for 5 sets of 5.
IF YOU DO NOT HAVE CHAINS OR BANDS:

If you really have your heart set on not having chains or bands you can use this variation:

**WEEK ONE:** Work your way up to a max single, then back it down to 80% of that lift for 3 sets of 5.

**WEEK TWO:** Warm up and work up in weight doing triples until you reach a max triple. Take 85% of that weight and do three sets of as many reps as you can get.

**WEEK THREE:** Perform ten singles with 90-93% of week one’s max single. Shoot for doing your singles with short rest periods.

**WEEK FOUR:** Work up the bar weight to a max set of five. Then drop the bar weight 80% and perform as many reps as you can for three sets.

**A SAMPLE ROUTINE:**

The routines that I write for people will have one main, heavy assistance move with two or three bodybuilding exercises thrown in after depending on their goal. The reason for that is because I’m always trying to build muscle on the people that I work with. The bigger the muscle is the more potential it has to be strong. So I’m a big believer in mixing high percentage work and high rep work, supersets, drop sets etc, in the SAME session. I will even mix explosive Olympic lifting movements, a heavy, multi-joint power movement and bodybuilding training in the same session, as I did in my own strongman training training.

The following is a direct example of a routine that I recently wrote for a client who has been lifting for a few years. He had decent strength levels already, and wanted to take his strength up a few notches as well as put on muscle. He was a perfect candidate for the ISS method. This will just give you an example of how I personally like to program. Like I said, as long as the main exercises are getting done, anything you do after that is just icing on the cake.
**THE IRON SPORT STRENGTH METHOD**

**WEEK ONE**

Week one is designed to be your test week, then give you some brutally solid work sets. Both are necessary for building complete strength.

**MONDAY:**

**Back squat:** Work up to a max single then back the bar down to 80% of that lift and do 3 sets of five with that weight.

**Romanian deadlifts:** 5x5- After two or three warm up sets take a weight you could probably get seven reps with and perform five sets of five reps with it.

**Glute/ham raise:** 4x8 – if you can perform more than ten reps of these with just your bodyweight I want you to add band resistance so that eight reps is fairly stressful. Do four sets of these with same band resistance. If five or six reps becomes impossible take bands away and do the last set with just bodyweight.

**Standing abs:** heavy 5x8 – I like to see people work the abs heavy, so five sets of anywhere between six to twelve reps is what I’m looking for.

**TUESDAY:**

**Bench press:** Work up to a max single then back the bar down to 80% of that lift and do 3 sets of 5.

**Floor press with swiss bar:** 5x5 – I want to see a moderate chain weight added to the bar. Bring up the bar weight until you can get maybe 6-7 reps and perform five sets of five with it.

**Rolling dumbbell extension:** 4 sets of 4 – I want to see you take these to absolute failure. Find a weight that will keep you in the 10-15 rep range and crush them.

**Barbell curls:** 8 sets – Take a light weight on the first two sets and do 12 reps for two sets. Add more weight and do 10 reps for two sets. Add more weight and do 6 reps for two sets. And then go back to the weight you started your first set at and do two sets of all out till failure.
THURSDAY:

Light front squats: a couple warm ups and 3 sets of 5 reps with moderate weight.

Deadlifts: Work up to a max single then back the bar down to 80% of that lift and do 3 sets of 5 reps.

Bent over rows: Perform two warm up sets and then four hard work sets of 8-10 reps, hard meaning about a 90% effort. Leave a little in the tank and don’t let the technique go to total hell.

Shrugs: 4 sets of 8-12 reps. Take the bar from the racks. Use a straight weight for all sets. Try to go to failure with each set in the ten rep range.

Pull-ups: 4 sets with just bodyweight – if you can get more than fifteen reps here I want you to strap on a little weight to keep you in the eight rep range. If you cannot do a pull-up we will substitute some kind of lat pull-down on a machine.

FRIDAY:

Power cleans or high-pulls: (optional) if you are still in a learning phase with this lift be generous with your warm-up sets. Once you are at a weight that you can handle three reps with good technique I want you to do 5 sets of 3 reps.

Military press: Work up to a max single then back the bar to 80% of that lift and do 3 sets of 5 reps

Dumbbell side raises: 4 sets Select a weight where eight to ten reps is your drop dead limit and do four sets till failure.

Band pull-aparts: 4 sets Use a light band for these, go for high reps and take them to failure.

Standing abs: Use a weight that is heavy enough where you could maybe do 9 or 10 reps, and do 5 sets of 8 reps.
WEEK TWO

Week two is to build some acceleration as well as overload and then gives you more work sets and volume. Don’t bother setting up chains on your overhead presses; instead add a moderate band and do the same thing the routine suggests for your chain day.

MONDAY:
Back squat: With added chain weight work the bar weight up until you reach a maximum triple. Remove chains and perform as many reps as you can for three sets with only the bar weight.

RDL’s: 5 sets of 8 reps We are going to push the reps harder on week 2. Try to take the same weight that you used on week one and do 8 reps on each set.

Glute/ham raise: 4 sets with bodyweight – Take these sets till failure.

Standing abs: Use a weight that is heavy enough where you could maybe do nine or ten reps, and do 5 sets of 8.

TUESDAY:
Bench press: With added chain weight work the bar weight up until you reach a maximum triple. Remove chains and perform as many reps as you can for three sets.

Floor press with swiss bar: Use a weight where 10 reps would be your absolute limit and do 4 sets of 8 with it.

Dips: 4 sets with bodyweight. Do these sets about two reps shy of failure.

Triceps pushdowns: 4 sets, pick a weight and do all four sets with that weight. Work them to failure

Barbell curls: 6 sets of 12 reps after one or two warm-ups take a weight where 12 reps would be your limit and do six sets. You may only be getting 8 reps by the last set.
**THURSDAY:**

**Light front squats:** Start with a couple warm ups and 3 moderately heavy sets of 5 reps, nothing above maybe a 70% effort.

**Deadlifts:** Work up your bar weight to a max triple with added chain weight to the bar. Then take off chain weight and do three sets of as many as reps as you can perform with just the bar weight.

**Bent over rows:** Take two warm-ups, then do four work sets increasing the bar weight up for four sets so that your reps look like this: 12, 10, 8, 6.

**Shrugs:** Do 4 sets increasing the bar weight for four sets so that your reps look like this: 12, 10, 8, 6.

**Pull-ups:** 4 sets with just bodyweight; max reps on each set.

**FRIDAY:**

**Power cleans or high-pulls:** (optional) Work these a little heavier than week one. Try for 3 sets of 2 reps and three singles.

**Military press:** Do not use chains on military presses; just work up to the heaviest weight that you can do for 5 sets of 3 reps with.

**Bent over rear delt raise:** 4 sets. Try to go till absolute failure on these sets.

**Band pull-aparts:** 4 sets light band, take all sets till failure.

**Standing abs:** Use a weight that is heavy enough where you could maybe do nine or ten reps, and do 5 sets of 8 reps.
Week three is all about tempering your strength as well as your mind. Nothing does that like a lot of attempts with the bar in your hands performing big, high percentage lifts. Plus, if you compete as a powerlifter you will want to get better at doing lot of heavy singles to re-enforce your technique for your sport. You will notice that reps 1-3 are kind of rough, you may be second guessing yourself whether or not you are going to make all ten, don’t give up though! Reps 4-8 feel great and will most likely be your best reps. Rep 9 and 10 will most likely be grinders. If you miss a rep somewhere during the course of the ten singles just count that as a rep. If you miss more than three reps lower the percentage for your next mini cycle.

**MONDAY:**
- **Back squat:** Take 90% of your max from week one and do ten singles with it. Keep the time between sets short but do not rush.

- **Leg press:** Take a light weight and do two all out sets of 20 reps.

- **Glute/ham raise:** 4 sets with just bodyweight, with about a 90% effort.

- **Standing abs:** Use a weight that is heavy enough where you could maybe do nine or ten reps, and do 5 sets of 8 reps.

**TUESDAY:**
- **Bench press:** Take 90% of your max from week one and do ten singles with it.

- **Dumbbell incline:** using a low angle incline bench, do 4 heavy sets between 6-8 reps; leave a couple reps in the tank.

- **Overhead dumbbell triceps extension:** Using two hands at the same time on one dumbbell, use a heavy enough dumbbell where 10 reps is your absolute limit and do 4 sets.

- **Rolling dumbbell extension:** 4 sets of 10

- **Barbell curls:** Pyramid your reps like this: 12, 8, 6, 4, 6, 8, 12, 15 Increase weight for lower rep sets and decrease for higher rep sets.
THURSDAY:

**Light front squats:** Do a couple warm ups and perform 3 sets of 3 reps. Don’t use more than a 70% effort.

**Deadlifts:** Take 90% of your max single from week one and do ten singles with it.

**Inverted rows:** 4 sets till failure; keep back arched and really stretch at the bottom.

**Shrugs:** 4 sets. We are going for high reps today, so use a light enough weight to get at least 20 reps on each set.

**Lat pull-downs with close V handle:** 4 sets of 12-15 reps. Get a good stretch at the top and use about 95% intensity.

FRIDAY:

**Power cleans or high-pulls:** Just work on technique this week. Use a light enough weight and do 6 sets of 3 focusing on precise technique. Use low intensity.

**Military press:** Take 90% of your max single from week one and do ten singles with it.

**Superset:** rear delt raises and band pull-aparts: Do 4 sets trying to get 10 reps on all sets.

**Standing abs:** Use a weight that is heavy enough where you could maybe do nine or ten reps, and do 5 sets of 8.
Week four is another acceleration and overload week. This week could be varied though to be a deload week if needed. I say “if needed” because I don’t believe you need to deload every single month. I’ll leave that up to you and your body to tell you if it needs a break.

MONDAY:

**Back squat:** Take 60% of your one rep max from week one and set up moderate to hard band tension. Work up the bar weight to where you could get maybe 6 or 7 reps and do it for 5 sets of 5 reps.

**Romanian deadlifts:** Increase the weight on each set and set your reps up like this: 10, 8, 6, 3, 10 (drop set). Lying leg curl: 4 sets of 12 reps. Stop a couple reps short of failure on these.

**Standing abs:** Use a weight that is heavy enough where you could maybe do nine or ten reps, and do 5 sets of 8 reps.

TUESDAY:

**Bench press:** Take 60% of your one rep max from week one and set up moderate to hard band tension. And work up the bar weight to where you can only perform 6 to 7 reps and do it for 5 sets of 5 reps.

**Flat dumbbell bench:** Do these heavy; 4 sets of 5 reps, with all out intensity.

**Triceps pushdowns:** Increase weight on each set, then do one drop set: Your reps should look something like this: 12, 8, 6, 6, 15.

**Rolling dumbbell extension:** 4 sets of about 10-12 reps. Go till failure on these sets and fry your triceps.

**Dumbbell hammer curls:** Using a moderate weights and strict form, perform 5 sets of 8-12 reps with 90% intensity.
THURSDAY:

**Light front squats:** Warm up then work up to 3 heavy sets of 3 reps.

**Deadlifts:** Take 60% of your one rep max from week one and set up moderate to hard band tension. Work up the bar weight to where getting five reps is difficult and do 5 sets of 5 reps.

**Bent over rows:** 2 warm up sets and then 3 heavy sets of 6 reps at 90% intensity.

**Inverted rows:** 3 sets till failure. Keep back arched and get a good stretch.

**Pull-ups with close grip:** 4 all out sets with just bodyweight.

FRIDAY:

**Power cleans or high-pulls:** Warm up and then work up to a one rep max.

**Military press:** Take 60% of your one rep max from week one and set up light band tension. Work up the bar weight to where getting five reps is difficult and do 5 sets of 5 reps.

**Standing dumbbell presses:** Take a moderate weight dumbbell in each hand. Clean them once, then press them once, and bring them back down to a deadlifted position. Clean them again and press them twice. Keep repeating while adding a press to each rep. Do as many as you can, and do three sets of this.

**Dumbbell side raises:** Use dumbbells that you can perform 15 reps with, and do 3 sets all out.

**Standing abs:** Use a weight that is heavy enough where you could maybe do nine or ten reps, and do 5 sets of 8 reps.

As you can see it’s a very basic and simple design. Of course it’s just a sample of a routine, many things can be varied at any time. If I were to personally coach this client on an ongoing basis other than the first two exercises I would probably never have him do the same thing twice. It wouldn’t affect his strength as long as he busted his ass on those first two lifts for me.
**THE IRON SPORT STRENGTH METHOD**

**PROGRESSION:**

Progression with the Iron Sport Strength Method is self-perpetuating, meaning your strength gains and your progress determine your monthly progression. Each month your one rep max will be tested and the entire month-long mini cycle will work off of that. You may make a twenty pound gain in your squat in one cycle and only five on your bench. That is perfectly normal. Remember, not all of your lifts will improve at the same pace.

I like to see people hit all time personal bests on each main lift during week one max singles. Remember not to shoot too high, a five pound PR is still a PR, and still means you are making improvement. So in week one of each mini-cycle make it a point to know what you did the month previous and always try to put more weight on the bar and make an improvement.

**Making weight increases during your training:** I see people in the gym every day who have no clue how to warm-up and make jumps to their top set. A good rule of thumb is: if you can only bench 245lbs you shouldn’t make 225lbs your first set! Here is an example of how I would have a lifter warm up to a max single attempt of 275lbs.

**Empty bar:** After a short warm-up, take 10 – 12 empty bar reps.

135x10 reps, 135x8 reps, 185x5, 225x2, 255x1, 275x1

You want to be liberal with the lighter sets to make sure you are warmed up properly but then really keep the heavier reps to a minimum to save your strength. You also do not want to take massive jumps either, the shock of a 60% increase will almost always result in a missed lift.

I also suggest that a lifter with lower strength levels really should have fractional plates on hand. Fractional plates are ½lb and 1lb plates to make jumps smaller than 5lbs. If you can only overhead press 70lbs it’s very hard to take 5lb jumps successfully. It would be very useful for that lifter to be able to go to 71lbs and then 72lbs. These plates can be purchased from various sites on the internet, and they are something you can just keep in your gym bag for your own use.
**MISSED LIFTS:**

**Yes, there will be some months when you will not be able to surpass your one rep max on week one. That is perfectly fine; I have seen it happen.** The work you will be doing during the rest of the mini-cycles will take care of that and keep making you stronger. More often than not you bounce back the following month with a bigger one rep max.

If you end up hitting a lower number on week one how does it affect your week three percentages? I have told people they basically can do one of two things:

**One:** If his missed his lift on week one due to a sheer lack of strength and really got crushed by the weight, I would have him use the percentage of the last lift he did complete successfully for week three’s 10 sets of singles.

**Two:** If he just barely missed the lift due to a technical issue- the spotter grabbed the bar too soon, the phone rang and distracted him, a hot chick walked by, the sun got in his eyes, etc. I would have them use that missed lift number for the percentages on week three. I might only let him get away with that once though. I don’t want people to be failing like crazy on week three’s singles. If that’s the case you need to lower the percentages on week three.

**It is important for you to be able to recognize the difference between not being able to make progress because your programming is wrong for you and the fact that you just have really horrible lifting technique or some other issue.** Sometimes, especially in the case of someone that is new to strength training, it is hard to distinguish between the two. That is when it would be beneficial to consult with an expert and have him or her sort this all out. Remember there are three possible factors to missing a lift:

**Physical:** you just aren’t strong enough or you are battling an injury.

**Technical:** your technique isn’t sound enough.

**Mental:** you aren’t awake yet, you don’t understand the lift or your coaches cues, you are distracted by other things in your life, you are afraid to get hurt, etc.

Pinpointing which reason, or combination of those reasons, is important so you can start fixing what is wrong. It’s time to really be honest with yourself or trust your coach when he tells you what your problems are. Many times when I start training a new client I will have to back her down on a certain lift and “re-tool” her technique somewhat. When I feel she is a little more technically proficient at that lift I will cycle her back up to some heavier weights. Sometimes re-tooling requires the lifter to use a whole new set of muscles to perform a certain lift and it takes a little longer.
I like to program one heavy assistance exercise and a couple high-rep, lower percentage movements in a lot of my routines. Assistance work should function just as the word describes it; the exercises you choose should assist you in getting stronger, or at least make a specific aspect of a lift stronger. The best assistance exercises are ones that address a specific weakness for YOU, so choose them wisely.

There are hundreds of useful assistance exercises but I’m going to go over a few of my personal favorites, some tips on performing them and what I usually program them for.

**SQUAT ASSISTANCE**

**Front squats:** I really like front squats for a couple reasons. They really challenge the upper back and core more than a back squat, and for the wide stance power squatter the fronts work all the muscles that you try not to use when back squatting. Use a shoulder width or slightly wider than shoulder width stance.

It doesn’t matter if you use either a clean ‘racked’ position or the criss cross way of holding it, as long as the bar is up high, touching your throat but not pressing onto your wind pipe. Fight to keep the elbows high and your back really tight throughout the lift.

Try a heavy eight week cycle of front squats and then go back and see how stable your back squat has become and how much extra leg drive you now have. Front squats, especially over 75%, are tough to perform for high reps. I like 3-6 reps for these.
**Box squats:** I use box squats in different variations to teach people how to back squat using the posterior chain. Box squats will also be useful to teach the lifter speed out of the bottom of the squat. I will also program them for people coming back from knee injury. The box acts as a brake at the bottom for you and makes the transition from you descending with the bar to coming back up a lot more comfortable. The key things to remember while box squatting are to really try to sit your hips back, do not let the knees travel out in front of your shins, keep the back arched, and come off the box trying to “spread the floor” with your feet while pushing the glutes through hard. You can do box squats either off a lower than parallel box or slightly above for varying rep ranges.

**Romanian deadlifts:** The reason I like RDLs is because they are a great posterior chain movement from top to bottom. Keep the back arched, keep the lats pulled back tight, have a slight bend in the legs but do not bend and unbend your legs throughout the set. As you descend with the bar close to your legs keep moving the hips back and let your weight transfer to your heels a bit. Fight to keep that back arch; when you lose that arch the set is over. I like to see low reps, in the 3-6 range.
**Pause squats:** You don’t see these much anymore but they were a staple of the old school lifters. You sit at the bottom of your squat for a count of three while trying your best to stay tight and keep your chest high. When your coach or partner counts to three you explode as best you can out of the hole. It really teaches you tightness and drive out of the bottom. I would only do these in the 2-3 rep range.

**Glute/Ham raises:** You’ll need a glute/ham bench for these. I love these for building that upper hamstring/glute area that does a lot of the work during a squat. Push your legs straight at the start, do not hinge at the waist, keep the body rigid and lift by curling your self up using your hamstrings.

Push your toes into the back foot plate and squeeze the glutes at the top. I like to see people do these in a higher rep range, 10-15 reps. If bodyweight reps are too easy for you, you can also add difficulty to GH Raises by attaching a band under the machine and using it as resistance.

**Good mornings:** I have seen this exercise butchered pretty badly over the years, and this is not an exercise you want to be sloppy on. If done wrong it could really put your back in a bad position and you could get injured quickly. I like to see a wider than shoulder width stance, hold the bar on your back in a low bar squat position, have a slight bend in the knee, arch your back and keep your head up.

As your upper body descends you want to push the hips back and transfer your weight onto your heels until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings. Keeping the back still tight and arched you want to push the hips through until your standing upright again. I like these in the 3-8 rep range.
Standing abs: This is an ab exercise that I really like. It’s actually the only one I ever do and teach to people now. I like it mainly because you stand up while doing it and you can do them heavy, usually performing between 6-10 reps.

Using a Spud strap and a lat pulldown machine, take a wide stance, put the strap at the top of your forearms, bring your arms in against your body, and blow your air out as you slowly curl your body down like you are trying to jam your head into your crotch.

Slowly come back up, keeping the abs engaged, until you are standing straight up again. Standing abs has totally stabilized my core like nothing else I have ever done. Every lifter at Iron Sport swears by this exercise.
Bench Press Assistance

Dips: I still say for the money dips are the best assistance exercise for the bench press. Again, dips come out of the old school training manual; the big benchers of the 50’s and 60’s all swore by heavy weighted dips. Keep the elbows tucked, descend until the upper arm is parallel to the floor and then drive up to lockout. Just be careful about going down too far; your shoulder will be put in a really bad position and things will go to shit quickly for you. I like dips in the 6-12 rep range.

Dumbbell bench press: I really like heavy dumbbell benches as assistance. Nothing puts power in your arms like being able to press big dumbbells. Either flat or on a slight incline, experiment with different angles and see what works best or you. Do these in the 5-8 rep range.

Floor presses: Floor presses are exactly what they sound like. You lay flat on the floor, with your feet straight out and bench press. The range of motion is slightly lessened because your elbows touch the floor before the bar touches your chest. You will have no arch in your back or any leg drive.
Floor presses are great for someone who doesn’t get much back drive out of the bottom of the bench and has a low sticking point. These can be done with a regular barbell, dumbbells, axle bar, swiss bar etc. You can perform them anywhere from 3-8 reps or use it as a max one rep exercise.

**Long pause reps:** Every now and then I will have a client perform their benches with a three second pause at the bottom to learn how to keep tight and really explode on the press signal. Do them during a down set and never with anything more that 80% of your one rep max. I will keep the reps low; 3-5 is enough for these.

**Varying your grip:** Another favorite trick of the old school powerlifters is varying your grip on the bar as assistance. Gripping the bar a little more narrow or much wider than your usual competition grip will force your body to now use different muscles to do the pushing making you strong in a wider range and from different angles. You can program these variations in any rep scheme.

**Board presses:** The idea here is to layer planks of wood on top of your chest in 2” increments to lessen the range of motion of your bench press. Board presses are designed to strengthen your ability to lock out heavy lifts. In my opinion it’s a more beneficial lift for lifters who use bench shirts but raw lifters will see benefit as well. You don’t need to buy any expensive equipment to do board presses; just get yourself some 2x4 or 2x6 planks of wood. All you need is about an 18” length of it.

Have a partner hold it at your chest tightly as you bench press normally. You can use one board or nail two, three or four boards together to alter the range of motion. With the higher (three or four) board lifts you can greatly overload the triceps by just working the lockout portion of the lift. I like to do these heavy for 3-6 reps.
Log lifts: An old strongman competition classic event. Not too many gyms have strongman logs, but if you do have access to one I would suggest giving it a try. The modern logs are made from steel pipes and have bars on the ends to add weight. The fact that it has parallel handles and is very awkward to lift make it an immense challenge. If you can master the overhead log lift, bench pressing will seem like a birthday party.

Log (or Swiss) bar bench press: The log bar is a cheap and easy alternative to a strongman log. It gives you several width parallel handles to use. Because it isn’t a huge round pipe like a log the result will be a greater range of motion while you are pressing. The advantages of the parallel handles are that your elbows are forced to stay tucked and a lot more of the push will be done with your triceps. You can perform these on a flat bench, as a floor press and on a low (30 degree) incline bench. I have also used the log bar to come back from nagging shoulder injuries. At times when benching with a regular straight bar hurt my shoulder too much, I found that I could at least bench press using moderate weights with a parallel grip without pain. Having these tools at your disposal will keep you in the game and off the side lines sometimes. To me that is very important for continued strength gains.
Biceps: Yes, I said “biceps”. A lot of powerlifters neglect training biceps because they are not primary movers in any of the powerlifts. But having thicker, stronger biceps will definitely carry over to the bench press and military press, mainly for stability purposes.

Strongmen also need strong biceps, a lot of the events involve lifting and carrying objects with bent arms. Biceps training is pretty simple, it's all curls. I still think you get you best bang for the buck with heavy, basic barbell and dumbbell curls. Keep the reps in the 6-12 range.

Inverted rows: This is a great antagonistic exercise that will build upper back strength in the same groove that you bench press in. When you perform these make sure your back stays arched. Try to feel yourself pulling your weight up by pulling the elbows down towards the floor. Use the same elbow tuck that you use while benching, and make the bar touch just below your pecs. It is a bodyweight exercise but you can also drape some heavy chains across your body for added resistance. I like anywhere between 10-20 reps for these.
DEADLIFT ASSISTANCE

**Deficit deadlifts:** Deficit deadlifts are simply deadlifting while standing on something that will put you 2-6” off the ground. This will increase the length of the pull and will also force your body into a disadvantageous starting position making the lift much harder. These can be done as assistance after regular deadlifts or as the main lift in various rep ranges.

**Rack deadlifts from below the knee:** When people miss a deadlift this is where they more than likely get stuck. It is that transitional position where leg drive usually stops and your back is forced to take over and pull more. Doing rack pulls from below the knee is deceptive because if you have never done them you are going to think that because the bar is higher off the ground it’s automatically going to be easier but in most cases it’s much harder. It’s impossible to start the lift with any leg drive so it’s nothing but a back pull. It usually takes a little practice before you can pull as much from this position as you can from the floor.

**Hyper deads:** This is one of the most punishing exercises I have ever done but the strength they build is fantastic. You will need a 45 degree hyper extension unit to do these. Set a bar up out in front of the hyper bench, and basically all you are going to do is deadlift the bar while doing the hyper extension. It’s simple and oh so brutal. Again, there is no leg drive at all, just nothing but posterior chain pulling. Keep your back arched and tight throughout the lift. I also suggest using 25lb plates on the bar so you get a better range of motion on your pull. You can also do them with a wide (snatch) grip for added difficulty. I like lower heavy reps on these, between 3-6 reps.
Barbell rows: Heavy barbell rows have always been another favorite of mine. Always start your rows from the floor, not out of a rack. Keep your back arched, a slight bend in your legs, keep your head up, get a little leg drive off the floor and bring the bar to your abdomen. Your rep range can be anywhere from 3-10.

Sumo and conventional deadlifts: If you are a conventional style deadlifter and want an exercise that forces you pull with a whole different set of muscles try working some wide stance sumo pulls somewhere into your routine. And the same thing works the other way too. In my opinion, one of the best assistance moves for a sumo puller is conventional deadlifts.

Tire flipping and stone loading: Flipping heavy tractor tires and lifting round Atlas stones like the ones seen in strongman contests has a tremendous carry over to the deadlift. The fact that the athlete has to bend down and pick the stone and tire up from a very low position, drive the legs and hips hard, fight and hump the weight up work the hell out of the entire body. What many people don’t realize who have never lifted stones or tires is it is also an amazing workout for the grip. There are no handles to these implements so gripping them is very difficult. These and many of the strongman events have quite a bit of carry over to your deadlifts.

High-pulls: This exercise has a two fold effect: it works on your upper back strength and gets your traps all jacked up and impressive. You can start with the bar on the floor or take it out of the rack. Wear straps, stand up straight, then tip forward at the waist while keeping the back arched. Slightly bend your knees, slide the bar down your thighs and when the bar gets just above the knee jump and pull.
The elbows should ride out to your sides as in the ‘scarecrow’ position, the bar should stay close to the body, and you should shrug your traps hard at the top. You can do these with a close or “clean” grip as well as a wide “snatch” grip. Low reps are best for High-pulls since it is such an explosive movement. Do between 3-5 reps.

**High-bar squats squats and front squats:** I still the think that most of your strength for the deadlift will come from squatting heavy and hard. Squats build the same primary movers of the deadlift in most cases. A lot of powerlifters don’t do front squats, but I really see them as a great assistance for deadlifts. They are challenging to to the upper back as well as the legs.

**MILITARY PRESS**

**Press behind neck:** I always joke around about these and call them “The forbidden exercise” because they used to be a staple in everyone’s training routine back in the 60’s and 70’s. People were happily building giant shoulders and then one day somebody came along and said they were too dangerous and all of a sudden you stopped seeing people do them.

Unlike military presses, which tend to use a lot of triceps, the behind the neck presses put more direct work on the deltoids themselves. If you do want to make them a little safer on the shoulder I suggest doing them in a smith machine. That will help you control your groove a little better and let you just concentrate on pumping out your reps.

**Push presses:** This is a great way to really overload the top end of your press. Use leg drive to get the bar moving fast off your chest and then press it out at the top. You will be able to handle weights much greater than you can strict press building both strength and stability.
Stevey P Combos: No, I didn’t name these after myself, the guys in my gym did. I was always doing these various combinations of high-pulling, hang cleaning and push-pressing in my training. The classic Stevey P combo consists of picking the bar up from the floor into the hang position, doing two hang high-pulls, then one hang clean, then ramming one push-press overhead. But any combination of the three lifts works. Sometimes we’ll take a set weight and perform 3 high pulls, one clean, then three push-presses then on each set after we will add one high-pull and one push-press until we gas out and can’t go any further. We call those “progressive Stevey P combos”.

We will also do combos with hang snatches. Mix up different numbers of snatch grip high-pulls and hang snatches. You can go heavy and do low rep sets (one pull, one snatch) or go for a high rep combo with lighter weights (five pulls and three snatches). Just be creative and have fun with them. Sometimes we come up with these combo workouts and before you know it we have a mini competition going on and they end up being some of the best training sessions as a result.

Triceps work: Working the triceps with movements such as dips and narrow grip benches really help out the military press. After the initial push off of the chest the press is mainly pushed through and locked with the triceps.

Seated Floor Presses: An olympic lifter from Lebanon that trained at Iron sport for a while taught my strongman this exercise. He was a big strong guy and had amazing pressing ability. He told us when he was a younger lifter his coach in Lebanon had him do seated floor presses. He then demonstrated them by sitting upright inside of a power rack with the pins just about chest height. He then removed the bar into a press position and began strictly pressing it. It became a staple lift of the Iron Sport strongmen after that day. The torso is not stabilized by the lower body at all so it really challenges the core tremendously as well.
When we first came up with the idea to put Iron Sport Gym together we never thought we were doing anything revolutionary. The idea of building a gym by the lifter, for the lifter just seemed to make total sense to us. We never even dreamed that nearly twenty years later we would be on the brink of something the “experts” said couldn’t be done. A small independently owned “meathead” gym going up against and surviving in the corporate health club world. That success didn’t just happen by accident. It took a monumental effort, a ton of sacrifice, scratching away for every penny, luck and a lot of help from friends and family to keep the dream of Iron Sport alive.

I receive a lot of emails from people inquiring about how they too can start a gym like Iron Sport. I will always tell them, “There is a small fortune to be made in the hardcore gym business . . . as long as you start out with a LARGE fortune.” You often hear people use the expression “my business is a labor of love” and in some ways that’s what Iron Sport is to me. But for me, running my business was more like all-out war. Those lessons that I learned in the weightroom were the lessons that helped me keep the gym alive during those times when business wasn’t going so well.

I treat the gym like a winning, third attempt deadlift at a meet. There is no way I am about to let go and stop trying until I am victorious. I refuse to lose. The lessons I learned through many years of sacrifice and struggle while training became my most important tools as a business owner. When I see other businesses up and down the pike opening and closing a few months later it reminds me of the people I see joining the gym and then quitting after a week when they realize it is actually going to be hard work. It isn’t in me to quit, so that was never an option. Nor will it ever be. And it should never be an option for you.
swear, God as my witness I will bring a legal shitstorm down upon you the likes of which you have never seen.