How the BIG Boys Train at DeFranco’s Saturday Strongman Workouts!

The secret is out, if you train with Joe D., you’re gonna get stronger than a freight train and you’ll pack on muscle faster than ever before.

That’s the plain and simple facts.

This is why he was always packed and busy training athletes, even Pro athletes, even when he was training in an old, revamped storage closet inside of an existing health club!

I had the chance to see how Joe trains his athletes as they prep for his annual DeFranco Strongman Contest which also serves as a strength, power and conditioning workout!

One would assume that there would only be Football players present, but that’s not the case at all.

There were Hockey players, Baseball Players and the Football players came from all over the east coast.
There were athletes traveling from Harlem, the Bronx, Queens, Long Island, Massachusetts, Maryland and all over NJ. Yep, I’m telling you, there are guys who drive 1 ½ hours each way almost every week day!

There are guys who find their way to Joe from Harlem who can barely scrounge together enough money to train with him but instead of making excuses, they find a way to make ends meet! Nobody whines and says “I can’t afford it”.

There were a few high school kids there, but the majority were collegiate athletes. Many were jacked and strong as hell, and not all of them started that way! One high school kid started about one year ago, could bench 155 lbs and looked like a kid with no inkling of talent what so ever!

What does Joe do with these kids?

Today, that same kid benches 275 lbs, he walked with the yoke better than the majority of the college guys and he NEVER backed down from the heavy weights during all the strongman events!

The day began with a dynamic warm up:

- Pull ups
- Squats
- Lunges in various directions
- Various jumping jacks
- Push ups
- Stretching and mobility

Then, the events were explained and the guys were broken up into two groups according to approximate strength and being above / below 220 lbs.

The events were performed for 2 sets each and reps are detailed below:
1. 600 lb tire flip: 2 reps light guys, 3 reps heavy guys
2. farmer walks: 190 lbs each hand for all groups, 60 yds.
3. RickShaw farmer walks: one 45 on ea. side (approx. weight?): 60 yds
4. log clean & press for 30 sec.: 105 lbs lighter guys, 145 lbs heavier guys
5. yoke walk (2 plates and a 25 on each side) and 5 plates sled back drag medley: same weight for all groups

The preparation for Joe’s Strongman event begins taking place approx. 8 weeks prior to the contest. But, what must be taken into account is that these guys are training for improvements in strength, speed / power and conditioning year round.

So, yes, the events are tough and challenging, especially due to the specificity factor.

The 190 lb farmer walks busted me up big time. The insane thing was that some of these athletes RAN with the 190 lb farmer walks! After this event hit me hard I made it a focus to squat more and perform the farmer walk more on my own.

Practice of each event certainly helps, so now walking with 190 – 200 lbs is much easier than before, although I am not yet jogging with the weights. We took the same approach at The Underground and began implementing a strongman day once a week.

Why a full strongman day and not just one strongman event during each workout?

Performing 3 events in one workout taxes the body very intensely and I want these guys to get used to the intensity and endurance required for so much work. This will have a great carry over to their Football games and will allow them to be better prepared than their opposition, both physically and mentally.

When we began with the strongman training we would use one movement and either start or finish a workout with that movement. Although the sled drag is often an event in
strongman contests, we did not consider this a strongman movement, but, we did perform sled work at the end or beginning of 2 out of 3 workouts. There are too many kids who are very strong and in horrible conditioning and the sled is a tool that has payed large dividends in improving GPP levels. We also combine the sled with the prowler as well. Two sets of each for approx. 150 – 175 ft. per trip does the trick!

The event which seemed to give all the athletes at DeFranco’s the most trouble was the yoke walk. What shocked me most was that a high school kid did this better than the majority of the college kids, and this was the football player who barely benched 155 lbs one year ago!

But, that was their second time of strongman training, and if you’re not physically ready to handle a heavy weight on the yoke or farmer walk, the weight will literally take you for a ride and throw you all over the place.

Below are a series of photos from DeFranco’s on their 2nd strongman session of the year. This session takes place on Saturdays and although it is used as a full body training day, it also serves as preparation for Joe’s annual strongman event which is where a few of our wrestlers and football athletes will be banging heads with Joe D’s athletes! It’s going to be one heck of a contest that’s for damn sure!
Above, the big guys had to get 3 flips with the 600 lb. tire. The entire group was always hyped up and the energy was high. You could clearly see the difference between motivated and unmotivated athletes, and ALL these guys were motivated for victory.
Above, a Football player from Mass. gets hyped up after recording the best time in the tire flip.
Above, a high school Football player performing the tire flip for 2 reps.
The energy, focus and intensity required to flip a 600 lb. tire is BIG! The struggle during strongman training teaches kids a lot about themselves and what they need to do to perform at a high level. Although not all athletes are ready for heavy strongman training, heavy is relative to the individual and I feel it’s a great addition to the traditional styles of training.
Above, Joe D. stands close by to make sure the athlete makes it through the tire flip alive!

Above & below, the athletes await instruction on the next event.
Above, the log clean and press begins from the ground on the first rep and then continues from the hang position. The time is 30 seconds and each athlete must go for max reps. Skill comes into play here. Athletes who rarely perform overhead work were trying to find their groove between a push press, a jerk or a strict press. Those who did best performed the jerk or push press at the top.

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Above, the once upon a time high school weakling is one of Joe D’s hardest working athletes. Hard work and dedication made the huge difference with this kid, as it does with 99% of all other kids. There are a small percentage of kids who train their asses off, and larger percentage of kids need to simply start training!
Above, one of the high school kids from Yonkers tearing it up in the log clean and press!

Sometimes you think a 15 minute ride is too far to find a gym. What about kids who drive 30 minutes, 60 minutes or even 90 minutes ONE way to get top notch training in?

That’s dedication!
Above, the college crew taking a break after an event.
The lighter college athletes pressing away on the log.
Above, a Football player presses away as a Baseball player looks on

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Above, the 145 lb clean and press battle begins.
Above, a STRONG back, heavily muscled. That’s the way it should be in the posterior chain!
Athletes prepare to perform the yoke walk
This was the first day of filming at DeFranco’s for a documentary that will require an entire summer of filming.
Jacked up and ready to walk the yoke.
After the strongman day was finished, Joe, his two trainers, John Impallomeni and Jeff Carr and myself were chatting training, naturally.

Joe told me that the college Football guys were given a special deal where they could come in and train 6 days a week. The workout looked like this at the time:

- 2 upper body days
- 2 lower body days
- 1 tred sled day
- 1 strongman day

Normally Joe takes them to a dome to run linear and lateral drills for conditioning purposes but with this crew he did not start doing that yet.

I personally wish my own athletes would train so often. Most of our athletes train here twice a week, and although encourage and educated to train on their own, the majority do NOT do so.

And if they do, the training is either not challenging enough to elicit a response or the training is what is done at their high school which often times weakens them through 400
meter runs with incomplete recovery (this is for Football), running with an empty sled or machine circuits.

The wrestlers are wrestling so often that it serves as their strength and conditioning work, so two days a week of training is great for wrestlers. For Football players, twice a week is simply not enough.

When looking at the majority of the Football players at DeFranco’s, they were all very lean. Sure, genetics plays a role, but, so does activity levels.

Our own Football players who have prepared themselves well will be heading North to participate in the strongman event.

Because they have already begun their required training for Football, they are doing a lot of extra work on their own, although less then effective training, sometimes I am simply grateful that they are moving on an almost daily basis.

So, for now, we are performing an upper body day once a week and a strongman day once a week. The strongman training hammers the lower body and all the running they are doing also taxes the lower body heavily. This is why we reduced lower body training for the last few weeks.

On upper body day, the athletes have been starting with a full body movement, which also works the legs. So although we are not deadlifting or squatting, the legs are getting hit hard and we’re all showing signs of progress.

A typical strongman day begins with a warm up: mobility, rolling out on foam roller and / or med ball and calisthenics.
Yesterday’s strongman training was:

1) farmer walk – 1 warm up, 1 medium, 1 heavy set

Above, two of our athletes worked up to 200 and 220 lbs in each hand for the farmer walk for approx. 175 ft. This is heavy stuff to walk with.

2) Tire Flip – the better prepared athletes perform 2 sets of 5, the lesser prepared athletes performed 3 sets of 2 – 3 reps
Above, a 145 lb wrestler flips the tire at the END of his workout. Although our wrestlers do not perform FULL strongman days, they regularly flip tires, drag sleds, push the prowler, carry sandbags and more odd object training!

3) The final event of the day – Various sled drags, HEAVY – we’ve had a wrestler drag a sled with 9 plates and an 88 lb Kettlebell strapped on! Sometimes we go heavy and move slowly, other times we choose a moderate sled weight and perform a few rounds of sleds with little to no rest.
Above, a sled loaded with four, 100 lb plates and two, 45 lb plates.

Above, staying LOW during HEAVY backwards sled dragging!
Well, now you have gotten a little taste of how DeFranco works his athletes with strongman training and how his annual strongman event has motivated our guys to get stronger!

Nothing gets kids more hyped than competition, and, as an athlete, competition is critical. When a local Football coach told me his kids were not interested in our ‘Lift Strong’ fundraiser I was shocked! Shocked at the kids and the Coach. The Coach should have reamed them out for not stepping up to compete against others, as athletes, that’s what we’re supposed to do!

Competition trains the mind and body for what the necessary emotions you will encounter come game day. The more you can improve your emotions and physical readiness on game day the more successful you will become!

This article is dedicated to the motivated coaches and athletes out there, and a BIG thanks goes to Joe D. for being a great mentor and friend!

For more info on Joe D. and his training methods, go to

http://DeFrancosTraining.com

To access the most innovative strength and conditioning web site in the world, go to http://UndergroundStrengthCoach.com

For more strongman training and tons of odd object lifting, check out The Ultimate Underground Training Manual by Clicking HERE Now!