How Powerlifting & Bodybuilding Can Make You Bigger & Stronger!

Powerlifting follows a very simple method, one which is often overlooked, underused and undermined. It’s called Overload. To get stronger and bigger you must move heavier weights or get extra reps with the same weight.

Many people fear heavy weights, bending barbells, big dumbbells and the battle against heavy iron.

I actually spoke about this very topic with Jason Ferruggia. We asked one another, “Are there any more real men out there who love to train hard and lift heavy, or do people just want to be told to drink green tea, do leg extensions, leg curls and concentration curls?”

That’s a heavy question and it got me worried! I worried he might be correct and that as Undergrounders we’re a rare breed. Perhaps a dying breed?

I can’t allow myself to believe we’re a dying breed though! Dave Tate knows that we’re out there. How does he know? Because every day Jim Wendler and Dave are on the phone helping Undergrounders set up their garage or basement gym! We’ve become disgusted with the fancy, sissy, anti sweat, anti heavy iron, anti effort gyms and have grown into a cult.
Now, there are many guys performing Powerlifting and bodybuilding in their personal dungeons. Matt Kroczaleski is a team member at http://elitefts.com and you see his training all takes place in his garage! Matt is the 2006 220 lb WPO Powerlifting Champion at the Arnold Sports festival!

The guys that I saw lifting at the 2007 Arnold WPO contest were not the stereo type most people give to powerlifters, which is that of fat, non-athletic people. These guys were rock solid and had chiseled muscles literally popping out everywhere!

Above, Matt Kroczaleski, looking lean, mean and jacked pulls big at the WPO Arnold Fest!

Photo courtesy of http://elitefts.com

When I stepped backstage to see the powerlifters warming up, all the guys in the 220 lb class and under were very lean, sporting 6 pick abs and chiseled muscles.
Even many of the guys above heavy weights were very lean! They reminded me of bodybuilders 3 or 4 weeks out from a bodybuilding contest!

Below, Oleksandr Kutcher of the Ukraine shown pulling.

What is the main premise here?

Always aim to break records and that means overload the muscles with heavier loads as often as your body can handle.

How did the bodybuilders at Diamond Gym constantly win titles and dominate the bodybuilding scene? The same way the guys at Gold’s Venice dominated the bodybuilding scene.

They ALL trained very heavy and very intensely. The norm was to start off with a max effort lift and crank out a few all out sets in the 3 – 6 rep range. The movements after that were also heavy, but in the 6 – 12 rep range, sometimes even more reps. Still, in all movements, we always aimed for improving our strength because we knew getting stronger also meant getting bigger!
This was a very similar method to the conjugate method. We used primarily max effort and repeated effort methods without knowing these methods were used for athletes.

Above, the 220 lb champion at the 2007 WPO at the Arnold Sports Festival. You don’t get that jacked training light!

Let’s take a look at a sample program for developing strength and getting jacked with nothing more than a barbell, power rack and dumbbells.

The split will be an upper / lower split, training 3 days a week, non consecutive days.
Day 1
Upper Body:

Warm up surrounding muscles with calisthenics, mobility and light weights.

Rest 60 – 90 seconds in between each max effort movement of the supersets to allow for heavy weights. After the max effort movements (exercises 1A & B) you can decrease rest and keep the pace very high.

1A) Flat bench press 5 x 15 – 3 reps (wave the load and decrease reps each set). The last two sets should be in the 3 – 6 rep range and taken to maximum exertion, or, if you are lesser prepared as an athlete to submax exertion.

1B) weighted chin ups 5 x 3 – 6 reps

2A) Incline DB bench 2 x 6 – 10 reps
2B) Reverse Grip Barbell Row 2 x 6 – 10 reps

3A) thick bar cheat curls 2 x 5 - 8 reps
3B) lying barbell XT 2 x 5 – 8 reps
3C) lying barbell close grip bench press 2 x max reps

*After you can not perform lying XT’s, immediately begin cranking out close grip benching

4) grip & ab circuit 3 rounds

* In between sets while resting, perform some band pull aparts or bent over dumbbell raises for high reps to work the upper back. During our warm up the band pull aparts and band face pulls are used regularly, but performing extra sets with high reps for this area builds muscle very quickly and also serves as a prehab movement for the shoulders.
For forearm hypertrophy, movements such as the wrist roller, wrist curls and high rep Captain of Crush grippers work great. Also, get rid of the straps. You never saw the bodybuilders of the 70’s and prior using them and they all had rock solid forearms! For additional grip strength include at least one set of a pinch or crush movement such as hex DB holds or plate pinching.

Day 2
Lower Body

Warm up with mobility and calisthenics

1) Barbell Squats (alternate every other workout with or without box) 5 x 3 – 15 reps
2) rack pulls or floor deadlifts 3 x 3 – 6 reps
3A) Barbell split squats 2 x 6 – 8 each
3B) 2 hand dumbbell swings 2 x 12 reps
4A) walking DB lunges 2 x 20 steps
4B) seated leg curls with band or lying DB leg curl (squeeze DB between feet) 2 x 10 – 15 reps

If you have energy you can finish with a variation of a back XT to further work the glutes, hams and low back. The horizontal back XT on the glute ham bench will be the most difficult exercise, especially if performed with added resistance.
Above, Dorian Yates shows the results of training heavy and intensely!

When we were bodybuilding, we always did 2-3 sets of back extensions at the end of our back workout. We held a plate across our chest (35 – 45 lbs) and performed 15 reps, dropped the plate and performed 5 more. Our lower backs were strong as heck and we never suffered low back injuries. In addition, we performed more than 50% of our abdominal training with resistance!

**Day 3**

**Full Body Repetition day**

**Warm up** with mobility and calisthenics for entire body

1A) weighted vest or backpack squats 2 x 50 reps  
1B) recline ring rows 2 x max reps  
2A) flat DB benching 2 x 20 reps
2B) Barbell DL (bar goes to mid shin level and then back up) 2 x 15
3A) Barbell hang clean and press 2 x 15
   4) band pull aparts 2 x 30 reps

You can finish with an **ab circuit** of 3 – 4 movements with 15 reps per exercise

**High rep days**

I found that high rep days taken to max exertion or close to max are excellent for hypertrophy! Squats in the 15 – 40 range with heavy weights on your back are brutal but they are awesome for increasing strength and mass on the lower body!

Rack pulls will add slabs of muscle to your posterior and will improve your squat. Squatting always helps add muscle and keeps your mid section tight. Simply walking with weight on your back and adjusting your feet forces you to shift the weight on your back and makes muscles work extremely hard that simply do not get worked like this from bodyweight abdominal movements.

Heavy walking dumbbell lunges are brutal but will add muscle to your lower body big time. Here and there, I actually did learn some good stuff from bodybuilding, and when Eddie Robinson spoke about his workouts, I recall how he always handled heavy weights and performed high rep workouts with heavy weights. He would take a 135 lb barbell to the gym parking lot and perform walking lunges across the parking lot or lawn.

I experienced the brutality of this movement when I trained with a few beasts at Diamond Gym and after heavy squats and heavy leg presses, they had me do walking lunges around the gym! I walked through each room and did a full lap! I don’t know how I did 4 sets of these when I couldn’t even stand up without feeling pain, let alone perform walking dumbbell lunges.
This is when your training partners come in handy and push you to a whole new level! Training with crazy people always elevates the intensity of each workout! A great training partner is a rarity but if you’re lucky enough you will have golden workouts 99.9% of the time!

The guys that had the biggest backs and shoulders were performing heavy clean and presses, heavy barbell, dumbbells and cable rows, heavy weighted chins and heavy deadlifts.

When I was only a teenager I asked one guy how he got so big. He told me HE ALWAYS lifts heavy. He was the winner of the Mr. NJ bodybuilding show, and his own words he said exactly this to me, “I go heavy or not at all.”

I used to watch him bench, squat and dead lift heavy all the time. It didn’t look like they were moving too fast or getting a lot of work done because I focused on supsersets and fast workouts back then. Little did I know that as the years passed on, powerlifting would find its place in all facets of my training: adding muscle, gaining strength, training athletes, developing speed and building confidence.
Until you start lifting heavy and hard, don’t expect to have the solid build of a powerlifter! Light weights just won’t cut it!

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