Westside for Skinny Bastards
A modified lifting program for "Hardgainers"

by Joe DeFranco
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I'm a gym scientist. My lab is the weight room and my lab rats are my athletes. Many of these "lab rats" are doing the program you're about to read. My experiments have proven one thing: this program works. Below I've provided four real-world success stories to prove it.

These four athletes represent only a fraction of the amazing results I've seen with this program. Below you'll see examples of normal high school kids who swore it was "impossible" for them to gain weight. Well, look at them now. These kids have packed on slabs of muscle mass using this program and good nutrition - and they're still growing! As a bonus, every one of these "hardgainers" has the strength to match their newfound muscle! See for yourself:

Success Stories of Former Skinny Bastards
John Iannuzzi, 18-year-old high school basketball player. John went from 171 to 186 pounds in 15 weeks. He can perform strict single leg squats holding 100-pound dumbbells. John also possesses a jaw-dropping 37 and a half-inch vertical jump!
**Brian Cushing**, 17-years-old, #2 ranked high school linebacker in the nation. Brian went from 213 to 231 pounds in 16 weeks. He can now perform 3 sets of 8 strict glute-ham raises on an incline with a mini band strapped around his neck! Brian also ran an official 4.5 second 40-yard dash at a major high school combine!
Nick Brandreth, 17-year-old high school wrestler. Nick gained 12 pounds this off-season on this modified Westside program. He was also able to maintain his newfound muscle throughout the season. He holds the record for career wins at his high school and was undefeated (31-0) in the county and region this year. Nick has performed 77 consecutive suspended chain push-ups on his repetition upper body day!
Jim Dray, 17-years-old, one of the most highly recruited tight ends in the nation. Jim went from 208 to 232 pounds in just 13 weeks. He also improved his 185-pound bench press rep test from 10 to 18 reps while on this program!

**The Method and the Madness**

Many of my programs are based on the principles popularized by Louie Simmons and the Westside Barbell Club. Through my extensive research and experience, I've found that this system produces the best results. I've also found that, like any other system, you must manipulate it to suit your specific needs.

We're all well aware that the Westside Barbell Club is the home to some of the strongest, most gifted powerlifters in the world. The results this system has produced speaks for itself. The problem is, I don't train powerlifters. In fact, most of the younger athletes who come to me aren't physically prepared to jump into such a demanding program.

My clientele consists mainly of football players, wrestlers, baseball players, hockey players, basketball players, and track & field athletes. These athletes range from high school kids to professionals. Through my experience of working with these different athletes, I'm constantly manipulating the system so it better suits an athlete's specific sport and his training level.
Now, if I were to write about all of the different templates I've designed for the different sports and skill levels, this would be the *War and Peace* of training articles! I don't think anyone wants to sit at the computer for a couple of hours reading a novel. (My ass hurts just thinking about it!)

Instead of writing a novel about how I manipulate the Westside Barbell system for all of the different athletes I work with, I've decided to do something much more practical for T-Nation readers. I've decided to appeal to the masses!

Let me explain. You see, I get flooded with phone calls and emails every day asking for my advice on getting bigger and stronger. These phone calls range from high school athletes to 40-year-old businessmen. Most of these people are dying to know the "secrets" of getting bigger and stronger. These guys usually sound as if they've been training their entire lives and they've tried every training method known to man. They call me in desperation and in need of a quick fix.

The funny thing is, after getting more info about these people, I find they have no right to be desperate and in need of super-advanced techniques! This is because they usually have three things in common:

#1 - They lack muscle mass.

#2 - They're weak.

#3 - They're inexperienced.

This is where my modified program comes in. And don't be fooled by the name, either. This program isn't just for skinny bastards; you can be a fat bastard and benefit from it as well! Seriously, I've used this program for a wide variety of athletes and "normal" people and it's worked wonders. Simply put, if you're interested in packing on muscle mass and having the strength to back it up, this program is for you.
Westside for Skinny Bastards: The Program

Below you'll find my basic training template for this program. Notice that I provide lots of variety for your exercise selection and rep schemes. I don't like turning people into robots by having them aimlessly follow a set program. Choose the exercises and rep schemes you feel work the best for your body. Add some of your own exercises if you'd like. And if you're not familiar with all the exercises listed, just use the search engine here at T-mag.

After I lay out the basic program, I'll provide some more detail about it at the end of the article.

+++++ Max Effort Upper Body (Monday) +++++

A. MAX-EFFORT LIFT - Work up to a max set of 3-5 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

Thick bar or regular barbell bench press
Barbell floor press
Rack lockouts
Board presses
Incline barbell bench
Close-grip bench press (index finger on smooth part of bar)
Decline bench press
Weighted dips

B. SUPPLEMENTAL LIFT - Perform 3-4 sets of 6-10 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:
Flat dumbbell bench press (palms in or palms forward)
Incline dumbbell bench press
Decline dumbbell bench press

C. HORIZONTAL ROW - Perform 4 sets of 10-15 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:
Chest supported rows
Bent-over dumbbell or barbell rows

Seated cable rows (various bars)

D. REAR DELT/UPPER BACK - Perform 2-3 sets of 12-15 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:
Seated rear delt machine
Seated dumbbell "power cleans"
Bent-over cable flyes (single arm)
Standing face pulls
Rope pulls to throat
Bent-over dumbbell rear delt flyes
Cable "scarecrows"(shown below)
E. WEIGHTED ABDOMINAL EXERCISE - 3-4 sets of 8-15 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

- Barbell Russian twists
- Low-cable pull-ins
- Hanging leg raises
- Barbell or dumbbell side bends
- Weighted Swiss ball crunches
- Low pulley Swiss ball crunches (shown below)
A. MAX-EFFORT LIFT - Work up to a max set of 5 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

- Trap bar deadlift
- Box squats
- Rack pulls (partial deadlift)
- Front squats
- High bar Olympic squats
- Straight bar deadlifts (various grips)

B. UNILATERAL MOVEMENT - Perform 3-4 sets of 8-15 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

- Single leg squats, back leg elevated
- Barbell step-ups with knee lift
- Barbell reverse lunges
- Barbell reverse lunges, front foot elevated
- Barbell reverse lunges, front foot elevated (with knee lift)
- Low-pulley split squats, front foot elevated
- Walking lunges
- "Speed-skater" squats (1 and a half rep single leg squats)
- Barbell step-ups
C. HAMSTRING / POSTERIOR CHAIN MOVEMENT - Perform 3-4 sets of 6-10 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

- Leg curls
- Glute-ham raises (various resistance, iso-holds, negatives)
- Romanian deadlifts
- Seated or standing good mornings
- Stability ball hamstring lifts
- Pull-throughs
- Reverse hypers
D. GRIP TRAINING - Perform 3 sets of timed sets.

Choose one of the following exercises:
Thick bar or heavy dumbbell holds
Plate pinch gripping
Captains of Crush gripper - 3 sets of max reps each hand.
Wrist roller
+++++++ REPETITION UPPER BODY - (Friday) ++++++

A. REPETITION LIFT - Work up to 3 sets of max reps, rest 60 seconds between sets.

Choose one of the following exercises:

Barbell bench press (max reps on 95lbs., 135lbs., 185lbs. or 225lbs.)
Regular push-ups, bar push-ups or suspended chain push-ups
Bodyweight dips
Dumbbell benches on Swiss ball, flat bench or incline bench

B. SUPPLEMENTAL LIFT (triceps) - Perform 3-4 sets of 5-10 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

Dumbbell triceps extensions (flat, incline or decline bench)
Dumbbell floor presses
Rolling triceps extensions
Rope pushdowns
Skull crushers (EZ bar or straight bar)
**C. VERTICAL PULLING** - Perform 4 sets of 8-12 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

Lat pulldowns (various bars)
Chin-ups or Pull-ups

**D. MEDIAL DELT or TRAP EXERCISE** - Perform 3 sets of 10-15 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

Dumbbell side press (single arm)
Dumbbell shoulder press (seated or standing)
Lateral raises (dumbbell or cable)
Barbell or dumbbell shrugs
Bradford presses (shown below)

E. ELBOW FLEXION EXERCISE - Perform 3 sets of 8-10 reps.

Choose one of the following exercises:

- Thick bar curls
- Preacher curls (EZ bar or straight bar)
- Regular barbell curls
- Hammer curls
- Alternate dumbbell curls (standing or seated incline)
F. ABDOMINAL CIRCUIT TRAINING

Just pick a variety of ab exercises and perform them in circuit fashion with no rest between exercises.

NOTE: Athletes who are approaching their season and want to incorporate running/conditioning/GPP work into their program can break up the week as follows:

MONDAY (A.M.) - MAX-EFFORT Upper Body lift
MONDAY (P.M.) - Sprint work, conditioning, GPP or skill training
TUESDAY - OFF or Restoration techniques
WEDNESDAY - Sprint work, conditioning, GPP or skill training
THURSDAY - REPETITION Upper Body lift
FRIDAY - Sprint work, conditioning, GPP or skill training
SATURDAY - Lower Body lift
SUNDAY - OFF or Restoration techniques

**Major Modifications**

Now, before all of the hardcore Westside "disciples" start grumbling, remember that this program is *not* intended for advanced powerlifters. It's intended for athletes and regular people looking to pack on some muscle mass without being "all-show, no-go."

Below I've provided descriptions of how the key components of this program have been manipulated from the traditional Westside template.

**Max Effort Upper Body Day** - The max effort method is the best method for developing maximal strength. In my opinion, max effort work should be the "nuts and bolts" of any strength-training program. If you're weak, you're dead!

Remember that most athletic qualities (sprinting speed, jumping power, etc.) rely heavily on your foundation of maximal strength. This is because maximal strength builds the foundation for all other strength qualities such as speed-strength and strength-endurance.

Your first exercise on this day will be your max-effort exercise. Traditionally, most advanced lifters will work up to a one-rep max on this exercise. This is very neurologically demanding on your system and it takes great coordination. Because most beginner and intermediate lifters are less neurologically efficient, we'll shoot for a 3-5 rep max on our max-effort lift in this modified program. This still enables the lifter to train with maximal loads, but it's much safer than going for a one-rep max. The extra reps also increase the time under tension, which can lead to greater hypertrophy (size) gains.

I recommend rotating your max-effort exercise every two to three weeks to prevent your nervous system from getting burned out. Whether you shoot for a 3-rep max or a 5-rep max, the goal is to break your previous record every week!

**Lower Body Day** - Unlike a traditional Westside template, you'll notice there's only one major lower body day in this modified program. There's a reason for this: most beginner/intermediate
athletes couldn't recover from two lower body days a week in conjunction with their running and conditioning work. Their legs would never fully recover and it would take away from their speed and conditioning workouts. One day has worked out much better for many of my athletes.

(If you're not an athlete or you only play one sport and it's your off-season, check out the "Extra Workouts, GPP, Conditioning Days" description below for adding another day to your lower body training.)

The first exercise on your lower body day will be a max effort lift. You'll work up to a max set of five reps in this lift. This lift will be rotated every two to three weeks as well.

On this modified program you'll always follow your max effort exercise with a unilateral exercise. This is one of the major differences between this program and a traditional Westside template.

I incorporate unilateral movements for many reasons. First of all, most athletes develop muscular imbalances between limbs. Unilateral exercises are a great way to overcome these imbalances. They also improve flexibility, balance and overall conditioning.

The unilateral exercises I prescribe are mostly quad-dominant exercises. Yes, I said the four-letter word, quad. The quads have gotten a bad rap lately, while the "posterior chain" has taken center stage. We must remember that the quads are extremely important for athletes and you can't neglect them. The quads are very active when an athlete accelerates into a sprint due to their forward body lean. The quad muscle on the inside of your knee (vastus medialis) also plays a major role in stabilizing the knee.

Finally, one of the most overlooked aspects in all of training is grip and hand strength. Improving your grip and hand strength will help with numerous athletic activities. We usually do our grip training after leg workouts. You'll see some of my favorite grip exercises in the training template.

**Repetition Upper Body Day** - I've substituted dynamic-effort days with repetition days for the upper body. This may be the biggest change from the traditional Westside template. I've also found it to be one of the keys to success for muscular growth in my younger athletes. Simply put, dynamic days just aren't that productive for weak, skinny bastards!

Remember that this modified program was put together for athletes who lack muscle mass. Well, the repetition method is an incredible way to elicit muscular hypertrophy. Compared to a smaller muscle, a bigger muscle has a better chance of becoming a stronger muscle. Packing on some muscle mass by means of the repetition method lays a great foundation for the more advanced dynamic days to come.
I even substitute dynamic days with repetition days for my NFL football players during the initial stages of the off-season. This is because repetition work is easier on the joints following a grueling season and it's a great way to pack on any muscle that was lost during the season.

**Extra Workouts, GPP, Conditioning Days** - Remember that my entire clientele consists of athletes. That's the reason why there's "only" three lifting days on my template. I don't use this program for bodybuilders or physique-geeks. I must leave room for conditioning workouts, GPP (general physical preparedness) and skill training.

If you're a non-athlete just looking to pack on some size and strength, you can incorporate "extra workouts" on non-workout days. Since Wednesday is your only leg day, I recommend a lower body sled-dragging workout on Saturday. This is just one example.

There's a lot of room for variety in this training template. That's what I love about it. Get creative and find out what works for you!

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**About the Author**

Joe DeFranco's training techniques have become a hot topic worldwide. This did not happen by accident. The training programs Joe develops and the athletes he produces speak for themselves. You can learn more about Joe, his athletes, and his techniques at [http://www.defrancostraining.com/](http://www.defrancostraining.com/).