

One Movement a Day, Five Days a Week

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A brutally simple program for outstanding strength and power gains.

Many people, including myself, have the tendency to overthink strength training programs, often overlooking the brutally simple lifts that develop strength, power, and build mass. Instead, coaches and personal trainers draw up programs, arbitrarily throw together a series of “functional exercises” and ton of movements they discovered on YouTube, perhaps earlier that day in a feeble attempt to spice things up for their client or athlete. Well guess what, the movements included in the program outlined later on are far more functional than surfing on a Bosu ball; will challenge more muscle than doing endless sets of Bulgarian split squats to band pull-aparts (I’ve actually seen this) and will maintain more strength than you would if you half-assed a Hammer Strength circuit, like many in-season college football players are programmed to do a couple of days a week.

Training Budget

As the title of the article says, you’ll only be performing one movement per day, so make sure it’s a good one. Save the biceps curls and triceps extensions for beach season. You’ll want to allot your gym time accordingly, spending it on exercises that will offer the most bang for your buck – the ones that build the most strength, power, and call on the most muscle. Therefore, you’ll want to select movements which will recruit more motor units, such as compound lifts, including Olympic lifts and classic lifts and their variants, performing them at maximal, or near maximal loads. Performing these lifts, will require a high degree of intermuscular coordination, which is the integrated activation of multiple muscle groups. For example, the requisite amount of intermuscular coordination for a squat is much higher than a leg extension. Individuals who possess many years of experience under the bar, which includes high-level athletes and advanced lifters, will activate fibers of individual muscles more efficiently by way of neural adaptation. Our commercial gym weekend warrior who grinds out sets of cable curls during commercial breaks, most likely hasn’t achieved the level of neural efficiency that the seasoned squatters, pullers, and pressers possess.

Spend more time on the movements that matter – the ones that will develop the most strength and power and have the most carryover to sport and everyday life. Budget wisely and spend the bulk of your time, or in this program, all of it on challenging compound lifts.

The CNS – Strength Headquarters

While muscle dimensions, body weight, nutritional status, and hormone secretion all influence strength to some degree, the central nervous system (CNS) is of paramount importance in the exertion and development of muscular strength (1). While the amount of muscle may contribute to strength, the CNS makes the final call; determining the quantity of muscle that’s used (motor unit recruitment) and how quickly it gets used (rate coding). Motor units, which are single motor neurons and all of the corresponding muscle fibers they innervate, are broken down into three types.

The first type, Type I, also termed as slow twitch motor units, contain oxidative enzymes, making them more resistant to fatigue; however they offer a meager amount of power output. Endurance athletes are found to have a greater proportion of Type I muscle fibers, due to their training and great enzymatic capacity.

The second type, Type IIa, also termed as fast twitch motor units, contract faster than Type I motor units, and like Type I units, are resistant to fatigue due to oxidative and glycolytic influences.

The third type, Type IIb, alternatively known as Type IIx, are fast twitch motor units that contract the most rapidly of the three, drawing from the energy supplied by the phosphagen and fast glycolytic energy systems. The action of these motor units cannot be sustained long as they are called upon during episodes of maximal or supramaximal exertion.

Maximal muscular strength is achieved when a maximal number of slow twitch and fast twitch motor units are recruited; their firing rate is intensified via rate coding, while working synchronously to summate the most force possible in a given period (1).

Movement Selection and Volume

Next, comes the fun part – picking your program's movements and workload. Since you'll only be performing one movement per day, you'll want to choose judiciously. Isolation exercises and machine based movements are not ideal as they offer a comparatively less significant challenge to the neuromuscular system. Efferent and afferent responses are greater with compound exercises, as are improvements to the vestibular, somatosensory, and visual systems, which will help improve coordinative abilities and body awareness that are crucial to athletic performance. The repetitions are kept relatively low as to keep mental focus and technical execution high, while improving neural drive, which is largely achieved by working within lower rep ranges with maximal, or near maximal poundages. Ideally, you'll be working with newfound strength, or have at the very least, maintained your current strength levels, when you decide to embark on a new training program. If you decide to plank on day one, do wrist curls on day two, calf raises on day three, and so on, you'll end up losing strength, so don't waste your time with the extraneous stuff.

The program, which I initially built for myself, due to working nearly 80 hours per week, was designed to keep me as strong and as explosive as possible, so I'd feel like the athlete I used to be before bills and life responsibilities started piling up. I later provided a variation of the program for a high school football team, with a limited amount of equipment, as an in-season training program. I alternated max effort exercises each week, going heavy on cleans and lighter on squats on week and performing cleans at lighter loads, or doing progression exercises in their place, while squatting heavier the following week. I kept my five core exercises the same throughout the program, which consisted of cleans, squats, pull-ups, bench press, and deadlifts. My alternate exercises consisted of variants of those lifts and jumps and sprints. I would do a complete intensity deload, every three to four weeks, as a precaution as to not overtax the CNS and reduce the stresses placed upon the joints.

Week One

Monday, Day One

Power or Hang Clean, working up to 5 x 2 at 90% of 1RM

Tuesday, Day Two

Front Squat or Back Squat, working up to 2 x 5 at 80-85% of 1RM

Wednesday, Day Three

Weighted or Un-weighted Pull Ups, working up to 3 x 3

Thursday, Day Four

Barbell Bench Press, working up to 5 x 2 at 90% of 1RM

Friday, Day Five

Barbell Deadlift, working up to 3 x 1 at 90-95% of 1RM

Week Two

Monday, Day One

Power or Hang Clean progression exercise, 4 x 3

Tuesday, Day Two

Front Squat or Back Squat, working up to 5 x 2 at 90-95% of 1RM

Wednesday, Day Three

Weighted or Un-weighted Pull Ups, working up to 3 x 3

Thursday, Day Four

Barbell Bench Press, working up to 2 x 5 at 80-85% of 1RM

Friday, Day Five

Sprints 5 x 20 yards

In-season High School Football Strength Training Program

Monday, Day One

Power or Hang Clean, working up to 4 x 1 at 85% of 1RM

Tuesday, Day Two

Front Squat or Back Squat, working up to 3 x 2 at 90% of 1RM

Thursday, Day Three

Barbell Incline Press, working up to 2 x 5 at 80%

Friday

Weighted Box Jumps, 5 x 2

I'd have the players perform these prior to or immediately following their pregame warm-up, having them jump onto plyo boxes, in pads, without cleats on of course, to ignite the CNS, for the work that's yet to come. It also helps the kids get excited about their warm-up and gets the competitive juices flowing a little bit.

If you catch yourself spending more time thinking about what action to take than the action itself, then you need to simplify things. Revert back to the basics – tried and true movements which helped transform average athletes into stars and turned one-time weak novice trainees into some of your gym's strongest lifters.

1. Zatsiorsky V. *Science and Practice of Strength Training*. Zatsiorsky V, ed. Champaign IL: Human Kinetics, 1995.

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