

# Develop Deadly Wrestlers With Deadlifts

*Josh Bryant, MS & Adam benShea, MA*

Bench presses and squats took some innovative thinking to invent. Picking up a heavy object off the ground is plain and simple prime mortal instinct. A cave man points at a rock and tells another to pick it up. If he can, he gets to eat a wooly mammoth steak, but if he does not, he gets clubbed over the head. Those were the stakes at the world's first powerlifting meet! Today, the deadlift is one of three contested lifts in competitive powerlifting (the bench press and squat being the other two) and has a significant place in the strength and conditioning regiment of the high school wrestling program looking for a strength and conditioning edge over their opposition.

Until recently, the deadlift was sort of the red headed step child of the strength and conditioning community. But, lately, there has been a metamorphosis amongst strength and conditioning specialists to include deadlifts in their athletes' programs.

## **Deadlifts for Wrestling?**

It's no surprise that many people engaged in wrestling continue to follow training methods that range from seriously effective to seriously crazy.

Do a casual search on 'youtube' and it will give you a glimpse of wrestler's engaging in some strange training methods that can leave people shaking their heads believing that those in wrestling conditioning programs belong in a Coney Island sideshow.

While many exercises may have their place in the the wrestlers' strength and conditioning routine, one of the best exercises they can do is the one that many don't and it's the deadlift.

Without a doubt, the deadlift remains the most effective exercise for building the posterior chain (the glutes, hamstrings, adductor mangus and lumbar erectors), or back side of

the body, which is crucial for almost all physical movements involved on the mat.

The posterior chain is of paramount importance for any wrestler because it is engaged during explosive movements that take place in a match. Believe it or not, these muscles are used in movements ranging from the execution of a double leg takedown to a hip throw. A strong posterior chain enables a more explosive hip throw or even 'heavier' hips when one sprawls to prevent a takedown.

Moreover, the fundamental action of the deadlift is picking a weight (or opponent) off the ground. This action forces the posterior chain to lift a load that is in front of the body and mimics the movement necessary to complete, both, lower and upper body takedowns. While some strength coaches ignorantly dismiss the deadlift as solely a powerlifting movement, picking up something heavy off the ground is the epitome of functionality.

Strengthening the posterior chain with the deadlift may even reduce the chance of injury. Strength Coach and competitive deadlifter, Eric Cressey, believes that weak hamstrings can greatly exacerbate the chance of an ACL injury (one of the most common injuries among wrestlers), patellofemoral pain, and many other problems in the hip, lower back, knee and ankle. Using machines, like leg curls, will not suffice to effectively strengthen the posterior chain in the way the deadlift can. Moreover, leg curls can cause overuse injuries because stabilizer muscles go unused and movements are in fixed plane of motion.

The National Association of Speed and Explosion (NASE) has stated in their certification course that the deadlift is the most effective predictor of an athlete's ability to produce

force through the ground. However, many coaches in the past have felt the deadlift was not worth the risk-to-benefit ratio. But when done correctly and programmed properly, the deadlift will build strength and explosive power with minimal risk of injury.

## **Be Careful of the Fads**

"Functional training" is a buzzword that seems to have become more relevant to exercise fashion than exercise science. Functional exercises are those which serve a specific process by preparing an athlete for specific movements in their sport. Be it in wrestling or modern dance, the idea is the same.

Functional exercises train movement patterns, not individual muscles in an isolated fashion. Think about it. Do you want each of your muscles to work alone or in concert with your body? Certainly you want the orchestra of muscles to play in concert! No better venue for that concert than the wrestling state championship!

Deadlifts are both highly effective for building power and one of the simplest ways to enhance rate of force production (RFD).

Think of rate of force development as simply how quickly a person can develop tension in a muscle. This is obviously important for any type of grappling movement and in many situations specific to the mat.

Enhancing rate of force is crucial for the successful execution of all explosive movements found in wrestling. Examples of these explosive movements range from a stand up to shooting, and completing, a deep takedown. One way to really increase RFD via the deadlift is by using compensatory acceleration training (CAT), popularized by Dr. Fred Hatfield in the 1980's. In layman's terms, compensatory acceleration training

means to lift sub maximal weights using maximum force, performing the lift as fast as possible after the movement is mastered. Weight as light as 30-40% of the wrestler's one rep max can be used to develop RFD.

The resistance bands and chains (also known as accommodated resistance) that have started popping up in local gyms – like spandex leotards in the eighties – can be included in deadlift training. However, unlike the leotards, the bands and chains can actually help your workout. Both of these tools will increase tension as the weight is lifted off the ground, so the resistance is heaviest at the top where most people are the strongest.

This type of training is called accommodated resistance and complements the strength curve of the lift which allows for maximum strength to be built. However, if the athlete does not lift the weight fast enough he will not successfully complete the lift because the tension is increasing. The athlete is, then, forced to lift with a speed and explosiveness which makes his grip work overtime as it feels like the bands are trying to rip the weight out of his hand. When this explosive strength is applied to wrestling, it can lead to increased escapes and more completed takedowns.

You should not be using straps when you deadlift because it is the ultimate exercise to help you increase grip strength. Your forearms will get stronger and grow larger if you deadlift heavy. And an increase in grip strength is a very helpful adjunct in wrestling hand fights, controlling one's opponent, and the application of nearly every grappling technique.

Ultimately, your hands are the vehicles that transfer power from your body to an opponent. Grip strength can make you or break you on the mat.

#### It's Time for You to Deadlift

There are many variations in the deadlift. The two most common full range of motion deadlift exercises are the conventional and the sumo techniques.

In the conventional deadlift the feet are hip width apart, arms just out side

of legs, the barbell is on the ground and lifted to a fully erect position.

In the sumo deadlift the hands are inside the legs and the legs are generally much wider apart than shoulder width. The starting stance is similar to that of a Japanese sumo wrestler. Additionally, the conventional deadlift generally has a much greater transfer of training to wrestling than a sumo deadlift and is a more effective posterior chain builder. The sumo deadlift, however, cannot be dismissed for wrestlers looking to build more quad strength as well as strength in the adductors. Increased adductor strength is particularly beneficial in its direct applicability to leg riding. Unfortunately, like the deadlift, many wrestlers have long ignored the adductors.

For a wrestler, it is very important to pick functional training exercises in the true sense of exercise science, not just passing fads. Deadlifts work virtually every muscle in your body. In addition, because so many motor units recruited, deadlifting is a catalyst for muscle growth if the right amount of calories and protein are consumed. Lastly, do not overlook the favorable spike in the natural production of growth hormone and testosterone.

What if someone offered you a way to build overall body strength, really work the posterior chain, aid in muscle gain or fat loss, work the forceful extension of the hips and knees, build grip strength, build mental toughness and overall speed, and was a functional movement to boot, Would you be interested?

Stop searching!

You have found all that in the

deadlift.

#### Here's how to do it:

- Push through your heels
- Middle of the foot should be directly under the bar, the shins must be touching the bar
- The back is in extension, don't round
- The shoulder blades should be directly over the bar, the shoulders are actually in front
- The elbows must remain in full extension throughout the entirety of the movement
- Lower the bar in the opposite way the bar was lifted in terms of hip and knee angles

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Former Kennedale High School Strength & Conditioning Coach Josh Bryant is one of the fastest rising names in the fitness industry. Recently Josh wrote the Elitefts.com best selling E-Book "Metroflex Gym Powerbuilding Basics" Currently Josh is a strength coach who works successfully with many clients, both in person at Metroflex Gym and via the Internet. By using the Joshstrength Method, he has trained world record setting powerlifters, women fitness competitors, Olympic athletes, professional fighters, NCAA champions, and a host of high school athletes who have received collegiate scholarships. As an athlete, he holds 12 world records in powerlifting. Josh Bryant is the founder and owner of Joshstrength.com and The Joshstrength Method. To learn more about Josh Bryant or to contact him visit [www.joshstrength.com](http://www.joshstrength.com).

Adam benShea is a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu black belt under Ricardo "Frajinha" Miller (Paragon Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu). Adam has won the World, Pan American, and California State Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Championships. In addition, he wrestled at the high school and collegiate level. He is a graduate of UC Santa Barbara and holds an MA from Indiana University. Adam is the Joshstrength.com Grappling/MMA Advisor, where he writes 'The Combat Corner' blog.



E-mail: [wcat@door.net](mailto:wcat@door.net)  
[www.wildcatmfg.net](http://www.wildcatmfg.net)

**WILDCAT**  
Mfg.

**Leighton Knox**

6 mi So. on Hwy US 87  
Box 914  
Tahoka, Texas 79373  
1-800-752-1076  
(806) 327-5602  
(806) 327-5420  
Fax (806) 327-5601