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**DEFICIT
DEADLIFT**

Stand on a three-inch platform with a loaded barbell on the floor and close to your shins. Grasp the barbell outside your feet, drop your butt, and raise the bar in a straight line—close to your body—until it's in a locked-out position at the top. Slowly lower the bar and repeat.

METROFLEX MASSIVE

FORGE **MONSTROUS MUSCLE** WITH
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FROM THE MEN WHO BUILT
BODYBUILDING LEGENDS
RONNIE COLEMAN AND BRANCH WARREN

BY **ROB FITZGERALD**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **CHAD WINDHAM**



Powerbuilding co-creator Josh Bryant presides over his stable of world-class Metroflex bodybuilders.



Barbell landmines
build overall
power throughout
your core.

S

ome gyms transcend fitness, like iconic iron temples Muscle Beach and Gold's Venice, or Bev Francis Powerhouse in New York. Walk in any time of the day or night, and you're bound to see someone that you've only heard about. Someone legendary. No matter how big and bad your neighborhood training partners claim you are, there have been bigger, badder dudes throwing weights around these joints since before you were born—and there are photos lining the walls to prove it.

Add Metroflex Gym in Arlington, TX, to this list. Founded in 1987 by Brian Dobson, Metroflex is the home of eight-time Mr. Olympia Ronnie Coleman, IFBB all-time great Johnnie Jackson, perennial contender Branch Warren, and dozens of other world-class and national-level bodybuilders. It's also the weight room of choice for countless professional athletes from other sports—including NFL players, strongmen, and powerlifters—and a must-train destination for anyone visiting the Lone Star State.

NO STRENGTH, NO SERVICE

"HARDCORE TRAINING AREA: THE WEAK ARE PROHIBITED" reads the sign posted at the entrance to Metroflex's main weight room. Any serious lifter walking into a gym known for producing bodybuilders—typically characterized by ripped physiques but relatively weak in comparison to powerlifters—could justifiably call bullshit as they strolled through the door.

While bodybuilding definitely put Metroflex on the map, this assertion is only half right. Bodybuilding may not be synonymous with strength, but Metroflex's bodybuilders are far from typical. In fact, they're more than

strong enough to change your perception of what they do, how they train, and what their sport is really about.

"When you look at the way Ronnie used to bench," says Dobson, "you see what our guys are like. He would bench with a flat back and a wide grip and do flat bench, incline, and decline with 400 to 450 pounds for eight to 10 reps, all in the same workout. It was incredible, but that's powerbuilding."

"Our guys all started out as powerlifters, and they just train a lot harder than everyone else," says Josh Bryant, Metroflex's longest-tenured trainer and Dobson's longtime training partner. "In other gyms, bodybuilders are doing con-

trolled, 'breathe in, breathe out' types of sets, while our guys are going balls-out every time on core movements."

THE BOOK OF BIG

That's why Bryant and Dobson co-authored Metroflex's training masterwork *Metroflex Gym Powerbuilding Basics*, a 310-page e-book that covers the gym's quarter century of acquired training knowledge. Bodybuilders coming out of Metroflex—Coleman and Warren are prime examples—have been exceptionally successful by any conventional measure. What stands out about Dobson's guys, however, is their strength levels. Coleman's body- ▶

building résumé stacks up favorably to that of just about anyone who's ever competed. Check out his videos on YouTube and you'll quickly realize that he's got a base of strength and power that wasn't built with unilateral cable curls and leg extensions.

That, Bryant says, is the essence of powerbuilding—looking and performing the part through a combination of basic, heavy moves for strength, and traditional bodybuilding exercises for everything else. “If you're a powerlifter, you're going to have to do some bodybuilding movements, especially if you're lifting without gear. You can't just bench, squat, and deadlift. Conversely, if you're a bodybuilder, you have to do the bigger moves, too.”

“Between the two of us we've trained thousands of guys,” says Dobson, “and Ronnie, Branch, and Johnnie [Jackson] are prime examples of what happens when you follow these methods. That's why we did the book. The Metroflex way is real, it's hardcore, and it's probably too hard for some people, but the proof is in the pudding. We've got seven guys down here who can deadlift more than 800 pounds, and they're not powerlifters wearing all kinds of crazy suits. They look the part, too.”

STRENGTH DONE RIGHT

You know all about Ronnie Coleman and Branch Warren, but why would you want to entrust your training to the philosophy of just one gym? *What's the big deal?* What is it about this place that has bodybuilders from around the world making pilgrimages and adopting the philosophy of a single gym in a nondescript industrial park in the middle of Texas?

“Because the people coming in and out of Metroflex have already done it,” says Bryant. We're not talking about an academic institution here, where Dobson and Bryant sit around debating theoretical concepts. This is theory put into practice. For the past 25 years at Metroflex, some of the biggest, strongest, most ripped people in the world have thrown just about everything they could think of at the wall. So far, powerbuilding has been the thing that stuck.

For proof, take a look at the level of quality control that tends to weed out



BARBELL FRONT RAISE

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, holding a barbell in a shoulder-width overhand grip at your waist. With a slight bend in your elbows, raise the barbell directly in front of you until it's level with your forehead. Lower it to the start position and repeat.

trainers who don't get Metroflex-quality results. Dobson won't tell you that you have to espouse powerbuilding as your primary training philosophy to be a successful trainer, but if you don't get your clients bigger and stronger in a hurry, you won't last. It's hardly a coincidence that the trainers who do well at Metroflex have embraced powerbuilding in some form.

“Trainers here have either trained a bunch of badassess or they've done something themselves,” says Bryant. “You can't just say, ‘Here's my certification, come follow me.’ You have to prove your value, and I see dozens of trainers come and go every year. You have to have proved yourself in the trenches before anyone will even consider training with you, and the powerbuilding guys are the ones who make it here.”





LANDMINES

Place a barbell in a corner or in a dedicated landmine unit, and add weight if you're an advanced athlete. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart with both hands on the end of the barbell, and wave it from side to side in an inverted U pattern. The barbell should pass directly in front of your face in the middle.



BACK SQUAT

With a loaded barbell on your traps, keep your entire upper body tight, with your elbows directly under the bar. Push your hips back and down, and descend into a squat until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Fire your hips, glutes, hamstrings, and quads and explosively return to the start position.

THE PROGRAM

The following routine integrates numerous powerbuilding techniques into a four-day workout. It's designed to add variety to your regimen and help you get bigger and stronger all over. "Powerbuilding is a combination of bodybuilding, powerlifting, and strongman all rolled into one," says Dobson. "If you can lift massive weights, you're going to be big and strong, and that's the essence of this program."

DAY 1

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
BENCH PRESS**	5	5
BENCH PRESS***	8	1
BENCH PRESS****	1	AMAP*
INCLINE PRESS	3	6
DUMBBELL BENCH PRESS****	4	8
ONE-ARM ECCENTRIC BARBELL CURL	5	5
ZOTTMAN CURL	4	12
PRONE ISO ABS	2	60S

* As many as possible

** Ascending in weight from 60% to 85% over five sets

*** 65% of your 1 rep max for eight singles

****55% of your 1RM for as many reps as you can perform

*****Pause for a second at the bottom

DAY 2

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
BACK SQUAT*	3	5
BACK SQUAT**	1	20
FRONT SQUAT	2	12
SLED DRAG	5	20 YDS
LEG CURLS	4	12
ONE-LEG SQUAT	3	12
DUMBBELL SIDE BEND	2	8
LANDMINES	2	10

* 75% of your 1RM

** 60% of your 1RM

DAY 3

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
MILITARY PRESS	5	5
LATERAL RAISE	4	12
BARBELL FRONT RAISE	4	10
BENTOVER FLYE	3	15
UPRIGHT DIPS	3	AMAP
SKULL CRUSHERS	6	15
LEG RAISES (KNEES TO CHEST)	3	12
LEG RAISES (STRAIGHT UP)	2	10

DAY 4

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
DEFICIT DEADLIFT*	5	5
DUMBBELL SHRUG	5	20
FARMER'S WALK	4	20 YDS
HEAVY TIRE FLIP	3	30S
CHIN-UPS	5	5
DUMBBELL ROWS	4	12
STRAIGHT-ARM PULL-DOWNS	5	15

* 65% of your 1RM in the conventional deadlift.

FARMER'S WALK

Stand at the center of two loaded farmer's walk implements and deadlift them with proper technique until you're standing with each hanging at your sides. Keeping your upper body rigid, walk for the required distance, then carefully lower the implements to the ground.



**"WE'VE GOT SEVEN GUYS
DOWN HERE WHO CAN
DEADLIFT MORE THAN
800 POUNDS."**



ONE-ARM ECCENTRIC BARBELL CURL

On a preacher bench or standing, start with a barbell or fixed barbell at the top position of a curl. Slowly lower it to the bottom position, then use your off arm to bring it back to the start position and repeat.



BENCH PRESS

Lie on a flat bench and grasp a barbell in an overhand grip slightly wider than your shoulders. Squeeze the bar tightly and tighten your upper back and shoulders before you move it out of the rack. On the descent, tuck your elbows and keep your chest up, then explode upward and through to the lockout.

HEAVY TIRE FLIP

With a heavy tractor tire on the ground, dig your hands under an edge you can grip, then simultaneously drive it forward and lift up until the edge of the tire is above your knees. Use your knee to bump the tire further upward, then adjust your hands, hips, and knees so you can press the tire to a standing position to flip it all the way over.



SKULL CRUSHERS

Hold a barbell or EZ-curl bar over your chest with your arms extended and your thumbs touching (see photo). Keeping your elbows pointed at the ceiling, lower the barbell to your forehead, pause, then use your triceps to extend your arms back to the start position.



**"TRAINERS HERE
HAVE EITHER TRAINED A
BUNCH OF BADASSES OR
THEY'VE DONE SOMETHING
THEMSELVES."**

PRONE ISO-ABS

Perform a basic plank by assuming a push-up position with your body in a rigid line from your feet to your head with your weight resting on your forearms. **M&F**

