HARDGAINER 2.0

Your Sampler Issue of HG 2.0

This Sampler has 16 articles selected from the first six issues of HG 2.0. The resulting 60-page publication is the same length as each individual issue.

YOUR MUSCLE-AND-MIGHT MENTOR
FOR PHYSICAL EXCELLENCE AT ANY AGE

Mission statement

HARDGAINER 2.0 is your training mentor because it provides training *clarity*. It will focus your attention on a single, time-tested, highly effective way to train—**abbreviated training *properly applied***. This marvelous approach has different interpretations, to accommodate trainees of all ages who want health, strength, and physique.

In each monthly issue, the contributing bodybuilders and strength trainees will provide you with a distillation of training expertise from their combined *hundreds of years' experience*. When you secure your access to that great wealth of know-how, you'll quickly become an expert yourself.

HG 2.0 will also motivate you to *implement* that expertise—to stick only with excellent training programs. It will provide you with support and encouragement through success stories and other powerful content.

And it will provide you with expertise and guidance on other important matters related to your training success.

But it's free of synthetic (drug-fed) physiques, training nonsense, and ads.

Whether you're a man or a woman; a bodybuilder or a strength trainee; use free weights, machines, or a mixture of the two; train in a home gym, commercial facility or elsewhere; or whatever your age; **HARDGAINER 2.0** will help you no end.

*Check out the **Sampler Issue** of **HG 2.0** that follows and see for yourself the magazine's uniqueness and wealth of helpful information and guidance.*

To your training success,

P.S. All articles in **HG 2.0** are brand new and original, except the final one-pager in each issue from Dr. Ken. **HG 2.0** is not a digitalization of **HG 1.0**. The two magazines are separate entities with different content.

Your royal road to success

Apply with persistence the teachings explained in HardGainer 2.0, and you'll make terrific progress, perhaps a ton of it.

Your age, and your genetic make-up for physique and strength, affect your pace of progress and your current potential, *but you can't do anything about your age and your genetics.*

What you can do plenty about, though, is your training and your recuperation. *You have total control there*.

But you must be super savvy about how you train and recuperate.

Forget gimmicks, ignore claims for "easy" methods, and reject the training guidance that works well only for those who are genetically highly gifted for bodybuilding and/or assisted by muscle-building drugs.

Furthermore, always give great importance to your health, to give yourself the best chance possible of leading a long, vigorous life.

Make the most of what HG 2.0 teaches. It can help you tremendously.

But start today!

You'll never be younger than you are now.

For how to subscribe to HG 2.0 *without* risk, please click on this link:
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A note of support from Stuart McRobert

If you're new to abbreviated training, or have heard about it but don't know much about it, get up to speed by studying **Your Primer**, the 56-page guide to abbreviated training and how to apply it properly. **Your Primer** is free with a subscription to **HardGainer 2.0**.

But **YP** isn't a lightweight, token bonus. It's a powerful summary of the most important information in my books and **HG** print magazine, and also from some of my other work.

Your Sampler Issue has 60 pages, as does each issue of **HG 2.0**.

Once you've studied **Your Sampler Issue**, **Your Primer,** and the first issue of your sub to **HG 2.0**, *you'll be on your way to training success*.

HARDGAINER 2.0

Your Sampler Issue

HARDGAINER 2.0 #1

A New Dawn

YOUR MUSCLE-AND-MIGHT MENTOR FOR PHYSICAL EXCELLENCE AT ANY AGE

HARDGAINER 2.0 #2

YOUR MUSCLE-AND-MIGHT MENTOR FOR PHYSICAL EXCELLENCE AT ANY AGE

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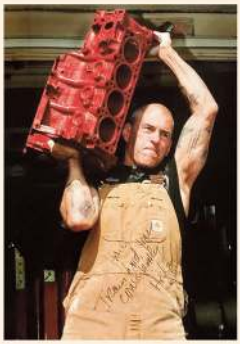
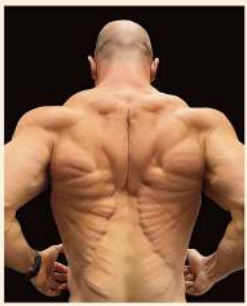


YOUR MUSCLE-AND-MIGHT MENTOR FOR PHYSICAL EXCELLENCE AT ANY AGE

HARDGAINER 2.0 #6



YOUR MUSCLE-AND-MIGHT MENTOR FOR PHYSICAL EXCELLENCE AT ANY AGE

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https://www.hardgainer.com/

Warning

It's essential that you train safely. Check with your doctor to ensure it's appropriate for you to follow a program of hard physical training. Neither Stuart, the other contributors, nor CS Publishing Limited, can be responsible for any injury that may result from following the instruction given in this publication. Proceed with caution and at your own risk.

Content disclaimer

HardGainer 2.0 represents the opinions of its authors. None of those opinions should be considered as definitive or as medical advice.

Photographs disclaimer

The only way to be sure there are no photos of drug-enhanced trainees in **HG 2.0** is not to publish any taken since around 1955. But that would be an extreme response.

Many men and women who *are* drug free have very strong, well-muscled physiques because they have good genetics for muscle and might, *and* they trained and recuperated well for many years. And some men and women with average, or even disadvantaged genetics, have terrific success stories because they also trained and recuperated well for many years.

*What's most important is that the instruction promoted in **HG 2.0** doesn't need drug assistance to make it work, or exceptional genetics. But how well the instruction works depends on how it's applied and for how long, the genetic potential of the individual, and his/her age, health and current level of development.*

The content of this special issue

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SAMPLER ISSUE

Editorial

By Stuart McRobert

*From **HG 2.0** issue #1*

Fall in Love with Your Training

I'm still in love with training, at 62 years old.

I love the anticipation of each workout.

I love getting ready for the gym.

I love the drive to the gym.

I love entering the gym and feeling the vibes of the place.

I love my few minutes walking on the treadmill, breaking a sweat, and getting ready to train.

I love setting up the equipment.

I love the feel of the weight plates.

I love the rattle of the plates as I load them.

I love getting my mind in gear for what I have to do on each set.

I love checking my training log.

I love pushing myself hard on each work set.

I love the satisfaction I get from each set done well.

I love entering data into my training log.

I love my temporary isolation from the rest of my life. (I've never taken a phone to the gym with me.) Should there be a distraction there, I quickly get my mind back in gear.

I love the youthfulness I feel as I keep pace with most of the youngsters there.

I love the thrill from a workout done well.

I love the privilege of training.

I love how the gym is my Sanctum where I pay homage to my training.

Your workouts must be Sacred.

Enter another world when you train—your Sanctum. Do that relentlessly and then your progress will also move into another world.

My love of training is as strong now as it was when I was a young man.

Even if lived alone on a desert island without any mirrors, I'd still want to train. I'd make do with whatever makeshift equipment was available and *still* schedule time for my workouts.

You must have great enthusiasm for your training if it's to be effective. But you must also use a program that has the *potential* to be effective for you and then *apply it properly*. And that includes satisfying all the components of your recovery.

When great enthusiasm for training is *misapplied*, the results are poor at best and calamitous at worst. It also makes trainees gullible to sales pitches for food supplements, and to training methods promoted by drug-users. And it has encouraged much drug use.

To be in love with your training over the long haul, your workouts must be safe, effective, *and sustainable*.

For me, that usually means just two workouts per week. More than that isn't sustainable *for me.*

Without sustainability, there can't be the dedication you require for the several back-to-back years of effective training needed to make the initial big changes to your strength and physique (or to maintain your condition if you're already advanced).

Without sustainability, there also can't be the dedication you require to make additional improvements (or to maintain your condition if you're already advanced).

Fall in love with your training! And find the variations of abbreviated training that are safe, effective, and sustainable *for you.*

Let **HardGainer 2.0** be your mentor.

The Master Class in Vintage Strength Training

By Chuck Miller

From HG 2.0 issue #6

Deconstructing a Favorite Lift

Bench pressing for longevity, Part 1

One late-summer afternoon, in the University of Pennsylvania weight room, I cringed as I observed a sophomore-to-be defensive tackle. He was doing parallel-bar dips, but dipping 3-4 inches lower than necessary and bouncing out of the bottom—a sure recipe for shoulder joint impingement. I called him over to correct his form.

"Carp, I love that you can dip so well at 285 pounds bodyweight, but you only need to descend until your triceps are parallel to the floor or slightly below. Any small additional muscular stimulus you may receive from dipping as deep as you are isn't worth the injury-risk tradeoff. You already get beat up more than enough on the field, and we need to keep you out there where you can help us win. Pull your dips up to about here [demonstrating the correct arm angle] and slow them down so that you're powering out of the bottom with muscle rather than momentum. Longevity is key to both your training and your football career."

Following directions, especially when you've been provided with a logical reason, tends to be a strong suit of high-IQ Ivy Leaguers, so I knew that when he said, "Okay Coach, I'll do that from now on," he wasn't just paying my observation lip service. He would actually heed my advice. I moved on to observe another player, thinking no more of the interaction.

At the end of the workout, I could see Carp ambling toward me from across the room. Even without the gleam in his eye that told me he had something clever to say, I'd have known something was up.

"Coach!" he barked at me, "I hear what you're saying about longevity, but what about *strongevity*?"

He'd probably spent the rest of his workout thinking of that line in between sets, and was tickled with himself as he bounded away howling. I also got a laugh out of his nonsensical word, but his comment left me wondering about the follies of youth.

Impatient to build muscle and strength right *now*, we often take many shortcuts

Chuck, bench pressing 380 pounds on April 20, 2013, at age 43 and 220 pounds.

with form—lifting too quickly, banging in and out of the lowering/lifting turnaround to generate momentum, contorting to squeeze out an extra rep, and other reckless behaviors. Giving no thought to how these actions might negatively impact our ability to train decades down the road when maintaining a lifting regimen is even more critical to our health and well-being, we lose sight of the most important aspects of training success—*consistency* and *longevity*.

Ego-driven to impress by the ever-present question we all hear whenever someone finds out we train with weights—"How much ya bench, bro?"—we've all been guilty of loosening our form to move more weight. Eventually, we all pay the price, and for some, that price will be the demoralizing loss of the ability to bench press at all.

Fortunately, as with most lifts, many of the best ways to bench massive poundages put our bodies in leverage-*advantaged* positions that are also the safest. *There's a better way to a big bench than sacrificing your health with lousy form.*

Setting up

It all starts with the set-up. If it sounds like I've sung this song before, I have.

Foot placement may be an afterthought for most trainees, but your set-up begins the moment you sit down on the end of the bench. At this point, align your feet in about the same position as your squat stance—slightly wider than shoulder-width, with toes angled out about thirty degrees.

They should also be at a point on the floor that allows your shins to remain either vertical or angled slightly back *toward* your

The racked and unracked positions when bench pressing alone, and when with a spotter.

body after you're in position under the bar and gripping it. If you place your feet too far under you, you won't be able to keep your heels flat on the floor and you'll be more inclined to raise your butt off the bench when you introduce leg drive.

I train a couple of people under 5-foot 3 who place 25-pound plates under their feet. The plates are non-slip on my rubber flooring and allow the clients to reach the floor on my standard-height bench like more typical-sized lifters.

Your position on the bench will vary by a few inches depending on whether you have a spotter or are lifting alone with safeties. Without a spotter, you'll be lifting the bar from the J-cups yourself and will have to slide your head toward the top of the bench so that your shoulders are nearly directly under the bar, for better leverage during the lift-off. Being close to the uprights means you run the risk of hitting them during the lift unless you press with a straight-line (vertical) bar path.

But if you have a spotter to assist with the lift-off, you can scoot down the bench away from the uprights so that your eyes are under the bar. This will give you room to

allow the bar to drift slightly toward your face through the sticking point, a technique many strong benchers use when handling near-maximum poundages.

Either way, if your bench has adjustable uprights, position them low enough that you don't have to roll your shoulders off the bench to clear the J-cups during lift-off but not so low that you waste a lot of energy doing a partial rep.

I prefer that lifters I coach keep their feet stationary after they sit down on the bench and set them in place. Moving them after you're laying back and can no longer see them increases the chances of getting them crooked and throwing your entire set-up off.

With this in mind, you have to know in advance exactly how far up the bench you plan to position yourself. In my home gym, I know exactly where my feet go when I have a spotter versus when I'm lifting alone.

So, your feet are correctly aligned and you've laid back on the bench with either your eyes or shoulders under the bar. Next, take a shoulder-width grip or *slightly* wider, for a balanced bench press that utilizes your chest, triceps, and shoulders. If you're using a power bar with rings, placing your ring fingers on those rings is about as wide as even most large men need to go.

Now "set" your upper back for a good pressing base. Many years ago, Marty Gallagher told me about the three, and only three, contact points that good benchers maintain—feet, butt, and upper back. To do this, firmly plant your feet, squeeze your glutes, and assume a *moderate* thoracic arch.

The goal is to bridge so that your mid- and low-back come off the bench while your butt and upper back remain in contact with it. Many trainees assist their bridging effort by pulling themselves off the bench in an inverted row of sorts and then lowering while arching.

A word of caution: if you try to bridge too high, you'll introduce excessive lumbar arching that will just pile on additional stress to an area that already takes a pounding from the compound lower-body lifts. "Roll your shoulders under toward your hips" is an effective cue I sometimes use with lifters who are having trouble understanding the difference between lumbar and thoracic arching.

If you find that your upper back is too rigid to get much arch, and that you're relying instead on lumbar arching, try laying on your upper back across a foam roller of approximately five inches in diameter. Relax with your arms overhead for a few minutes at a time and let gravity's gentle pull work on your thoracic mobility.

Just about every coach I've ever met also talks about pinching the shoulder blades and spreading the lats. The problem for me, and for many lifters I've coached, is that we lack the requisite muscle control to do both at the same time (if doing so is even biomechanically possible). My high-school football coach often said the best-looking play on the chalkboard is worthless if it's too complicated for players to run on the field. I find that logic applicable to the esoteric advice of "pinching the shoulder blades and spreading the lats."

Taken by itself, pinching the shoulder blades is easy to feel, and I coached it for years, but I'm no longer convinced it's necessary. Battling a persistent shoulder impingement some years ago, I noticed that my left shoulder began to ache as soon as I drew my shoulder blades back and lifted the loaded bar from the J-cups. Frustrated after weeks of rotator cuff strengthening exercises and mobility movements that didn't seem to be helping, I stumbled on the idea of throwing conventional wisdom out the window and trying to bench *without* pinching my shoulder blades.

Voila, no more pain!

Anecdotal evidence is the best I can offer to support this claim, and since my discovery, I've suggested to several other lifters who were struggling with shoulder issues to forget pinching their shoulder blades, with good outcomes.

I advise them instead to focus on achieving a moderate thoracic arch to shorten the pressing distance for improved leverage and to create space for their scapulae to move freely.

If you observe anyone doing a seated cable row, their scapulae naturally retract as they drive their elbows rearward without any need to purposely initiate retraction by drawing the shoulders back at the beginning of the pull. A bench press being no more than a reverse row, it stands to reason that similar mechanics apply. Perhaps someone with a better understanding of kinesiology than me could explain this concept more articulately, but I suspect it has something to do with the ball of the shoulder joint remaining better centered in the socket rather than forced rearward too early in the lift.

After positioning your feet, laying back, gripping the bar, and setting your arch, it's time to tense every muscle and prepare for the lift-off. A wet-noodle lower body when benching leaks power, so be sure to drive your feet into the floor while tensing your quads and glutes along with your entire upper-body musculature.

By now, you may have noticed several similarities between my set-up tutorial for the squat and the bench press. In addition to the commonality of full-body tension, I also recommend two big breath holds before you begin the descent for either lift.

Whether you're lifting off by yourself or with assistance from a spotter, the first inhalation occurs *before* you break the bar from the J-cups. Hold this first breath until the bar is locked out over your chest in the ready position for lowering, and then seep some air out and re-inhale and hold before you begin lowering the bar.

Limp wrists are another power leak, so make an effort to straighten them by turning your knuckles toward the ceiling. The lower you carry the bar in your hands, the more easily you'll be able to straighten your wrists. I coach my lifters to turn their hands inward slightly to position the bar closer to the fatty pads at the base of their thumbs. No one benches with perfectly straight wrists, however, because doing so would require Herculean thumb strength to prevent the bar from dumping onto your chest.

In the top photo, Chuck demonstrates the correct positioning of his wrists.

Lowering the bar

Head position, arm angle, touchpoint, and bar speed are the four main considerations when lowering the bar.

My partner says that my head and hands are inexplicably connected when I drive. Where my head looks—perhaps off in a meadow at a cow—my hands follow and we drift toward the field. Not good!

For many lifters, the two are also connected when benching. As the hands lower the bar to the chest, the eyes follow and the head raises. Again, not good, because of the potential for neck strains and, for those with competitive aspirations, because keeping your head in contact with the bench is a requirement at some meets. Be deliberate in maintaining contact with the back of your head on the bench even if you follow the bar's path with your eyes, but don't overcompensate by forcefully jamming your head into the bench.

While head position is pretty straightforward, arm angle is a trickier discussion. Like most other older men, I'm fond of recalling the good ole days, so please bear with more of my reminiscing about mid-1990s powerlifting warm-up rooms. In that faraway land of gold-painted 100-pound plates, equipped-lifting was still king, and we all squatted with vertical shins and benched with such extreme elbow tuck that our arms scraped our rib cages.

I may not have known how to get more than a few pounds of assistance out of my bench-press shirt, even though proficient shirted benchers could get a hundred or more, but my form surely indicated otherwise. The drastic tucking of my elbows was designed to rely on the shirt for the first few inches off the chest before the triceps would take over at the sticking point.

Despite doing 90% of my training without a shirt, I was an all-the-time tucker, and both my chest development and bench press suffered accordingly. I did have a nice set of horseshoe triceps, though!

The difference between too much and the right amount of elbow tucking is subtle but important. Note the space between Chuck's right arm and his torso. When he tucks to a reasonable degree (top photo), there's more space, his elbow is aligned more directly under his hand, and his wrist is even straighter, placing him in a much stronger position to drive the bar off his chest.

Plate manufacturing has evolved to those boring but very efficient slim-line designs in the 30 years since, and I've also learned a thing or two about arm angle.

Returning to the theme of natural biomechanics from the section on scapular retraction, *letting your touchpoint on your chest dictate much of your arm angle* is the way I generally coach today.

Unlike how I was influenced when I was young, most bench pressing newbies today are far more influenced by bodybuilding bro-speak than by the niche within a niche that's equipped powerlifting. And they've been bombarded with the faulty claim that touching the bar further up their chests toward their throats is necessary to work every fiber of their chest muscles thoroughly. So most do the opposite of my extreme tucking that was always combined with a low touchpoint to my solar plexus (the soft depression in the upper abdomen directly below the chest where the ribs meet).

Instead, they touch the bar to their upper chests above the nipple line, a bar path that requires substantial elbow flaring, which invariably leads to sore shoulders, or worse.

Touching somewhere between the nipple line and the solar plexus, a difference of only about 1.5 inches, naturally brings the elbows in some. Combining this lower touchpoint with *purposefully* stacking your elbows directly under your wrists as you lower the bar will further refine your arm angle relative to your torso so that you avoid tucking too much. About 30 degrees is the right angle for most people to distribute the load in the best way for safe and powerful benching. H

To be continued next issue.

The Not-So-Hard-Gainer
What matters *is what works*

By Tracey Cheuvront

From HG 2.0 issue #6

Apparently, I'm some kind of radical in my training. I don't know, though, what people find so bizarre about *doing what works*. Demonstrably. Consistently. Predictably. For decades now, I've been met with not just skepticism, but abject disbelief and even derision regarding my high-intensity, low-volume, low-frequency training approach. Mostly, it's the extremely low workout frequency that unquestioning proponents of mainstream methods can't seem to digest.

I long ago lost count of how many times I've been told by people with less muscle than me how my approach can't possibly work—that is, according to what the learned experts allow you to consider. All the science and conventional wisdom supposedly proves you have to work each muscle at least once per week, so I must be lying or pulling their legs. Or perhaps I'm some freakish genetic outlier. Whatever. I simply maintain that what works is what works, and I encourage anyone reading this who ain't feeling me yet to stop right here and go read *The Owl Critic,* a poem by James T. Fields.

Could it be that what works is not what supports a billion-dollar industry based on people's dissatisfaction with their bodies and their desperation to try any product or service for sale that promises to deliver the physique or strength gains they so desire? I admit it took me a few years to realize that the impressive physiques on display throughout the fitness industry—the very ones that inspired me to aspire similarly—are much more the products of anabolic steroids than sound training practices.

My training philosophy is sound, as well as simple and straightforward. It's not a bunch of convoluted, esoteric gobbledygook that only gurus and PhDs can grasp. I happen to have a degree in biochemistry and have taken graduate level courses in exercise physiology, but if I can't explain in eight minutes to an eight-year-old the basic governing theory behind anything I believe in, call me full of bull.

Here's my basic governing theory behind effective training: ***Stimulate with a small amount of hard effort. Recover from the physiological deficit of exertion with plenty of rest and quality food. Grow by continuing with active rest and good nutrition until the body's innate overcompensation mechanism is near its maximum—which is on a scale of weeks rather than days, as is commonly believed. Stimulate. Recover. Grow. Repeat those steps in a more or less systematic fashion.***

Candid post-workout posing from Tracey in his garage gym, circa 2010. He's around 195 pounds in both photos, where he hovered for most of his twenties and early thirties.

Ironically, it was the writings of a pharmaceutically enhanced professional bodybuilder in a mainstream bodybuilding magazine that gave me my first glimpse past the horizon of conventional, accepted training ideology and into the realm of what actually works for normal people who want to live healthy and balanced lives.

About midway through my junior year of high school, I was in a state of utter desperation for results such as mentioned above. After doing multiple sets of multiple

exercises per muscle multiple times per week, exactly as my well-worn copy of Schwarzenegger's *Encyclopedia* instructed, and umpteen issues of the various popular bodybuilding magazines of the time all affirmed, I'd not gained an ounce of bodyweight or an iota of strength on even a single exercise in more than a year.

I was considering giving up on bodybuilding altogether at that point, frustrated and nearly convinced that I was just an extreme hard gainer, one of those poor souls who, despite years of Herculean effort, can scarcely gain a wisp of muscle. So desperate was I that I dared to heed the advice of a heretic whose ideas suggested, in contravention to all prevailing thought, that overtraining might be the problem. Could it be that I was doing too much, that more is not necessarily better—and that in fact, when it comes to bodybuilding training, *less might be more*? Outlandish, truly!

As some have probably already guessed, the heretic in question was Mike Mentzer, who for a brief stretch in the mid-1990s had a series of articles promoting his Heavy Duty training system. They were in *Flex* magazine, if I remember correctly, and seemingly always relegated to the back pages, amongst the more irrelevant and questionable content. Of course, Mentzer wasn't the first or only person to blaspheme the gods of volume. But he was my introduction to the concept of abbreviated training and had a major influence on how I think about exercise. He had a way with words that was blunt yet articulate, precise and rational, yet full of creative imagery and analogies. He persuaded me to question the orthodoxy, set my doubts aside, and give his approach a try. Besides, what did I have to lose at that point, anyway?

So I took a week off from training altogether and then began my new program, which worked each muscle with only three to five total work sets once a week. It wasn't as truncated as Mentzer recommended, but it was still only about one-third the frequency and one-fourth the volume as before. Lo-and-behold and right out of the gate, my strength started going up at every workout! My squat workout weight jumped from 225 pounds to 275 in just nine weeks, and my bodyweight began to creep up from about 155, where it had hovered for over a year. I kept on this basic schedule and by high school graduation, I weighed 175 at 5-foot 8 and was repping with 315 in the squat and deadlift.

In retrospect, it's obvious that I was still overtraining and would have progressed even faster with more rest days and less volume, too. It's hard to argue with results though, so I kept doing what was working until it didn't, which was at age eighteen. I added another rest day into my rotation and got very modest and occasional strength improvements, but nothing significant or consistent. My work-set poundages in the squat and the deadlift, although respectably approaching 400, had once again hit a wall, and I was stuck at a bodyweight of 185 for almost three years.

This plateau wasn't as easy to break through as the first one, because it took me a long time to hit upon the combination of

factors that set me once again on the path of progress. Partly I credit increasing my food intake to the point of absurdity, not only gorging on calorie-dense foods every two to three hours throughout the day, but setting an alarm to wake up and stuff myself with peanut butter sandwiches in the middle of the night.

Also, I had enough training experience by this point in time to know which exercises were most productive for me, and restructured my training split, eliminating worthless movements altogether and minimizing body-part interference issues that had been hampering my workout efficiency. A major problem that this fixed, for example, was extreme lower-back cramping that would often ruin the workout when I did squats or deadlifts. I finally figured out that the cramping was caused by my lower back never getting fully recovered, and the solution was not to squat and deadlift successive workouts. In other words, exercises with overlapping stabilizers had to be offset sufficiently in my rotation to allow full recovery for all muscles.

Lastly, I added in even more rest days. I found success with a scheme that targeted each muscle once every ten to twelve days, split over four separate workouts, and I stayed on this high-intensity, low/moderate-volume, low-frequency program through most of my twenties. During that time, I achieved most of my career-best training performances and attained my highest ever bodyweight of 204 pounds at under 10% body fat.

Training highlights

Some training highlights from that period are full-squatting 350 for 25 reps on one occasion and 405 for 17 reps on another. I never trained specifically for low-rep-max strength, but one time on a whim of curiosity at the end of a leg workout, I squatted 495 for an easy double. I also used repping poundages of 315 for decline barbell presses, 200 for one-arm dumbbell rows, 585 for barbell shrugs, and 445 for stiff-legged deadlifts off a six-inch box.

I don't claim to be the strongest or most jacked dude to ever clamber under a barbell, but I think most in the Iron Game would agree, those aren't bad numbers for a lifetime drug-free guy with a medium frame.

With age, and dare I say wisdom, I consciously began to limit the role of bodybuilding in my life. I prefer optimizing my investment returns over maximizing my ultimate development, which is a game of ever greater investment for ever diminishing returns, as many of you reading this will surely know.

There are many interests and obligations in life that are more important than always having the most muscle humanly possible, so I strike a simple balance and pursue bodybuilding to the extent that it enhances the rest of my life without requiring undue compromises or accommodations. Throughout my thirties and without said compromises, I was able to maintain my physique at a lean 190-195, routinely squatting 315 for around 25 reps, with a fraction of the training people would expect.

My training today

I'm in my mid-forties now and for the last several years have been self-employed as a sort of offbeat wood carver and teacher. I love my work, but it's extremely physically demanding. I'm often on my feet all day doing hard labor such as wrangling heavy logs and swinging a sledgehammer, and have gotten sick from overexertion. Having an abbreviated training structure and strategizing my workouts and recovery days around the bodily demands of my job is currently the only way I'm able to continue bodybuilding at any level.

My sheer physical workload and correspondingly limited recovery, age, and constant dealings with occupational overuse injuries all affect the degree to which I can partake in bodybuilding as a recreation, and I'm realistic about that. I may have had 20 more pounds of muscle 20 years ago, but I also had time and energy to spare then that I don't have now. My body is my livelihood, and I must prioritize my health, strength, and vital energy toward that reality.

Rather than mourn muscle lost, I consider it a very fair trade to keep a fighting weight of 180-185 while only stepping into the gym once every four to five days to maintain it.

During a relatively injury-free period over the last few months, I've been gaining back strength while working each muscle only once every three weeks or so. Notably, my stiff-legged deadlift workout poundage increased by 30 pounds from just two work sets over a span of seven weeks, and almost all of my other exercises have been increasing by a rep or two every workout. This rate of progress would translate to about a 40% increase in workout poundages in a year if I could go that long without getting injured!

But alas, I'm older than young and my job abuses my body. I ride the bumpy plateau of gains and losses that averages out to maintenance mode over the long term, and that's okay.

Naturally, I do wonder sometimes how much more ultimate development I might have attained as a zestful young bodybuilder had I learned faster and trained even less during my prime years. I don't lament those unachieved gains too much though, because I did manage to build 27-inch thighs and exceed Casey Butt's Maximum Muscular Bodyweight predictor by training far less than most do, after all!

Different people will have different reasons for training—not just different from each other's reasons, but different from our own at different stages in our lives. Some people may have competitive aspirations, and some may just want to look and feel good or be able to pick up their great-grandkids. Or, over a lifetime, those reasons might all be found in the same person.

Looking back over my own training history, there are things I would change here and there, but one thing is crystal clear, *the solution to every challenge has always involved training less.*

Next month, I'll unpack the evolution, execution, and hindsight insights of the program that took a not-very-big guy to a lean 200 pounds in my twenties.

New Beginnings

By Stuart McRobert

From HG 2.0 issue #1

In 1989, when I started **HardGainer** print magazine (**HG 1.0**), I was 30 years old. My youth undermined my credibility as a publisher, so I didn't reveal my age.

There's a sketch of a pensive me on page 19 of the first print issue, but I didn't disclose my identity. Now, though, my age (62) adds to my credibility. It reveals the extent of my experience of training, writing, and life.

The following montage merges three points on my timeline that are pertinent to my life's mission to promote abbreviated training. It's a rendition of (a) when I started **HG 1.0** (the sketch from issue #1); (b) the only time I've been photographed in a gym (my 400 lb x 20 deadlifting at 195 lb, in 1992); and (c) today, as I start **HG 2.0**.

The print magazine started with me as the sole contributor except for one page from Malcolm Watson. Our combined training experience was around 40 years.

As I accumulated authors of exceptional experience and achievement, I learned a great deal from them. Without them, I wouldn't have been able to write my books.

But **HG 2.0** has an amazing wealth of contributors right from its first issue. The training experience of the authors in this issue totals around 400 years—ten times what was in issue #1 of **HG 1.0**. Not just any type of training experience, though, but mostly the *abbreviated* form. If you exclude Malcolm's page from issue #1 of **HG 1.0**, this issue of **HG 2.0** has around 25 times the training experience. But experience that's relevant to all trainees.

When I was a young man, I focused on making improvements to my physique. And I took for granted my youthful posture, gait, vigor, co-ordination, balance, strong bones, and other benefits of youth, which I enhanced with my training.

But now, in middle age, physique benefits still matter to me, but by far the most important returns from my training are life preservation and minimizing the decline of the great benefits of youth I used to take for granted. Those returns are my interpretation of *physical excellence* for me now.

But the most effective, time-efficient way to do all of that is the same one that also produces terrific physique benefits at any age: abbreviated training *properly applied*.

At 62 years old, I still follow that approach, but the details of *properly applied* are different to what I should have followed when I was a young man.

Your interpretation of physical excellence *for you* will depend on your goals and circumstances, and will change as you age.

This first issue is a feast of motivation, inspiration and effective training instruction, for both young trainees *and* not-so-young ones. And all the other issues will be, too.

HG 2.0 will help you no end.

Enjoy!

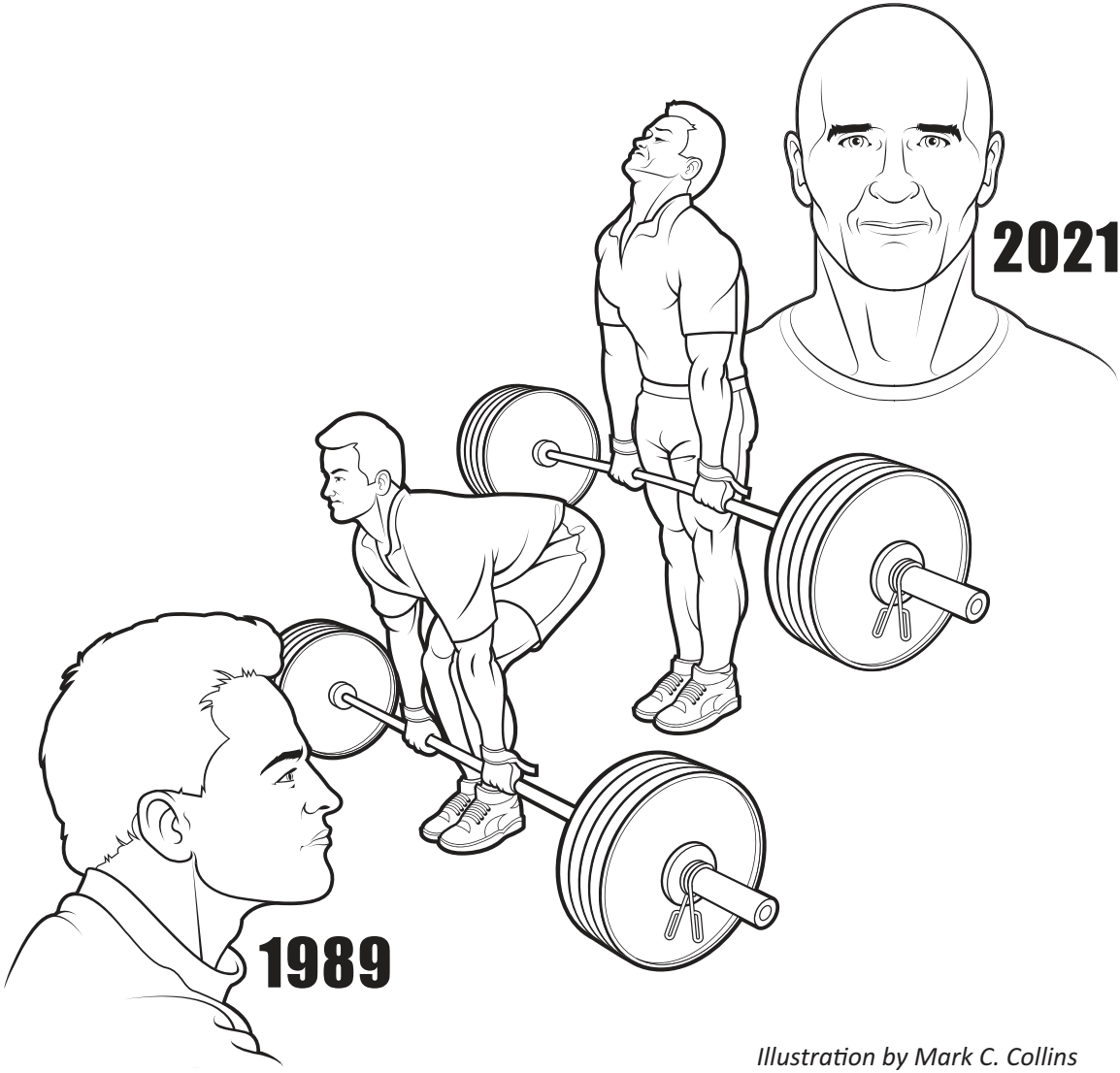


Illustration by Mark C. Collins

Some Key Lessons I Learned from Dr. Ken

By Jason Dalen

*From **HG 2.0** issue #5*

If you're anything like me, any material related to Dr. Ken Leistner will always be highly valued.

As I mentioned in my article in the previous issue, Doc coached me (via email) for every powerlifting meet I competed in from 1995 until his death on April 6, 2019.

He designed my training programs based on what my goals and circumstances were at the time. But we also became friends and discussed many topics besides strength training. So I got to know him very well. Doc was a wealth of information on many subjects, and very compassionate—he had a really big heart.

For example, we would talk at length, via email, about topics such as law enforcement (I was a law enforcement officer, and Doc was a *huge* supporter of the police), drug abuse (both in sports and recreation), adoption (my daughter was adopted, and that struck home with Doc), and life in general.

Doc preferred email. He told me he hated talking on the phone. I don't think he even owned a cell phone. I would often get emails from him at around 3:00 AM, because he would be catching up on his messages then. He didn't seem to sleep much.

Here are some key lessons I learned from Doc that I still apply today:

A balanced life

Doc mentioned (actually, *drove home!*) that balance in one's life is vital. So often, lifters and bodybuilders get obsessive about training to the extent of forsaking everything else, even their families. Doc constantly reminded me that I should train very hard, and be consistent with it, *but that I should always make time for my family even if it means missing a workout occasionally.*

Doc didn't include de-loading in any of the programs he wrote for me. He said life has enough twists and turns that extra days off training will occur naturally due to other commitments. *Train hard, train consistently, have fun, eat a lot, and enjoy your family and time away from training.* That was his overriding message to me.

Nutrition

When we discussed nutrition, Doc wouldn't place the kind of emphasis on it that many others do. He always told me to eat well, eat "lots" (enough calories to sustain hard training), eat as clean as possible (while knowing that, as human beings, there'll be the occasional garbage meal), and eat balanced—protein, fats, and carbs in roughly equal amounts in terms of calories. But Doc never told me to measure food, or to exclude fats or carbs; or to use supplements—we both had the same opinion on them: yuck!

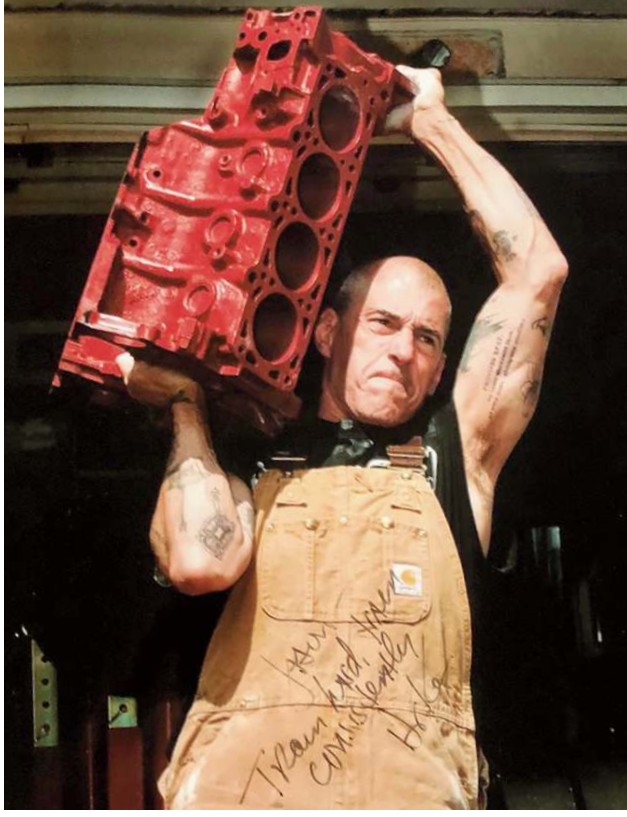
Nutrition is important, Doc told me, but history is full of athletes who achieved the highest pinnacle in their respective sports while eating a diet of "junk."

The most useful advice he gave me on nutrition was to go to a college bookstore and buy a nutritional textbook (a nutrition-101 type of manual) and learn how the human body utilizes the food we consume, and what constitutes "clean foods."

Many trainees would rather jump aboard the "fad-diet train" and ride that into oblivion rather than educate themselves in sound nutrition. Sad but true.

Training routines

Once in a while, Doc would have to set me straight when I wanted to add things to my training that didn't address a specific weakness or problem. With some of his sentence enhancers (cuss words!) thrown in, he would explain that everything "added" erodes recovery ability, and therefore would risk setting my training back.



***On the cover of this issue**: The photo in Jason's garage gym, of Dr. Ken.*

Although I hardly ever strayed, when I did Doc would make me strip my training down to just the three powerlifts and train them for 3-6 months without any assistance work. Then we would discuss my progress and add some carefully chosen assistance work only if necessary to correct a weakness.

So, the key lesson was, when in doubt, strip to just the barebones main lifts, work them very hard, and 9 times out of 10 you'll make progress. *Be very careful about adding anything to that basic program.*

Another lesson from Doc was not to make wholesale changes in my program. If

we changed anything, it might be the reps a bit, a switch from the trap-bar deadlift to the straight-bar deadlift, or add one auxiliary exercise for a period to address a weakness. There was never a complete change of a program. Of course, I was on a good program right from the start of my time working with Doc.

He also told me that I can't accurately judge my progress if I often change my training program.

Since 1995, I've followed this basic twice-weekly training template:

Day 1
A form of the deadlift, an overhead press, and forearm, neck and ab work.

Day 2
Squat, bench press (or a very close variation), maybe an auxiliary pulling movement (for instance, a row or a pulldown), and forearm, neck and ab work.

Hard work on that template enabled me to win meets at national and world levels, and set world records along the way. I'm not trying to boast, but to give you in-the-trenches, real-life proof of the effectiveness of hard work on simple, basic routines, while striving for progressive poundages in good form.

Training intensity and form

Doc always told me that I need to go all out (like he recommended to all his readers in pretty much everything he wrote), but not let my form break down. He told me that when doing high reps and heavy weight, so long as my form is good, I should continue until I can't move the bar upward. But if my form breaks down, I should terminate the set immediately. Doc also told me that when I get close to a meet and am doing triples and doubles, the stakes are much higher. A breakdown in form then can lead to a bad injury.

Doc told me once, "If you work out hard enough, one work set is enough." That quote is also hanging on my garage-gym wall.

Repetitions

Until 10-12 weeks out from a meet, the reps per set I did, per Doc, were as follows:
Squat—15-20, occasionally 10
Bench press—3-6, mostly 6
Deadlift (or a form of it)—same as the squat
As I got closer to the meet, I gradually lowered the reps in the three lifts per his instructions—8, 5, 3, 2. I did one or two work sets per lift during that stage.

Assistance work was usually something like 1x12 and 1x8 except for overhead presses, where I did mostly 1x5 and 1x3.

Of course, prior to the work sets for each lift/exercise, I did sufficient warm-up sets.

In a nutshell, his advice was, "Train hard, allow for sufficient recuperation time, eat well, and enjoy yourself!"

I have journals full of specific programs that Doc wrote for me. I'll share some of them with you in other issues of ***HG 2.0****.*

Yorkshire Nous
The Chris Donlon Column

*From **HG 2.0** issue #6*

Practical nutrition

When discussing my article for this issue, I persuaded Stuart to let me write it on nutrition. Although we had nutrition articles from both Ian and Bill last month, regular information is needed on the topic because it's where so many trainees go wrong.

One of the purposes of this magazine is to cut through the bull, lies, and hype, and keep you on the straight and narrow. For some of you, that applies to nutrition just as much as training. So I'm going to outline what I consider to be the most important, practical considerations when it comes to nutrition. It represents what I wish I'd known 25 years ago when I started training.

For some reason, nutrition can polarize people and lead to vociferous debates—often as a result of people adopting dogmatic positions. But, as with training, **HG 2.0** is all about practical information and what works in the trenches, so this article is not about discussing the rights and wrongs of different dietary approaches.

The most important message I want to get across is that however you decide to eat, if your daily fare isn't nutritious, digestible, enjoyable, and sustainable for you, you're missing the point. (See the nutrition section of **Your Primer**—that came free with your subscription—for more detailed information on this.)

The importance of structure

First things first, you need to decide whether you're serious about your training or not. If that's the case, you'll get serious about your nutrition, too. It's the Achilles heel of too many trainees. They give lots of thought and attention to what they do in the gym, but little to what and how they eat. (And the same thing applies to other out-of-the-gym considerations, namely sleep, rest, and stress-management.) The simple fact is you have to plan what and when you'll eat, and have the discipline to stick to it. Of course, there'll be holidays, special occasions, and social gatherings where that may be unrealistic for most people, but make sure you average no more than one day a week where you eat "off your diet."

To be clear, when I say "diet," I don't just mean a fat-loss diet. Whether your aim is to increase, reduce, or maintain your bodyweight, the same fundamentals apply.

For example, it's common for someone who's eating to build muscle, to eat lots of junk food. But that invariably leads to gaining too much body fat, regretting it, and then having to waste time dieting off the excess pounds. So, even when you're not trying to lose fat, you *still* have to know how much you're eating.

Eat for health

Of fundamental importance is that your diet is nutritious. Health comes before muscle building, so your diet should not solely be about protein. But eating mainly healthful and nutritious foods is also what will give you the best chance of building yourself up. Again, people may debate this all day long, but I think we all have at least a rudimentary grasp of the foods we should, and should not, be eating. Ensure that 80%+ of what you eat is made up of nutritious foods. If in doubt, eat what your grandma would have fed you. You get the idea: meat, fish, liver, eggs, milk, potatoes, vegetables, fruit, nuts, butter, cod liver oil, and so on. And steer clear of sugar, refined grains, seed oils, and excessive alcohol.

Establishing your baseline intake, and be a uniform eater

You don't have to track calories, but you do need to know how much you're eating. If you're maintaining your bodyweight, your current intake must equate to your maintenance number of calories, regardless of whether you actually know what that number is. See Ian Duckett's article in issue #5, because Ian is a perfect example of how you can maintain and manipulate your bodyweight simply by following a "base diet" without paying any attention to calories or "tracking macros." This is sometimes known as uniform eating and it's what made the biggest difference in finally getting some structure and consistency into my own eating. (Many others have reported the same thing.)

If you eat the same or similar foods most days, it removes all the thinking. Ensure your daily template includes two or three different options for each meal, and that it's made up of nutritious meals you enjoy. But if you feel restricted, whilst still exercising some control, eat one weekly "free meal."

If you don't know where to start, multiply your bodyweight in pounds by 14-16, depending on how active you are. This will give you an idea of your maintenance caloric intake. (Even the most complex of online calculators will only give you a rough starting point.) Whatever your aim, weighing yourself, and taking your waist measurement, two or three times a week, will provide you with fully personalized data. Based on this, you can modify your food intake in line with your goals.

Meal frequency

Conventional wisdom used to be to eat 5-7 times a day to "fuel the metabolism" and "prevent catabolism." We now know this to be wrong. Although that's still a valid option that works well, it's not necessary to eat so often. Your muscles won't drop off if you go without food for a few hours. And, as for the so-called starvation effect, the

metabolism doesn't slow down until it's gone three complete days without food.

If there's an optimal meal frequency for muscle gain, it seems to be 3-5 evenly spaced, daily feeds. What's more important, though, is *adherence*. Eat in a way you enjoy and that fits with your lifestyle.

For example, intermittent fasting (IF), where, typically, you limit your daily feeding window to 4-8 hours, has gained popularity in recent years. Not having to eat breakfast has been liberating for many people—not because there's any magic to fasting, but because it helps them to be consistent with their eating. Some people are simply not hungry in the morning, but it works the other way, too. A few years ago, I tried IF for the supposed health benefits and because I believed it may help to build muscle with less fat gain. But I didn't enjoy it because I love to eat breakfast. So, any theoretical, marginal benefits were far outweighed by the fact it was impractical and unsustainable for me.

How much protein?

If there's one aspect of nutrition that preoccupies the average trainee, it's protein. Let me cut straight to the chase. My simple advice is to eat 120-180 grams of protein per day, depending on your size. Unless you're a genetic outlier—and assuming you're on the lean side—as a male trainee, you'll weigh anywhere between 140 and 240 pounds.

So, for example, if you're in the mid-range of this (190 pounds), you'd aim to eat 150 grams of protein. There are other ways of calculating your protein requirements, but you won't go far wrong with this one.

Your overall daily intake is more important than when you get your protein feeds. Nonetheless, as I've already said, if there's an optimal frequency, it seems to be 3-5 evenly spaced feeds, with each of those feeds containing no less than 20 grams of protein. Only one or two daily protein feeds may stimulate less muscle protein synthesis. But too many protein feeds may also have a negative impact because it's possible the body responds less well if it's constantly bombarded with food.

Ultimately, we're all conducting a one-person experiment, so you could try slightly higher intakes to see how you respond, both in terms of your progress in the gym, and how it makes you feel. If you're older, you may find you need at least 40 grams of protein per meal, because a form of "anabolic resistance" may develop with age.

Low carbohydrate or not?

This is a huge area of controversy. I'll simply say that people have had success following both low-carb and higher-carb approaches. In terms of essential nutrients, you need a minimum amount of protein and essential fatty acids. How you then "fill in" the rest of your food intake largely depends on your genetics, your personal preferences, and your individual context. As a general rule, the leaner and more active you are, the better you'll respond to carbs, and vice versa. Personally, I feel that, for optimal muscle gains, you should eat at least 200 grams of carbs a day.

Some people struggle to get lean unless they follow a low-carb diet. Although it's true that you must pay close attention to the energy balance equation ("calories in" versus "calories out"), your carb intake can have a significant impact on the "calories out" side of the equation. For some people, a low-carb diet will result in more fat-loss compared to a diet containing the same number of calories but more carbs, and vice versa. Experiment and find your own way.

To bulk or not to bulk?

Although it's true that many trainees eat too little (and, therefore, never get round to building respectable size and strength), if you eat too much, you'll just become fat.

If there's a time to eat with abandon, it's if you're a lad in your teens or early twenties who can't put on weight "no matter what." That's the time to supplement your knife-and-fork meals with copious amounts of whole milk—a gallon or two a day—*and* train properly. For everyone else, forget it. You only need a slight caloric surplus to build muscle.

If you're gaining more than two pounds of bodyweight a month, you're probably adding too much body fat. If your aim is to build further muscle, my suggestion is to eat an average daily surplus of 300 calories. (See **Your Primer** for a suggestion as to how you could split this across training days and rest days.) Three hundred calories isn't a lot of food, which is why I said earlier it's important to track your food and apply dietary control, even when you're not trying to lose body fat.

Caveat: don't take the aforementioned as meaning you should try to stay very lean when trying to build muscle. Not eating sufficient nutritious calories is one of the main reasons the average trainee never changes their physique from one year to the next. Don't overdo things and get fat, but unless you're willing to accept some fat gain along with the muscle gain, you can probably forget about building any appreciable size.

Once you become advanced, you may want to consider "gaintaining." Any further muscle gains at this stage are going to be slow and almost impossible to measure. Therefore, eat only the said 300-caloric surplus on training days, whilst eating at maintenance on rest days. The idea is that, if your goal is bodybuilding, you'll use strength gains (rather than any significant bodyweight changes) to track possible increases in muscle mass.

Can you build muscle and lose fat at the same time?

It's possible to build muscle and lose fat simultaneously, but unless you're a raw beginner, it's unlikely you'll do so in equal ratios over the short to medium term. In other words, forget trying to replace, say, 10 pounds of fat with 10 pounds of muscle. Nonetheless, it's possible to lose a lot of fat whilst building small amounts of muscle. The further you are from your genetic potential, and the more body fat you have, the more likely it is that you can do so. The formula is relatively simple: train hard and consistently on a sensible abbreviated

routine, recover well, eat an adequate amount of protein, create no more than a 10-20% caloric deficit, and be persistent.

Fat-loss

There have been literally thousands of books written on how to lose body fat, even though it's ridiculously simple, on paper. That's to say, you must maintain a caloric deficit for as long as you want to get leaner. But, just as with training, people complicate it because simple, common-sense advice doesn't sell. Not only that, but our complexity bias means we often prefer complicated explanations and solutions, and find it difficult to believe that simple can be effective. As long as calories are controlled, there are neither any special, "clean" foods that you must eat, nor any "bad" foods you can't eat. (**Caveat**: 80%+ of your daily fare should be made up of nutrient-rich food items, regardless of whether you're on a fat-loss diet or not.)

Some people struggle with fat-loss because of psychological issues. If this applies to you, I strongly recommend you read Stuart's book, **A Man Devoured by His Body, Food & Work**. Fat-loss wasn't something Stuart struggled with, but by reading his fascinating story, you may be inspired to start your own self-inquiry that brings about your own realizations, self-awareness, self-understanding, and psychological healing. The particular process that worked for him may not work for you, but his story may help you find the process that *will* work for you.

Unless you're very overweight, reduce your usual caloric intake (from fat and/or carbs, but not protein) to a level that results in a bodyweight loss of around one pound a week. That way, there should be no reason you can't continue to improve your performance in the gym, albeit, perhaps, at a slower rate than when your calories are higher. And forget the notion that cardio is a magic fat-loss tool. Some moderate cardio (one or two times a week) can help, but a caloric deficit is a recovery deficit, so don't overdo the cardio. If you're sedentary, though, become more active, so you're getting at least 5,000 steps a day. Otherwise, to lose fat, you may be forced to eat a very low number of calories, which has negative effects and isn't sustainable.

Eating for life and social events

As serious trainees, we should all recognise the importance of dietary discipline. Yet, at the same time, we're also human! We'll find ourselves in situations where it's unrealistic, or undesirable, even, to eat "on the diet." As mentioned earlier, holidays, special occasions, and social gatherings are examples of such times. Although a few people have no problem sticking to their usual dietary habits, there are benefits, occasionally, to eating "off the diet." I'm not advocating that you gorge yourself and lose complete control, but eating good food with others is one of life's pleasures. And so-called flexible dieting is one of the main predictors of long-term successful fat-loss.

In other words, if you're too strict and have unrealistic expectations for yourself, it's unlikely you'll be able to stick to a sensible eating plan over the long term.

Proof in Person

Letting go of the hamster wheel

By Gina Traynor

From HG 2.0 issue #3

Change is something that most people—women *and* men—have a hard time accepting. We lock into our beliefs, get into our daily routines . . . and then we're asked (or forced) to make a change. We fight change because of pride, fear, and not knowing what to do. Even when we desire something different, we usually still fight change.

Fitness-wise, that described me with precision 10 years ago.

I was stuck in an over-exercising, under-eating insanity. After some medical difficulties, I was in the worst physical shape ever—I'd bounced from a skeletal low of 90 pounds to gain 30 pounds of fat (at 5-foot 0). I was 32 years old, fat, unhappy, tired, stressed, and on lots of medications.

My old fall-back eating-disorder method wasn't working. I was disgusted with myself. I was also desperate. A bad combination!

I spent two hours a night, six days a week, at a commercial gym doing at least an hour of cardio, followed by a few machines at random and some light dumbbell exercises. Sometimes, I'd do home exercise videos (abs and booty blasting, for example) or go outside for interval sprints. I did that on as few calories as possible . . . week after week, year after year.

Even though I had a love/hate relationship with the gym, I felt proud that I endured. I had no idea what I was doing, but I was doing "something." But what I was doing was wasting my time and energy. I got nothing to show for my efforts.

I was stuck in the endless exercise-and-diet loop and didn't know any better. But I couldn't possibly do any more.

Then I met a woman who told me about a local gym that was "different": no cardio, just weights, and only 30-minute workouts.

I was skeptical that working out so little was going to do anything for my situation. That Saturday, I went to Tom Traynor's group weight-training class that he'd started almost two decades earlier. He created this group class specifically to teach women how to lift dumbbells safely and effectively in an abbreviated manner.


Gina in 2021, age 42, at The Compound, where she coaches with her husband, Tom Traynor.

I won't ever forget that first class. It was hard—despite all my previous time spent working out. It was brief—only 30 minutes. And it was intensive—Tom is a passionate (understatement!) coach.

It was definitely "different" than what I'd been doing. And little did I know at the time, *it was also my freedom!*

Looking around the gym, it was clear that Tom lived up to his training persona. He had a proven training program that built strong, healthy, and impressive men and women. He'd tell you to be prepared to "do what I say, and work for it." He focused on the "basics" of strength training: proper form, progression, overload, nutrition, rest/recovery, and sustainability. The concept was entirely new for me: *building* something.

We weren't just exercising. We were training (and eating) for strength, and overall health and fitness.

Before I found Tom, I had no idea what worked in terms of exercise and fitness. All I focused on was *the doing*, not *the approach*. How many of us are in that same boat at some point in our fitness journeys? Where do you find good information? Not everybody has access to an established, knowledgeable trainer with a proven method, world-class equipment, and an effective nutritional plan.

From searching on the internet, I would never have followed an approach like Tom's. And even if I did, I would've done it wrongly, thinking that I or the trainer/influencer I followed online knew better. As Tom is fond of saying on this subject, after honing his craft over several decades, "I've forgotten more than you've ever known."

What's amazing is that Tom originally learned about the abbreviated training style by reading books like **BRAWN**, magazines like **HG 1.0**, and attending in-person training workshops. Now, though, many people seem to think that just because they saw something on the internet, it must be true.

I was lucky enough to see proof in person, with my own skeptical eyes. Here was a literal body of evidence that Tom's abbreviated style of training did indeed

work. I was all in for the hard training, but the low frequency still bugged me. How could that little training work?

I kept my other gym membership so that I could do cardio, and in case this "unorthodox" program didn't work out. Even though it wasn't changing my body, I was afraid to let go of the daily hamster-wheel approach.

Another big change for me was my eating. I kept listening to Tom ranting about how "you can't out train your eating!" Here I was trying to eat as little as possible, and he's telling me I need to eat more—of the right things, of course.

I remember my lightbulb moment, sitting on the bench after a workout and thinking, "So, you're telling me to work out just twice a week for a half hour (instead of two hours each night) and change what I eat? Well, that's a hell of a lot easier than what I've been doing so far. And way more practical."

It was terrifying to change. I'd committed so much time and energy to that other way. It was depressing to think how much of my life I'd wasted doing nonsense. But I took a huge leap of faith, canceled the other gym membership and never looked back!

Fast forward 10 years, and I'm just another success story of applying sound, consistent, progressive, abbreviated training on a regular body. For that matter, a woman's body—the ultimate hard gainer.

I train twice per week, 30 minutes each session, full-body routines, mostly compound movements, using both machines and free weights. And I *still* make Tom's group-dumbbell class one of my trainings. Even after 10 years of doing the same class, I still make improvements in my body composition, strength level, and form. In today's fickle world, it's amazing to think someone can essentially stick with the same method of training, the same lifts, the same nutrition . . . and it still continues to work!

And it will continue to work and produce results, *as long as I continue to apply the correct basic principles.*

As a coach/trainer, Tom changed my life so much that I wanted to help others do the same. I've always had a passion for helping others, but was stuck in a high stress, no-win industry selling "health" insurance—ironically the antithesis of the actual preventive health plan I "sell" now. So after much soul searching, I left a 15-year career and became a personal trainer (and then eventually a Traynor) at our own private facility, *The Compound*.

Our clients are a tribe of "regular" people with busy lives—*men and women*, plus some teen athletes. We're spoiled to have access to a gym filled with world-class equipment, and access to decades of Tom's knowledge. We *all* do the same style of training, exercises, frequency, and so on. Those who commit to the full program, and apply themselves properly, get impressive results. And there are no special pills, potions, or daily exercise involved.

Most people won't believe you can get results on this type of program. I've been accused of working out more than I say, starving myself, prepping for a bodybuilding show, and taking a little "something" to keep progressively growing. All false.

Ten years ago, when I was throwing every ounce of nutritional and training knowledge against the wall to see what stuck, I wouldn't have believed Tom's program worked. But I quickly learned it does work.

Of course, I keep getting new clients who ask, "How much are you really working out?" I always answer, "The exact same as my clients do—but at my ability/weight level. I may just do it with more intensity (and more disciplined eating) than you do."

My best training (and marketing) tool is to "walk the walk"—be the best proof possible, and show others how they can do the same themselves.

When I ask my clients why they changed from "mainstream" workouts to our style of abbreviated strength training, most say they didn't have the time for the conventional approach. We're supposed to work full time, be a spouse/parent, and somehow find time to train every day. Around 70% of our clients are women—trying to do it all, but running out of time and energy.

Just like me, most of our clients came from an every-day-exercise background—cardio, a strength class "in disguise" doing bodyweight only, or a HIIT boot-camp-style workout. At *The Compound*, they saw regular people getting results in a fraction of the time they used to spend working out. And they saw how my journey transformed not just my body, but my entire life.

Women are built to lift, and the abbreviated format works perfectly for busy lifestyles. And if anyone is considered a "hard gainer," it's a woman. I know from decades of experience.

The "genderless" approach

I joke that our training style is "genderless" because it works for *any* body—man or woman—and produces a strong, fit, healthy body *if* you apply a sound, dogged approach to both nutrition and lifting.

I keep seeing comments on social-media fitness sites that overcomplicate training a woman, as if our bodies are wildly different to a man's. During my recent years of success, I didn't know women supposedly "need" higher reps, lighter weights, lower intensity, different lifts, or to have the goal of entering a bikini show. Instead, I carried on training like every male client I have.

Women may take a little longer (as I did) to adapt to heavier weight training and the less-is-more approach, but once we do, we're unstoppable!

Some women may have a different mentality and motivation for lifting than men do, but not all of us. And it's always a nice side benefit to look good in a bikini.

I'm especially proud we feature women clients on social media doing chin-ups or lifting an impressive amount of weight. They ask to be videoed because they're proud of what they've built. We're proof that women can lift intensively, be strong, and yet still look like women. And all done from abbreviated training *properly applied*.

Change takes time. What I started 10 years ago on a leap of faith has transformed me. I'm grateful I was given the opportunity, the knowledge, and the tools to change.

Don't let pride, fear, or not knowing hold you back. Whether you're a man or a woman, *take the leap*. It's worth it!

Old-School Gold *for Classical Bodybuilding*

By Ian Duckett

*From **HG 2.0** issue #1*

Foundation Over Fluff, Part 1

An old-school lesson in hard work

Along with my training partners, I work out in an old-school gym in England that's some 40 years old. But it's never altered in all those years, and nor should it.

It's hard core and then some.

The worn-out barbells and dumbbells are held together with blood, sweat and chalk. Welds that were once there have long since worn away.

It's the type of gym you would see Rocky in from the movies, but definitely not the science-trained Drago.

I mention Rocky because the place is primarily a boxing gym, home to some of the best boxers in the country, and that's where the primary focus and cash flow are.

Members like us, who train with weights, are few and far between. Old or old-school, we love the old iron, the rust, the chalk. If you were to walk into it, the raw atmosphere would hit you like a slap in your face. It's a place for hard work. Period.

Now, take today's typical young lad, sat with his phone between sets, in what passes for a gym these days. There he is, with his designer shorts, top, gloves and matching trainers.

He searches through his phone, looking for "workout" inspiration and ideas, inundated with countless posts showing every conceivable "exercise" (I say, in the loosest terms). So, between checking his phone and making sure he looks the part, he does set after set of cable-this, machine-that, doing "fluff," and it takes him hours.

Sure, he looks toned, but not built like he would like to be.

Now, I'm not picking on this young man, because it's not his fault. His mind is awash with what he thinks is right. He hasn't been as lucky as I was, and many others were, who lived and breathed the old-school years, being drip-fed the basics and having **HardGainer** to turn to back in the day.

But today, our young prodigy is blessed!

Ian, age 42, shortly before he won his division at the UIBBN 2007 World Natural Bodybuilding Championships.

"God's honest truth—I won my major titles on just the basics; and I still do them decades later and counting."

The awakening

He turned up at our old-school gym.

He stood bewildered in the labyrinth of steel and iron, looking utterly out of place in his designer kit, with a phone in hand. He looks down at his phone, and notices it has no internet signal because there isn't one at the gym. *This gym is only for serious training.* Looking around for the exit, he mutters under his breath that he's going to need a tetanus jab if he touches anything.

I step up. "Hi there. We're about to start. How about joining me and my training partners for a workout? It's our upper-body pressing day."

Something is about to click in his mind that will change his training and life forever.

After some general warming up, we focus on the basic foundation movements, as we always do.

First up, the rack bench press. He starts with the pins set so the barbell is only an inch or so off his inflated chest. After a few tester warm-up sets, it's two all-out sets with as much weight as he can handle in good form. Our young lad is shocked by how those two really hard sets make his chest, shoulders and triceps feel. The difference to machine-this and cable-that is like night and day.

Dips are next, with added weight. A feel set and then two hard sets. We coach our new lad through these, and he manages to hang some weight around his waist. He can't believe the feeling he has in his chest, shoulders and triceps. He feels numb, like he's never trained before. Just four sets and he has that deep fibre ache we all know well but is new to him. Never have four sets of anything felt that hard to him, or, dare I say, that good.

Next, we move to the standing shoulder press. A real press with an Olympic barbell and plates. We opted for the standing press today, so we could give our youngster a lesson in keeping tight, and how this

basic movement literally works the whole body and not just the shoulders.

By now, he's getting into the workout, and he's really sold on the old-school way. He could have gone either way with his first "real" workout—either embrace it, or run out of the gym and back to his old ways.

Just two work sets here, keeping solid and tight, with every muscle in his shoulder girdle working together, and all the other muscles in his body locked in support.

We go back to the rack for the "close-grip" rack bench press, our fourth and final movement of the workout. A tester set and two hard sets, with the bar starting just off our chests and a grip that has our hands at about armpit-spacing.

Our young lad is sore all over and can barely pick up his designer shirt and gloves he threw on the floor earlier. His hands, forearms, chest, shoulders and triceps have a deep ache that old-school trainees strive for, which comes when you work hard and heavy on the basic foundation movements.

A new member of the old-school ranks emerges

We never saw that designer kit again or phone. A few months have gone by and our new training partner is still with us.

To say he has changed would be an understatement. His designer kit has been replaced by old tracksuit bottoms and a thick sweatshirt, and they're covered in chalk from top to bottom. He looks hugely different, barely recognisable. Thicker in his neck, traps, back and chest. His sleeves are pulled up ready for work—*hard* work—revealing thick forearms and callused hands that not only look strong but *are* strong.

From that first day until now, he has gained a tremendous amount of strength. Each workout has been a stepping stone, with a few more pounds on the bar here and there, or an extra rep here and there.

This is the nature of progressive resistance training on just a few basic movements. The rest, honestly, is just fluff and not really needed.

Read those last two paragraphs again *and let them sink in!*

What really works

I'll be blunt. *I wouldn't have won any physique titles, not even a little one, if I'd messed about like the kids do today. The only reason I did well as a drug-free, hard-gaining bodybuilder was because I worked for strength on the basic exercises. Period.*

I'm glad I grew up in the non-social-media age because I was never distracted from the basics.

Kids today are distracted, confused, and deceived by social media. What they need to understand is that social media is nearly all about it "likes," being different, and adding content to posts.

If all you ever saw on social media was rack-this and rack-that, and just the basics, it would be boring. But I can almost guarantee that the dudes posting about just those basics would be *built*.

Nothing will build your physique like the basic foundation moves. Even if you have dreams of stepping on a bodybuilding stage, the foundation movements *still* need to be

at least 90% of your workouts, *no matter how advanced you may think you are.*

Foundation movements

I keep this very simple, as I do with all my training principles. Those principles are what work for me within the realm of abbreviated training for drug-free trainees.

Here's one of the basic principles of good program design: *I've always focused on the basic planes of motion.*

(1) What I can press horizontally.

(2) What I can press vertically.

(3) What I can pull from overhead.

(4) What I can pull horizontally.

(5) A hinge movement.

(6) A squat movement.

(7) A curl movement.

(8) A triceps movement.

(9) A calf movement.

(10) A midsection movement.

They are my foundation movements I choose above all other exercises.

I'll summarize how I break the categories down. The old-school gym I train at doesn't have any machines. So, it's free-weights-only for me. But I prefer them to machines.

When I was a young man, I combined that exercise focus with a relentless pursuit of ever-larger poundages, in good form. That's what built my mass back then. I trained hard then and still train hard now.

Horizontal press

The rack bench press is the main go-to here, for me and many of my clients. I start with the bar set on the pins so it's an inch or so above my inflated chest. It's a strong, safe way to bench because there's no need for a spotter. I can't get trapped under the bar.

This exercise works the entire chest girdle, shoulders, and triceps. The rest of the body is held so tight that the entire body is worked to some degree, especially if you train hard. Correct back position is a must—chest high, shoulders down, the whole body rigid as steel.

Vertical press

More often than not, I use the rack here again, for a seated barbell press off the pins set at just under my chin.

The standing press is another excellent movement. You could do lateral raises until the cows come home and you still wouldn't build the muscle that heavy, hard pressing will into the entire shoulder girdle.

Find a vertical pressing movement that works for you and fits your structure, whether standing or seated. Barbells and dumbbells also build the stabilizer muscles. So, no machines, please—unless, like Stuart, you legitimately can't press safely and hard with free weights.

To be continued next issue.

MAXIMUM BOB

Your goal, not dogma, should define how you train

By **Bob Whelan**

*From **HG 2.0** issue #2*

Stuart asked me to write a series of articles about the most important things I've learned in over 30 years as a professional strength coach (and 56 years of total training experience).

The first thing is the need to pin down the training goal *and* be willing to use the many good methods and tools available to help you reach that goal. Most people have only the slightest idea of what they want, and provide just a general answer to the question. Many are also dogmatic in their knowledge of training. This is usually not based in fact, but on what they watched on YouTube from some guy with a great many views and followers.

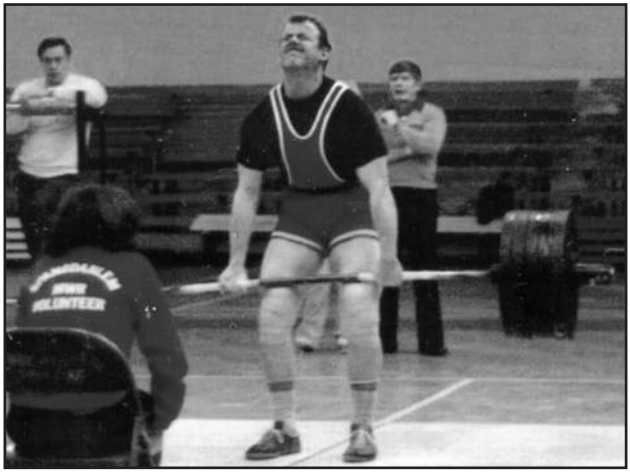
So, that's the first question I would ask a new client: "What's the goal of your training?" The foundation of your program design comes from the answer to this one question. (I also account for their age and medical history as part of the goal.)

The great motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar, used to say that, to be successful, "You need to be a *meaningful specific* and not a *wandering generality.*" There are too many wandering generalities in weight training!

Everything from the length of your workout, to the exercises you select, to the energy system you'll use, to your rep speed, to your rest period between sets, to the equipment you use, to the sequencing of exercises *is derived from your goal*.

Your goal should be *specific*, not general. Don't just say, "I want to get stronger." Almost everyone wants to get stronger. More details are needed. Getting stronger for everyday living is a lot different from getting super strong to be able to compete.

Here are examples of specific goals: "I want to increase my squat by 100 pounds and my deadlift by 120 pounds." "I want to do a double-bodyweight bench press." "I want to compete as a powerlifter."



Bob Whelan at age 26 and 180 pounds during a meet in 1980. This was his first attempt, 505 pounds. On his third attempt, he set a new PR of 555 pounds.

Most clients aren't specific on their own, so I ask questions to make sure I know exactly what they want from their training. An older client also might want to get stronger, but his main goal is to get his blood sugar lower and not become a type 2 diabetic and be forced to use medication. The weight-training program, nutritional plan, and amount of cardio would be different for him than for a healthy young man who wants to compete in powerlifting. The older client would have more of a general fitness routine but while still building strength.

By getting the complete picture of a client's training goal, I'm more able to help him or her reach it *and* get stronger, too.

A good coach has his clients' best interests at heart and must not be dogmatic about his training philosophy. He doesn't force his clients to fit into his dogma, like many coaches do today.

He doesn't force old ladies to do the snatch, for example. There are places now that do exactly that!

He doesn't force his clients to use only kettlebells and pretend that's the best way to work out for all serious trainees who want to compete in a strength sport.

A good coach has the flexibility to find the right method and tools to enable each individual client to reach his or her goal.

A good coach doesn't have financial considerations that constrain him to one inferior tool or method for everyone.

Many training tools and methods work *within* the framework of common-sense, progressive weight training. But different tools and methods are required for different clients.

I don't like labels to define my training, so I no longer use them. I don't neatly fit under one label, and I'm not a follower of just one camp.

I started Whelan Strength Training in 1990, but before that I never rigorously had to factor "time" into the equation. Of course, we all have general time factors to consider. But, because clients pay me by the hour, I have to be sure they get their money's worth.

Prior to 1990, I never had any association with "high-intensity training." I read Mentzer's book *Heavy Duty* in the early 1980s, and I read some of Arthur Jones' articles, but that's about it. I learned to love and adapt some of Jones' methods, such as doing sets to failure in my own training after I'd already trained for over 20 years and my powerlifting days were over.

Some coaching specifics

I knew high-intensity training was a perfect fit for my training business because it needed fewer sets and thus gave my clients a good bang for the buck.

I always defined poundage progression as the top priority. Going to failure was the secondary element. To me, "high intensity" meant "hard training with progressively heavier poundages."

Dan Riley had the biggest impact on me for adapting some of Jones' methods to my business in the early 1990s. Dan was the Washington Redskins' strength coach at the time. I visited Redskins Park a few times and had many productive phone calls with Dan. Doing sets to failure is simply more time efficient (because you need fewer sets), and a great way to train for most of my clients.

It was mainly by considering the goals of my clients, and the amount of time available per workout (an hour), that made me consider using some of Jones' methods and adapting them to fit my clients' needs.

My Mecca was never DeLand, Florida, though, but always York, Pennsylvania. My early influences were Bob Hoffman and John Grimek (at York), and Peary Rader, Brad Steiner, and others, but not Jones.

I'm an independent thinker, a hybrid of sorts. How would I describe my training philosophy? In a nutshell, it's Natural, Hard, Safe, and Progressive. I was always open-minded enough to see the benefit of using a new method or tool to help my clients reach their goals.

Other than the cables on the old Universal machine for pulldowns and seated cable rows, I never used machines until I was in my early forties. In 1995, five years after I started WST, I bought my first Hammer Strength machine. It was a used leg press that Kim Wood gave me a great deal on. I bought many more machines after that. I did it to expand the tools I had available to help my clients reach their goals.

For my own training, I could have done just fine with free weights only, but most of my clients weren't like me. The good machines could do the job just as well as free weights, but safely for them while also making my job easier as a hands-on coach.

Exercise sequence is something I always adjusted in order to reach the individual client's training goal.

My clients almost never work their lower bodies first. I don't want them to train the rest of their bodies while still feeling impaired from their squats (or leg presses)

and/or deadlifts? They usually work their lower bodies *last*. And I usually give them built-in (extra) rest by placing their exercises in an order to benefit their recovery.

I alternate their upper-body pushing and pulling exercises, for example. And after a hard set of squats, I'll have my clients rest for a few minutes. Then I'll follow that with some "tinkering" exercises such as neck, calves, grip, or abs. That gives them extra recovery from the squats but without losing any training time overall.

I was never a fan of the "effort only" philosophy. When I used the description "high-intensity training" in my articles in the early- and mid-1990s, it wasn't the same as the "HIT" normally use it today. Remember the group "Super Slow"? You don't hear much about them anymore, but they haven't gone away. That's because they are into HIT now.

The people who are anti-cardio have turned their "strength training" into a fitness or cardio exercise and only rarely mention poundage progression. My old "high-intensity training" label would now more accurately be described as "*heavy* HIT" (rather than "HIT" alone) because I always defined poundage progression as the top priority.

Keep that in mind when you read any article about a workout. Such an article is a snapshot of one individual's workout. If an article mentions machines, it doesn't mean always to use machines. If sets to failure are mentioned, it doesn't mean always to do sets to failure. And so forth. The goals of those trainees are not your goals.

Poundage progression, adequate recovery time, good nutrition, and no drugs are the unifying factors that make all successful strength-training programs work. And that's the **HardGainer** way!

Once you nail down your training goal, you'll find the best strategy to reach it.

A young powerlifter might curtail cardio for a while. His goal is to maximize strength for an upcoming meet, not general fitness. He would do pyramid-style lifting, lower reps, and take more rest between sets.

But higher reps, less rest between sets, and sets done to muscular failure might work better for someone with more modest strength goals, time restraints, and who wants overall general fitness benefits as well as more strength.

Think for yourself and use common sense. Ignore the gimmicks and fads. Forget the labels and be open to find the best methods to reach *your* training goal.

That's why **HardGainer** is so great. The message is simple, flexible, and truthful. Stuart is trying only to spread the truth.

The magazine is also the embodiment of Physical Culture, as I define it here:

It's about what you do in the dark. It's about how hard you train when there's no one to impress. It's about what you eat, how you think, and what else you do on a daily basis. The philosophy comes ahead of the end result. I don't care if you can't bench press an Olympic bar without any plates, for example. What's really important is ***attitude****.*

It's not how strong you are now that matters, but where you're going. You must be interested in doing the right thing. H

Beyond "use good exercise form"

By Stuart McRobert

*From **HG 2.0** issue #2*

There's more to avoiding training injuries than just using good form

Here's physiotherapist Tobias Andersen's summary from 2020 of what constitutes high-risk training: "You get hurt when you're exposed to a load that you aren't prepared for." That triggered off a discussion between us that led to my writing this article.

Here's a sentence from page 173 of my book **BUILD MUSCLE LOSE FAT LOOK GREAT**, the first edition of which was published in 2006: "Most injuries are a result of an imposed force exceeding the structural strength of the involved body part."

Those sentences of Tobias and mine are almost identical. We're on the same page.

Immediately after that sentence in **BMLFLG**, there's this one, "If structural strength is increased, resistance to injury will be increased, too."

Here are four common categories of factors that undermine the structural strength of your body and increase your likelihood of sustaining an injury from training or another activity:

(1) Poor exercise form, because it imposes greater load on your muscles, connective tissues, and joints than good form does.

(2) Training-related load also includes training intensity, volume, and frequency. Overdosing on intensity, and/or volume, and/or frequency, weakens your physical structure.

(3) Inadequate nutrition, insufficient recovery time between workouts, and short sleeping reduce your body's ability to cope with a given training load and cause further accumulation of fatigue that weakens your physical structure.

(4) Psychological issues can also undermine your physical structure. Don't underestimate the negative effects on your body (and mental health) from the psychological distress caused by relationship problems, financial difficulties, overworking, and other high-

"For training safety, it's essential you use good form, but also essential you avoid, or at least minimize, the physical and psychological stressors that make your physical structure more prone to injury in the first place."

stress challenges. And I don't mean just the short sleeping that may accompany such periods of distress.

It's not just your structural strength that would be weakened by the aforementioned. Your immune system would be, too, which would reduce your resistance to illness. And illness wrecks training, at least temporarily.

I've seen many people use terrible exercise form yet not get injured. Usually, it was because they didn't train with sufficient resistance and/or effort to exceed the strength of the involved physical structures. But if they were to take each set to failure and/or were to use even poorer form—shoddier exercise technique and/or even looser bar control—they may impose greater forces on their bodies than they can handle safely, which could trigger injuries. And here's why:

The shoddier exercise technique means that the trainees' limb positions and/or bar pathways have been altered, and thus the training load is applied differently to what their bodies are conditioned for. And the looser bar control will probably mean intensified jolts of stress, especially at the turnaround point from the negative phase of a rep to the positive phase—at the bottom of most exercises. (Instead, pause for a second or two at that turnaround point, or at least make a *smooth* transition.)

I've seen some very strong men persist with what I would call "poor form" but without getting injured, even though they were training with a maximum weight for the rep count they were doing. So, during those periods, their bodies' structural strength could tolerate the imposed forces.

But some lifters at meets—and trainees who are motivated more than normal at the gym—perform faulty lifts that impose forces that *do* exceed their structural strength, and thus trigger injuries. They may not have detected the faulty form at the time, though.

Whether those excessive forces were solely a result of the out-of-the-ordinary

form they used (because they were super psyched up and temporarily oblivious of the harm they were risking), *or* whether that form was the last straw for bodies worn down by the accumulation of fatigue from excessive training intensity and/or volume and/or frequency and/or inadequate nutrition and sleep, and/or a highly stressful life, may not be easy to determine.

Perhaps, had their training not been excessive, and had their recovery been excellent, that lax form wouldn't have triggered any injuries.

The Golden Fleece of training

If you're slowly but steadily building strength with consistently good form, you're gung-ho for each workout, you're sleeping and eating well every day, you're free of a high-pressure life (or are managing stress well), and you have no tissue damage or pain, you've found your Golden Fleece of training and recovery. Your structural strength would be high, and your resistance to injury would also be high. And you'd be unlikely to get injured unless you did something reckless in your training or had a misfortune inside or outside the gym.

On the other hand, perhaps your workouts have been laborious recently, your zest for training has gone, your sleep has been poor, you cut corners with your nutrition, you're run ragged by a highly stressful life, you've not built any strength for a long time, and you're always training around one injury or another. Then, the accumulation of fatigue would be profound, and even a small slip in form during a workout could trigger an injury—because all that fatigue has reduced your structural strength and made you ripe for injury.

But that severe accumulation of fatigue could *itself* explain the slip in form. For example, if normally you could just squeeze out eight good-form reps in an exercise with a certain poundage, but at today's workout you could do only six good reps but then "gutted" out two more with ugly form and got hurt, the causes were the severe fatigue that impaired your strength *and* your bad choice not to end the set after the sixth rep—the final good one.

In such a situation, your structural strength could be sufficiently impaired that even an event at home—moving an awkwardly shaped piece of furniture, for example—could trigger an injury because it would apply a force in a way that would exceed what your body can tolerate.

Such situations illustrate severe overtraining/under-recovering, and should trigger a rest from training for a few days and/or a period of easy training until you feel fully restored. *Then* overhaul your "proper" training. *And* make improvements in your sleep, nutrition, and stress control so you don't get into such a mess again. (But the warning signs of impending overtraining/under-recovering would have been there for some time. Corrective action should have been taken earlier.)

When I was a young man, I "got away" with poor form over the short term. But over the medium term, I took greater liberties with the explosiveness of some of my reps, and even greater liberties with my exercise

technique so that I could cheat even more. Eventually, I reached the tipping point where my structural strength couldn't cope with the extra stress that my degraded exercise form imposed on my body, and I got injured.

The accumulation of fatigue from training too much, too hard, and perhaps too often would also have contributed to weakening my structural strength.

The key lessons to learn

Always use excellent exercise technique *and* controlled reps, *and* add poundage one small dose at a time *only* when you've built the extra strength to earn the extra iron. Never get into "dirty" training that brings about fake strength increments.

And avoid excessive training volume and/or frequency, train hard at most of your workouts but not at 100% intensity all the time, sleep well and eat well every day, and manage the stress in your life so that it doesn't exhaust you. *Then* you'll reduce the chance of accumulative fatigue wearing you down so that your structural strength is impaired and you're ripe for an injury.

That safer way of training isn't just for training longevity. It's a better way to train your musculature, which is a better way to build muscle and strength.

Be especially alert at the end of each work set. On the final rep, if you could complete it only by relaxing your form and/or using an uncontrolled rep speed (which would increase imposed forces and apply them differently to what you're used to), you'd risk exceeding your current structural strength. And that would make an injury possible. That's when a competent spotter can be invaluable—to help you grind out that final rep *while maintaining excellent exercise technique and rep control.*

If you train alone, *never* "gut" out that final rep through form degradation. Instead, take the rep as far as you can with impeccable form, momentarily hold the final position of that partial rep, lower the resistance slowly, and end the set safely. (You must use a safety set-up so that you can't be trapped under a bar.)

But, once you've had a few years of training experience, if not earlier, you should know when you've done your final rep in good form under your own steam. *End the set at that point, especially if it's a major compound exercise.* Failing during a rep on such a major exercise could be disastrous.

There's much more to pain and tissue damage than what's in this article. Here, I've outlined when tissue damage from training-related injuries accompanies physical discomfort or pain. In some situations—not necessarily training-related—it's possible to have tissue damage but no pain, or pain but no tissue damage.

The key point I want to make is that there's much more to minimizing your potential for injury than simply avoiding poor exercise form. But I'm not downplaying the potential harm from using poor form.

For training safety, it's *essential* you use good form, but it's also essential you avoid, or at least minimize, the physical and psychological stressors that make your physical structure more prone to injury in the first place.

DREW'S WORLD

The "Keith Richards'" approach

By Drew Toney

From HG 2.0 issue #4

I'm hesitant to write articles with training templates. Templates are helpful guidelines but it doesn't take long for your circumstances (genetics, schedule, lifestyle) and the template to be at odds. Still, it's useful. It's a start. It's what you pay for!

I compare weight training to any sort of visual or performance art. At first, you learn and apply the fundamentals, often under someone's tutelage. You learn about templates and recovery and form. Then, as you grow, you start to add your own flavor and personality to your workouts. In a few years, workouts don't follow templates. They follow your own inspiration. This is when weight training crosses over into art. This is when it becomes fun.

My favorite guitarist is Keith Richards from the Rolling Stones. He's often derided as not being very gifted in a technical sense. His fingers are slow and thick, making his solos sound "dirty." His riffs aren't complicated. Still, you know a Keith Richards riff the second you hear it. Why? Well, less is more.

Keith plays with only five strings in a relatively simple tuning. Guitarists have failed for decades to replicate his sound—often because they were doing too much, by using six strings, too many chord changes, and so on. Keith took five strings and created 60 years of music. He did far more with way less. And his main objective is to make rock-and-roll music you can dance to.

I like to consider myself a kind of Keith Richards of weight training. I don't care about a lot of theory. I know what's important. I can do the fundamentals. Still, I stick to the basics and crank out very good results with just a few exercises. Keith learned his five-string technique in the late 1960s when the Stones were at the height of their fame. Switching to five strings required a different mode of thinking. Having fewer options, Keith made the most of what he had in terms of space, time, and rhythm. The switch arguably gave the Stones a new lease on life. It revolutionized their sound, and they continued to be the biggest band in the world through the seventies.

The same goes for training. You have to start with more exercises before you gain the skill to do more with less. You have to learn the movements that work *for you*.

As you start to hone your "sound," you learn to make every movement count, how to time your recovery, and get the most out of the few. You learn what you need and what you don't. And then you get a new perspective and motivation for training that can get you through the next decades.

So, in the spirit of less is more, let's get right to the example. Most mainstream routines espouse body-part splits, with 3-6 exercises per *body part*. My routines use 4-5 exercises for *my whole body* because, like Keith, I want my workouts to *move* me.

Here's a snapshot of the work sets of my current routine. (Warm-up sets are extra.) The weights or reps increase every workout, depending on how I feel. The routine is five different workouts spread over 14 days.

Day 1
1. Squat: 435 lb, 1x10
2. Overhead press: 210 lb x4x3x2x1
3. Trap-bar row: 250 lb, 3x10
4. Dumbbell curl: 60 lb, 2x7
5. Ab crunch: 3x20 with a 50-lb dumbbell

Day 2
1. Barbell stiff-legged deadlift (off a two-inch block): 340 lb, 3x3
2. Conventional deadlift (off a two-inch block): 340 lb, 1x10
3. Bench press: 355 lb x1; 335x2x1; 315, 1x5
4. Ab crunch: 3x20 with a 50-lb dumbbell

Day 3
1. Squat: 415 lb, 1x10; 405, 1x5
2. Power snatch/dumbbell snatch: 175, 2x3
3. Overhead press: 175 lb, 1x10
4. Barbell curl: 115 lb, 2x8
5. Ab crunch: 3x20 with a 50-lb dumbbell

Day 4
1. Squat: 480 lb, 1x5
2. Barbell stiff-legged deadlift: 280 lb, 3x5
3. Bench press: 315 lb, 3x5
4. Pull-up: 3 sets to failure
5. Ab crunch: 3x25 with a 45-lb dumbbell

Day 5
1. Trap-bar deadlift: 440 lb, 2x5
2. Trap-bar stiff-legged deadlift: 335 lb, 2x3
3. Lateral raise: 20 lb, 3x10
4. Ab crunch: 3x20 with a 50-lb dumbbell

The road to this routine was long and winding. It took stops and starts. It took following templates, learning proper technique, sticking with routines for months at a time, recording progress, dealing with and training around injuries. It took years. It took experience.

What did the experience teach? That results come from major compound movements; that good form is paramount; and that you must seek increased poundage (in good form). It also taught that you must focus intently and work with intensity in each movement, one rep at a time.

If you can do all of that, you don't need dozens of movements or four workouts each week. For example, if you've got plenty left in your tank after a set of 10 squats with 435 pounds, you're either (1) kidding

yourself or (2) a physical marvel who can squat even heavier. One hard set of 10 is all that's needed. Your body is toast. The squat requires no further training at that workout.

A few months ago, I was sticking to this same basic routine but there was one additional workout, bringing the total to six rather than five. That workout consisted of muscle snatches and stiff-legged deadlifts. But I combined that workout with the heavy squat workout and dumped the muscle snatches. Instead, I combined 2 sets of power snatches with one set of 10 heavy overheads. This allowed me an extra recovery day, and I still got a complete, full-body workout of compound movements.

For about three years, I followed a standard powerlifting routine and competed in (and won) a few state and local competitions. Eventually, I craved more variety and flexibility in my training. Still, until about a year ago, I was still squatting three times a week. I squatted three times a week for years. After powerlifting, I didn't do much deadlifting of any sort. I'm not built for it and I hated it. I did a lot of cleans and snatches from the floor and allowed those to work my strength off the deck. Eventually, I lost enthusiasm for that routine and decided to simplify things. Olympic movements are fun, but the risk vs. reward was getting to me as I approached age 40.

Seems like a lot of program hopping, huh? Not really. I've done basically the same workout, minus a few exercise exchanges, for the past eight years. Let's talk about some of the keys for developing a Keith Richards'-style program.

Weight selection

You need a rough estimate of your max weights for the major movements. I'm not a percentages guy, and *I am not talking only about a one-rep maximum.* If you don't know a one-rep max, try figuring out a 10-rep or 5-rep max. *But you need to determine a basic ceiling* so you can make educated decisions regarding your working weight.

I discovered that the weight with which I can do three sets of 5 reps in the squat is about 15 pounds more than my 10-rep squat poundage. I started a period of 3x5 squatting, slowly building up the poundage. When I got bored with that, I reduced the weight by 15 pounds and shifted to a single work set of 10 reps each squat workout. Then I slowly built that up over a few months, before reverting to my previous 3x5 poundage, which I then built up further. And so on and so forth.

I also work in heavy singles. For example, my one-rep max on a bench press is 400 pounds. So I consider anything above 350 to be an acceptable weight for a single rep. Why? Because that's a weight I can safely lift and yet still be challenging. There's no scientific reason.

Establishing a ceiling also helps establish a floor. For example, there's no workout where I squat less than 405 for my work sets. It's my absolute floor. There's no workout where I bench less than 315 for my work sets. Your floor will vary depending on what rep range you choose to work in. *But, you should always establish an absolute minimum weight*, no matter how you're feeling *but provided you're not injured*.

Progression models

Rotating three sets of 5 and one set of 10 is a great way to progress on some exercises. I don't know if I invented it, but I did come up with it on my own. Here's the detail:

After warm-up sets, do three sets of 5 with the same weight, adding one pound across all three sets each session you do the exercise. Rest well between sets so you get all your reps each time. Do that for as many weeks (or months) as you can. Then back off 15 pounds. That should enable you to make a single work set of 10 reps, perhaps with a couple of reps to spare. Continue to work on just *one* work set of 10, adding a pound each session. When you get tired of that, switch back to three sets of 5 with the poundage you previously stalled at (or five pounds more, depending on how you're feeling). You should then be fresh and ready to begin progressing again on the sets of 5.

Here's an illustration: Tyson worked on three sets of 5 on the squat for 10 weeks, and stalled at 300 pounds. So, next squat session, I took him down to 285 and got him to do a set of 10 reps. That was all the squatting he did at that workout (after some warm-up sets). Next time (squatting no more than twice a week) he used 286. He increased just one pound per session. A few weeks later, he stalled at 293. Tyson then went back to 300 for three sets of 5. (Had he felt really good, he'd have started at 305.) He added a pound across all three sets each session until he stalled at 310. Then, Tyson again took off 15 pounds (to 295) and worked on a single set of 10 for a while. When he stalled again, at 302, he went back to his most recent working weight for the three sets of 5 (310) pounds), and so on. Your progression would be different, though.

This is a hard but sustainable method of progression. It varies intensity and volume, and yields slow but steady gains in strength.

But I recommend it only on squats, deadlifts, and overhead presses. I feel those movements can take it. I rarely recommend anything above 5 reps on the bench press. My experience is that lots of reps can pound the front delts and wear you down quickly.

Add just one pound per movement per workout. You can add five or more pounds when you're a novice, but that ends quickly. If I add one pound to five exercises, I've added five pounds to my overall volume. Very manageable. If I add five pounds to five exercises, I've added 25 pounds of total load and I'm quickly going to get stuck.

On other exercises, progress in reps *and* weight. Eventually, you won't be able to do both simultaneously. So, *look at your log book and ask, "How can I challenge myself today?"* Is it moving up a weight and keeping the same reps? Or moving up a weight but dropping the reps? Or backing off a weight but upping the reps? Or upping the reps at your current weight? *There are lots of ways to challenge yourself and those experiments will provide the data you need to develop routines going forward.* It's how I tweak, alter, and redesign my workouts. It's not scientific. But, you feel different every day. So, after you've read all about the "science" of progression, you'll actually practice the "art" of progression, because *it's very individualized*.

Exercise selection

Some folks find movements to target muscle groups. Some folks use muscle groups to perform movements. I'm kind of both, but more of the latter. I try to get stronger on movements—picking something off the ground, squatting, lifting things overhead. In that, I work most of my major muscles. And I know that I'm stronger in a more "functional" sense (although I dislike that term).

I don't have any problems with targeting muscle groups. I think it's fine. But we're talking about *simplifying* a workout. There are so many ways to "hit" a muscle that that approach is a rabbit hole I walk around. If I focus on *movements*, I hit many muscles at once and can keep real data on poundage increases, therefore ensuring progress.

So, I choose the big stuff. My goal is to be strong picking things up (deadlifts of several varieties, rows, and curls), holding things (pull-ups or lat rows), pushing things away (overheads and benches), and standing up against resistance (squat). I choose exercises that enhance those *movements*. The *muscles* follow right along. And I include lateral raises to give my shoulders a nice, warm burn.

I love the Olympic movements, but they may not be for everyone. Instead of a snatch, try a muscle snatch, which is a sort of half-snatch. Essentially, do a clean using a snatch grip and then press out the rest. Or try a dumbbell snatch. If none of those satisfy you, or are too tricky to perform, just do some heavy rows or chins. Olympic movements are a luxury, not a necessity.

Training frequency

I usually have five workouts in 14 days. How that gets done is up to me and how I'm feeling. Theoretically, it's three workouts one week and two the next. If I'm feeling really good, though, I might work out three times each week for a while. If I'm not feeling good, I might have only four scheduled workouts over the 14 days. If I'm feeling bad, I'll still work out but may only "tinker" around with no real purpose other than not skipping a workout. (See my article in issue #2.) But, I'm loose. With four kids and a full-time job, I *make* time to train. It's not always smooth or consistent.

You should, however, be able to squeeze in four or five workouts over two weeks *if they are sufficiently abbreviated*. And if the intensity is dialed in and the selection of movements is wise, you'll get great results.

First, though, you need experience on novice routines, if you don't already have it. You must know the fundamentals and have progressed beyond straight linear progression. *Then* you'll have the skills to figure out a routine that works best for you.

Nutrition

I'm not the guy to speak to on nutrition. I am, however, the beefy dad on the block. No one doubts I work out. If this style of training didn't work for me, I would've given it up years ago. If you take good care of your nutrition *and* follow these basic routines, you'll make great progress *and* look terrific.

So that's how I train: what I do, why, and the results. It's the Keith Richards' approach! H

What Inroad Are You Traveling? Part 3

My personal experiments

By Ron Sowers

*From **HG 2.0** issue #3*

In my previous articles, I explained how the S.A.I.D. principle—**S**pecific **A**daptations to **I**mposed **D**emands—applies to our training. It applies with respect to how the variables in our training affect our bodies' various subsystems.

We have different tolerances and adaptability in those subsystems. Here are five examples:

Neural. *How much potential you have to improve your neural system, and how much neural stress you can handle.*

Absolute muscle tension. *Joint and tendon size, and mechanical stress tolerance.*

Cardiorespiratory. *Your general fitness level and how much it can improve.*

Metabolic. *Blood circulation, energy storage, and fatigue clearance.*

Discomfort tolerance.

I've done many experiments on myself. It always fascinated me that adaptations can be pointed to other subsystems when we're trying to point them at muscle growth.

Don't assume that what I found to be true for me is also true for you. But I'm not a genetic outlier, and I've never used bodybuilding drugs, so perhaps the lessons I've learned *will* be helpful for you.

The area that fascinated me the most was effort vs. work. For example, some people can get all the stimulation they need from one really good "all-out-to-failure" work set per exercise, yet others can't. While I learned early that too much volume really is a path to no gains and overtraining for me, what about between the extremes? That's where I was most curious.

For trainees who grow well from the one-set-to-failure approach, it seems that they are able to stress their muscle cells very well that way. Their neural factors (total output *and* the tolerance of using high output) are sufficient so that their muscles *are* the weak links and thus *highly stimulated to adapt by growing in strength and size.*

I was also curious about "good reps" (the hard reps at the end of a work set) long before the term "effective reps" was even conceived. It seemed obvious that the harder reps at the end of a set are more stimulating than the others, so I decided to test it. In the early 1990s, I compared normal sets (such as 3 x 8) with a rest-pause

format (hard set, short rest, more hard reps, short rest, yet more hard reps). I found that the results were the same in terms of size and strength progression. I kept all other variables constant as I moved back and forth for periods between those two approaches. Science may nitpick. One study may declare one of those formats is marginally superior, but what matters is *reality*. For me, the two approaches were interchangeable.

I also did some self-experiments to compare a single set to failure with three not-to-failure sets. I tested carefully. So, I ceased all training except for my arms. Why arms? Arm training is systematically less draining than most other weight training, so that eliminated systemic recovery as a factor. Arms are also an easy body part to measure and track. I designated one arm for one-set-to-failure training, and the other arm for the three sets not quite to failure. I took careful measurements and then trained each arm in its designated way for four weeks. At the end, after I measured, the one-set-to-failure arm had remained the same size but the other one had some growth. Perhaps had I done this even longer, I would have seen growth in the single-set arm and maybe a bit more in the other one.

Months later, I wondered if my results had something to do with the one-set arm being my dominant side (I'm right handed). So I did the experiment again but switched arms. After four weeks of that, I had the same results: the three-set arm did better. Years later, I did this experiment another time because I wanted to make extra sure. But again, I got the same results.

A couple of years ago, I was curious about size and strength *in me*—not science, not theory, but *personal real-world stuff.* Here's what I did to find out:

I trained with single work sets for three months, going for maximum strength but while keeping tabs on my size. I reached near-lifetime PRs on all my exercises.

Then, for nine weeks, I switched to training each muscle group twice a week for three sets of eight reps done cumulative-fatigue style with just 30 seconds rest between sets. I used a fixed weight for the three sets of the same rep count. Each set was harder than the previous one, as the fatigue accumulated. The load was based on what I could *just* squeeze out the eight reps with on the final set. It was a lot lighter than what I'd have used if I'd warmed up and then gone for broke on a single work set. With the CF poundage, I'd *nudge* up the weight (the next workout) for *all* three sets when I could get more than my target rep count for the third set at a session.

For the nine weeks of training in the CF manner that summer, I recorded steady size gains each time I checked. At the end, I'd grown a decent amount all over. Interestingly, when I tested my strength, my eight-rep maxes were 15-20% *lower* than they were at the end of the single-work-set strength program. So, I was bigger but not as strong. Was it just a loss of neural strength and performance? What would happen if I now went back to the program of single sets and got my strength back up?

So that's what I did. It took me two months to get my strength back to those

near-lifetime PRs, and lo and behold, my size slowly dropped during that time. When I hit my previous-best strength levels, my size was down to exactly what it was at the beginning of the summer immediately before I started the CF program.

Then the following spring, I tried the same experiment again, and the exact same results occurred.

So, after those experiments, I found out, with no question about it (because it was *me* that experienced it), that *how* I get stronger matters *a lot*. Was my size increase due to more sarcoplasmic hypertrophy? Or was it that one way I gained muscle size *only* but the other way I was just *tuning up* my use of current muscle size via neural and "effort ability"? Or another explanation? I don't know, but I did learn a valuable lesson.

A caveat, though, is if the strength gains come from neural gains without stimulating hypertrophy, there'll be a point where a hard stall happens. Once those performance attributes are maxed, if your muscle size doesn't increase, you're now getting all you can out of your *current* size. No more strength gains will occur *until* you get your size increasing again.

But I'm not saying that volume is more important than effort, or that more volume is always better.

What I *am* saying is that each trainee probably has a personal ratio of volume and effort, and that's determined by which subsystem is the least adaptable and/or least tolerant of that variable. If you can't stimulate, or tolerate the effort needed to fully stimulate, with just 1-2 work sets per body part, then going not-quite-as-hard for 3-4 sets might be superior.

Another test I did a few times on myself that somewhat relates to volume was comparing volume to frequency. What I found was very close to what some studies have shown: one set done three times a week is similarly effective to three or four sets done once per week. I recover better, though, when doing the latter.

The reality of how size and strength are related

Fibrils (*not* fibers) are the actual contractile strands inside a muscle fiber. The number of those in parallel is directly related to the force production of that fiber when considering *equal neural activation levels.*

A whole fiber's size is somewhat related to its strength, because its size can also vary from other components besides fibril number—for example, sarcoplasm, mitochondria, water, and glycogen. A whole muscle's size and strength are less related because the size can vary from all those components *plus* connective tissue, intramuscular fat, and a few other things.

Our strength in a compound exercise can vary a lot based on many factors besides the size of the muscles involved. That's why it can be confusing when we compare muscle size to how much we lift in an exercise. We can't know if the strength increase was caused by fibril hypertrophy, coordination, a lowering of negative feedback, a lowering of antagonistic muscle contribution, higher neural output, or something else.

How I Put on 25 Pounds of Mostly Muscle in 12 Months

By **Bill Piche**

From HG 2.0 issue #6

It's a blessing that it was engrained in me very early in my training that the way to get bigger *is to get stronger*.

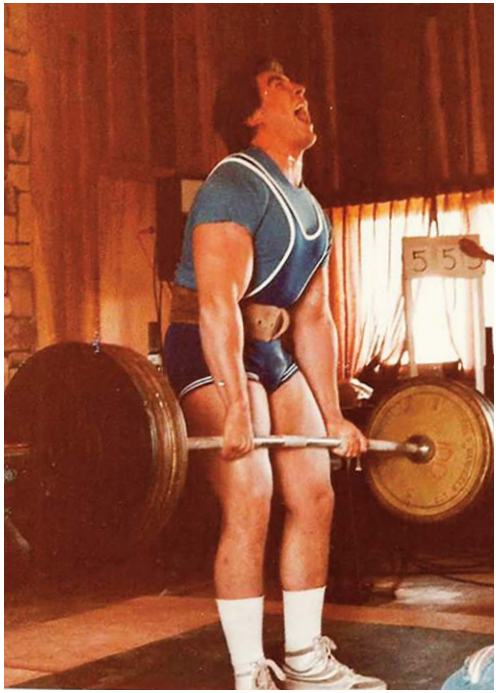
I'd been reading every muscle magazine I could purchase from the local corner drug-store. Up to that point, I'd focused primarily on my upper body. One day during my senior year of high school, in the back of one of the muscle magazines, I saw an ad for *Powerlifting USA* (*PLUSA*).

I subscribed to the magazine, and that's where I first read Dr. Ken Leistner's writings. He often wrote about how to get big and strong. He emphasized doing just the three powerlifts along with a few "assistance" exercises; and basically one all-out-effort work set to failure for each movement.

My first order of business was to purchase a 310-pound Olympic weight set. I also purchased my first and only thick powerlifting belt—from the famous Bob Morris Belts, as advertised in *PLUSA*.

At age 17, I was officially a powerlifter. My starting bodyweight was approximately 170 pounds. My new routine would be the three powerlifts and a few accessory exercises. I somehow came to the conclusion that it was best to perform work sets of five repetitions in the powerlifts. I learned from *PLUSA*, probably from Dr. Ken, that warm-ups should be just that. I shouldn't wear myself out on excessive warm-ups that would reduce the weights I could use on my work sets.

For the three powerlifts, I adopted the inverted pyramid warm-up. As I added weight to the bar, I reduced the number of repetitions. The last warm-up "set" prior to my one work set to failure for each lift was just a single rep. For example, a work set of 300 pounds would have this warm-up: 135x8, 185x5, 225x3, 255x2, and 280x1. Then, after a few minutes of rest, I'd do my single all-out-effort set with 300 pounds.



Left: Circa 1981, 17-year-old Bill at the start of his 12 months of great gains, manhandling 315 pounds. He didn't know what good form was at the time. Right: About two years later. He barely made the 198-lb class and was over 205 pounds the night before that meet.

While my target for each work set of the three powerlifts was five complete reps, I would go to absolute failure. It might be five and a half reps, or six, or six and a quarter, or whatever—until I could no longer move the bar any further. I simply kept going until I reached utter positive failure.

For that first 12 months of really effective training, I seemed to add weight to the bar every week in all three powerlifts. It was amazing, and addictive, to say the least.

My bodyweight climbed to around 195 pounds. I transformed myself in just 12 months—approximately 25 pounds of bodyweight but without any noticeable change in my body composition.

I was in my late teens, so my hormones were perfect for strength training and building muscle.

My nutrition was focused on getting enough protein, and at that age I could get away with eating a lot of calories without getting fat. I didn't know of the term "bulking" at the time. Later, though, the men I'd observed bulking got too fat for me ever to prescribe such a method.

My training routine was tied to the seven-day week. I bench pressed and squatted twice a week and deadlifted once a week. I squatted on Mondays and Thursdays, bench pressed on Tuesdays and Fridays, and deadlifted on Saturdays. With warm-ups plus just one work set for each lift, and minimal accessory work, my workouts were very short. Lots of food and sleep, and a teenager's hormones, enabled me to make amazing progress on five very short but very hard workouts per week.

Would I have had similar results from just two or three somewhat longer workouts each week? I think I would. (I had to reduce my training frequency later, to keep my progress happening.)

My accessory exercises were each done for just one all-out set to failure.

Because I trained in my basement with barebones equipment, I didn't really have any accessory work on squat days. The nearest I got to it was some high-bar squats. My priority was the low-bar lifter's variety.

After the bench press, I performed the close-grip bench press (about 14 inches between my hands). On most bench press days, I would also do a single set of overhead presses.

On deadlift days, I also did weighted pull-ups, barbell curls, and weighted sit-ups.

After the 12 months, I was performing my top sets with nearly 300 pounds in the bench press, over 600 in the squat (with a huge caveat), and 500 in the deadlift. The caveat was that I wasn't going down to parallel in the squat. I fixed my depth later, but had to reduce my poundage to do so.

My training partner during that year, Mark "Gumby" McCleod, put 15-20 pounds on his 6-foot 2 basketball-player type of body. We would go crazy during our training sessions. We would crank out the music for our top sets, and screaming was the norm when we attacked those sets. We treated the top sets like life-or-death situations. *We really gave our all!*

I gained a further 10 pounds or so in the following 12 months. But then progress slowed to a grind.

To keep even slow progress happening, I had to reduce my training frequency. I threw out the seven-day training week. I benched every fourth or fifth day and squatted every sixth day. I deadlifted every other squat day—every twelfth day. (So, on alternate squat days, I also deadlifted.)

I didn't know what proper form was initially, especially in the deadlift. My mindset was "get the weight" at any cost. If that meant rounding my lower back, so be it. If it meant exploding with the weight out of the correct position, so be it. I got away with the poor form initially, but it soon caught up with me and I paid a heavy price.

I also stopped training the squat and deadlift to absolute failure, and I increased the rep count of my work sets.

See my article in the first issue of ***HG 2.0*** *for the details on those key lessons.*

I stopped competing in powerlifting in 1990.

The main lesson I learned was that *the basics work.* They literally transformed my body in just 12 months. *But I wish I'd applied them with correct lifting form.*

To basics, 'breviated, and best!

On the Cover

By Ben Howard

*From **HG 2.0** issue #6*

I'm a 31-year-old father of two from England. I started bodybuilding in 2005, when I was 15 years old.

After a short time of training, I discovered natural bodybuilding competitions through internet forums, and I interacted with the champions of that time. I voiced my interest in competing. Lee Kemp, a local show promoter at the time and now President of the UK Drug-Free Bodybuilding Association, offered to help me prepare for my first physique show in 2009. Some 12 years later, Lee and I have become great friends, and he still helps me prepare for my competitions. Here are some of my titles:

2014 UKDFBA *Novice UK, Champion*
2016 UKDFBA *Amateur UK Middleweight, Champion*
2016 WNBF *Lightweight World Champion*
2018 UKDFBA *Professional UK, Champion*
2018 WNBF *Pro Lightweight World Champion*

I've always used an abbreviated approach to training—three low-volume but high-intensity workouts per week. This approach has allowed me to make consistent, steady progress over the years *and* have a young family and a busy working life.

I've kept training logs for the last decade. Here's a routine I used in the offseason of 2012, when I was 22 years old:

Day one
1. Standard barbell squat
2. Standard barbell row
3. Barbell bench press
4. Barbell curl

Day two
1. Conventional deadlift
2. Standing press
3. Supinated chin
4. V-bar weighted dip

I trained three days per week, alternating the two workouts. My recovery was great so long as my volume was low—just two work sets (to absolute failure) per exercise after warm-ups. Sometimes I went with a trap bar to mix things up and rest my lower back a little. If you try this program, adjust the training frequency (especially of the squat and the deadlift) to fit *your* recovery ability.

I've also used many full-body and upper-body/lower-body abbreviated workouts over the years, with great success.

BODYBUILDING *the Houghton Way*

Train the muscles or the movements?

By Mark Houghton

*From **HG 2.0** issue #6*

Should you train your muscles or the movements, or should do you do both? What processes and events go through your mind before and during the performance of each set? And do your goals make a difference?

You might think that a powerlifter would "train the movements" rather than the muscles, and a bodybuilder would "train the muscles" rather than the movements.

Reading about the processes that someone such as Chuck Miller goes through, before and during a set, shows that even the performance of the specific lifts of the sport of powerlifting involves "training the muscles" to some degree.

And even the most avid "pumpers" among the bodybuilding fraternity have to learn and train each movement before they can focus on specific muscles.

So, in reality, we're not looking at an either or scenario, but instead are talking about degrees of emphasis.

In this article, I'll share with you my thoughts on "Train the muscles or the movements?" and how an understanding of it may help with both the design and application of your own training routines.

So what are the main benefits of emphasizing the *movements*?

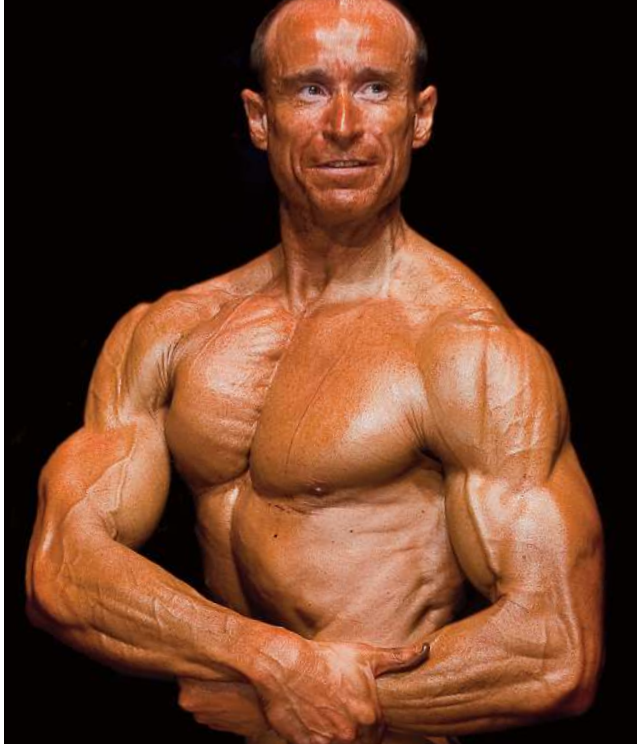
First, regular *proper* practice of a movement should improve its performance and result in greater training loads. That's a huge benefit for strength-focused athletes. And it's also a big benefit for trainees primarily focused on hypertrophy.

Second, those greater loads, especially with the major compound movements, produce systemic stress and perhaps subsequent hormonal response, which are important for long-term progress.

So, there's great merit in putting focus on the movements rather than the muscles, especially if your primary goal is strength, and particularly in the major compound movements.

But how much focus should you put on "working your muscles"? For sure, there should be some focus, because the muscles move the weight and stabilize the body.

What if we put more focus on "squeezing" and "contracting" the muscles?



Mark, age 47, the 2012 BNBF Overall Masters' Champion.

That's what the bodybuilding world describes as the mind-muscle connection. How would that affect our results?

If there's more focus on the muscles, there'll be less on the movements, which means there's a likelihood that the resistance will have to be reduced, with the possibility of less overall stimulus. But if you're focusing on the muscles more, or specifically a *particular* muscle, then that muscle should receive more stimulation.

Research into the mind-muscle connection is far from clear and may raise more questions than it gives answers to.

I've looked at some of those studies. There appears to be support for the mind-muscle connection as a useful method for trainees who primarily want hypertrophy. And that's something many bodybuilders have long believed from personal experience.

Another matter to look into when comparing the pros and cons of "Train the muscles or the movements?" is compound vs simple (isolation-type) movements.

My thoughts are that compound exercises are more likely to be aligned with training the movements, whilst isolation exercises are probably more effective when their use focuses on training the muscles. But those two uses could be reversed and still be beneficial.

So, armed with that information, how does it affect our training?

For those whose goals are primarily strength—and it should be noted that I don't consider myself an expert in this

area—I think that the vast majority of focus should remain on the movements. But if one identifies a weak muscle group involved in a lift, a potential way to improve that exercise would be to make the weak muscle stronger.

Creating a hypertrophic response in that muscle will make it stronger. And by putting more emphasis on training the muscle through improving your mind-muscle connection, you're likely to increase your chances of stimulating hypertrophy in that specific muscle.

If I was to do that myself, it would be with a supplementary *isolation* movement, rather than a compound one.

In regard to prioritizing *hypertrophy*—a subject I have decades of experience with—the "Train the muscles or the movements?" issue is more complex.

For beginner and novice bodybuilders (anything up to three years of consistent *effective* training), a strong focus on the movements will get you the fastest results, especially if you perform predominantly compound movements during that period. After that, noticeable gains in muscle are still possible, but those gains (and those in strength) will usually be slow, so *still* most of your focus should be on *training the movements*.

Once you've moved beyond the beginner stage, your weaker/stubborn muscle groups will be apparent, so periods of *training the muscles* can be beneficial but, I reiterate, it's vital that the focus remains on getting stronger on the basic compound movements, in good form.

If you're an intermediate trainee who wants to apply more focus on training the movements, I first recommend including two isolation movements in your routine—for example, a bicep curl and a tricep extension. But do them with the aim of becoming stronger in consistently good form.

After several weeks, reduce the weight of those two exercises by 20-30% and focus on the muscles (biceps and triceps).

Then assess the merits of both approaches and decide whether to incorporate one of them on a regular basis.

Let's move to the advanced stage. By now, you should be lifting very respectable poundages in the basic movements that suit you, and be near the upper end of fulfilling your muscular potential. Any muscle gained now will rarely show on the scale, but in most instances in individual muscle groups rather than overall growth. It's *now* that you should look at *training the muscles* more than before. But that doesn't mean you should no longer train the movements.

If heavy compound exercises built your physique, they still have a key role to play in maintaining your development *or* pushing for the final few percent of growth.

Here's an example of how one might do that, using an upper-body/lower-body split, and alternating the two routines over a twice-weekly training schedule:

Routine A

1. Dumbbell bench press
2. Chin-up
3. Shoulder press

4. Machine row
5. Dip
6. Bicep curl

Routine B
1. Squat
2. Leg curl
3. Leg extension
4. Still-legged deadlift
5. Calf raise
6. Ab crunch

I prefer safety-bar squats with handles on the power rack. Then I can adjust my position so that my knees aren't irritated.

The first work set of each movement is a heavy one (6-8 reps) with the focus on the movement, taken very close to but not quite reaching momentary muscular failure.

The second (and final) work set of each movement requires a 30% reduction in weight, and the focus is on squeezing and contracting the target muscle, or muscles, to move the weight, pushing to failure (but not eyeballs-popping-out failure).

That's just an example, though. Once you're an advanced bodybuilder, you should be experienced and confident enough to create routines that are suited to your body and your goals.

It was in 2012 that I found my sweet spot between training the movements and training the muscles. For each muscle group, I chose one core movement where I focused on progressive overload, and an additional exercise (usually an isolation movement, but not always) where contracting and fatiguing the muscle was the goal. It proved to be very successful and resulted in my carrying more muscle tissue than ever before.

The muscle groups I noticed most improvements on were my chest and my biceps. Typically for my chest, I performed two heavy sets of incline or flat dumbbell presses, followed by a muscle-focused machine fly and sometimes a dip machine. For my biceps, incline dumbbell curls were my core movement, followed by a machine curl of some sort.

Machines are typically the best tools to use if you're focusing on training the muscles because there's less emphasis on balance and coordination than there is with free weights. And, in some cases, the less obvious sticking points on machines allow more of your focus to be on contracting the muscles rather than training the exercise.

Recently, though, with less time available to train, I pondered whether I could fine-tune my successful formula to produce better results, or results just as good but with less overall training.

For my current program, I've refined my approach of training both the movements *and* the muscles within the same workout, with less volume than previously. So far, I'm pleased with how it's going. I'll go into detail about it next time.

This article is more than just about whether you train the muscles or the movements. It's also about getting you to think about what you do and why, which is an approach you can apply to many areas both within your training and recovery, and outside of it.

The Last Word

By Dr. Ken E. Leistner

*From **HG 2.0** issue #1*

*Stuart's note: With the 38 parts of his "Asking Dr. Ken" column, and in other ways, the late Dr. Leistner played a key role in the success of **HG 1.0**. As a tribute, I'll regularly excerpt from his work so that he's in **HG 2.0**, too.*

Well-designed machines can make training more enjoyable, provide variety, and allow one to perform an exercise for, or give work to, a body area that can't otherwise be suitably attacked due to previous injury or body-leverage disadvantages. In a few specific cases, those machines provide an advantage over a barbell or dumbbells.

Some believe that no machine serves a useful purpose other than for rehabilitation or "toning." I will repeat my oft-stated premise that the tool doesn't matter nearly as much as the way it's used. Machines and barbells should be used the same way, in accordance with the same training philosophy. One doesn't use a machine differently from a barbell unless they have no true understanding of physiology (and many so-called experts truly don't).

In the case of a well-designed pullover machine that's used properly, no barbell or pulley movement can provide the type of potential muscle stimulation to such a large number of major upper-body muscular structures as this one exercise does. Yet, the machine is rarely used by those who believe in "barbell training." In this case, though, the machine is a definite advantage.

Almost any bicep machine is a waste of time in my opinion. A doctoral study indicated that one of the well-known manufacturers' bicep machines, using the most sophisticated load cells and other diagnostic equipment, varied the resistance a total of three pounds over the course of the range of motion of the machine! This is hardly significant. Despite the limitations of the barbell or dumbbells, these are just as effective and usually more comfortable than any bicep machine. Yet in any gym, if they have but one machine, it will be for biceps.

I believe that nothing is harder, thus more effective, than the barbell squat and stiff-legged deadlift. Arthur Jones agreed with this assessment. These two exercises can do more for any trainee if exploited to their limits, than anything else you can do in the gym. Kevin Tolbert was perhaps the ultimate product of these two movements, having strung together a no-suit, no-wraps set of 600 lb x 30 in the squat followed by 450 x 15 in the stiff-legged deadlift on a block. These two sets wiped him out totally, but also were responsible for making him 248 lb of awesome muscle at 5-foot 8.

While this is inspiring, you or your trainees may not be able to do either of those movements safely and/or efficiently. But some machines *can* do the trick.

Please share Your Sampler Issue with everyone you know who trains.

To subscribe to HARDGAINER 2.0 *without* risk, please click on this link:
https://www.hardgainer.com/hardgainer-2-0/

Are you still wondering whether HG 2.0 is for you?

If you are, please read the following 16 pages.

But what is "abbreviated training"?

"Conventional" or "mainstream" training methods are those popularized since the 1960s by the leading (drug-assisted) bodybuilders and promoted by mainstream bodybuilding publications. Today, those methods are also promoted by many social-media and other online "experts." They require four to six workouts a week, conventional split routines, and typically three or four work sets for each of three or four exercises per body part.

But those methods still produce little or no improvement for most drug-free trainees. Most trainees also find those methods impossible to sustain because the required time commitment is too great.

HardGainer 2.0 and my other publications promote a much better approach. One that's effective without drug assistance *and requires way less training*. And *that's* why it's called "abbreviated training"—it's *abbreviated* relative to the volume and frequency of training promoted by the mainstream. **But it's not just any type of abbreviated training.**

Some other forms of abbreviated training employ an abbreviated list of exercises but often apply volume and/or frequency of training that are excessive for most drug-free trainees; and, sometimes, their exercise selection and recommended form are high risk. Those forms of abbreviated training don't apply the fundamental principles as I do.

HG 2.0 and my other publications promote abbreviated training *properly applied*, which *is* appropriate, safe, and effective for all drug-free and genetically typical trainees, *and* can be sustained over the long-term.

The interpretations of "bodybuilding," "strength training" and "weight training" vary, but refer to the same fundamental activity: the use of weightlifting equipment to improve appearance, performance, and health.

Abbreviated training works!

Some of our authors are primarily physique-focused, some are primarily strength-focused (including some powerlifters), and others are both physique- and strength-focused. But they all adhere to the fundamentals of abbreviated training properly applied, which includes customizing the fundamentals of training and recovery to suit them individually.

You may not be interested in competing in powerlifting or bodybuilding, but the training methods these trainees applied with great success will also work for you when you apply them properly.

Here's one of ***HG 2.0's*** *physique-focused authors: Mark Houghton, age 47, in England, 2012, at the British Natural Bodybuilding Federation's British Championships, where he was the Overall Masters' Champion.*

*Here's a master strength coach for **HG 2.0** who also wrote for **HG 1.0**: Chuck Miller. Chuck has trained with weights for over 35 years, always drug-free. He has won multiple regional and national powerlifting championships, and totaled Raw Elite three times—twice in the 198-pound weight class and, most recently, at 220. On April 20, 2013, at age 43, Chuck achieved his best powerlifting total to date—1,600 pounds—with a 600-pound squat (shown here), 380-pound bench press, and 620-pound deadlift. He made those lifts despite two major challenges: He is a type 1 (insulin-dependent) diabetic, and he overcame a tibial plateau fracture in his left knee at age 38 that required a plate and five screws to fix.*

But remember, HARDGAINER 2.0 is nothing like a mainstream muscle magazine. It's devoid of synthetic muscle monsters and their promoters.

Never mind the cartoonlike physiques of professional bodybuilders who are genetic super-studs *and* further enhanced through their prodigious drug assistance. Not only will the training methods that work freakishly well for them not work for you, they will *prevent* you from realizing your drug-free genetic potential for physique and strength.

*Here's another of **HARDGAINER 2.0's** physique-focused authors who also wrote for **HG 1.0**: Ian Duckett, age 42, shortly before he won his weight division at the UIBBN 2007 World Natural Bodybuilding Championships.*

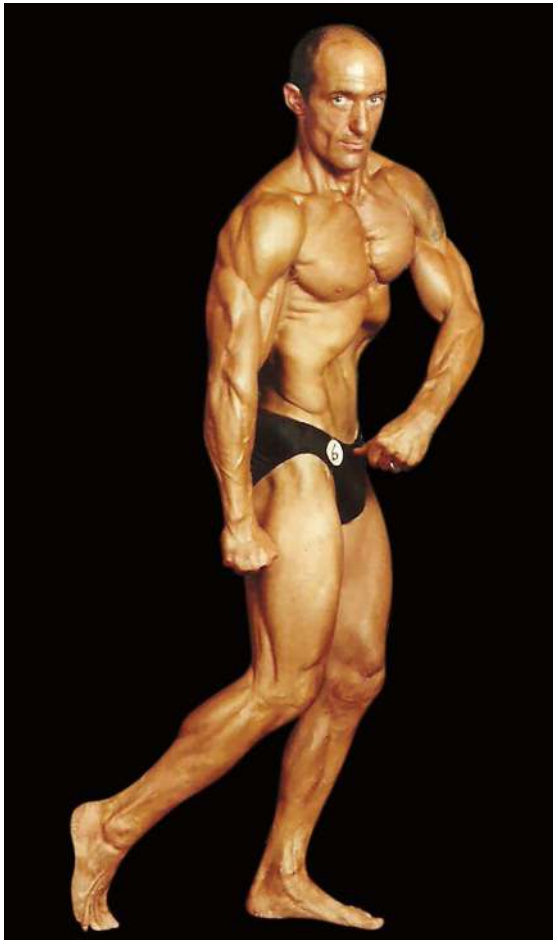
Of course, the training approach promoted in **HG 2.0** that works so well for men, also works for women. Women should train the same way men should. Even a little additional muscle improves appearance and yields substantial health benefits. Aerobics alone won't do and are overrated; and tinkering with bands and tiny dumbbells also won't do.

Serious training is needed for serious benefits for women.

Here's an illustration of the effects of serious, drug-free strength training for women: Gina Traynor, age 42. Gina will also contribute articles to **HG 2.0**.

Here's Vince Vaught, age 43, not just another example of the effectiveness of abbreviated training properly applied, but of success over adversity. At age 24, he was kicked by a horse midway between his ankle and knee on one leg, destroying four inches of both bones there, and severing the leg except for the calf muscle, which was severely stretched. He required major surgery to save his leg—five operations over seven weeks.

But Vince then built an outstanding drug-free physique, and exceptional strength and endurance. He has done a set of 140 below-parallel squats with 200 pounds. He was featured in **HG 1.0** and was on the cover of #77.



*Here's **HG 2.0** author Bill Piche. He also wrote for **HG 1.0**. He's deadlifting 600 pounds at an ADFPA (drug-free) meet, age 26. His mindset was "get the weight at any cost." He sacrificed form for poundage, which was a mistake. Heed Bill's advice in his article in issue #1 of **HG 2.0**. It will teach you some of the biggest lessons about abbreviated training **properly applied**.*

Mark, Chuck, Ian, Gina, Vince and Bill—and many others—owe their success to their knowledge of abbreviated training and their dedication to applying it properly. And without drugs, and without being stellar genetic outliers.

The extraordinary knowledge and experience that **HardGainer 2.0's** authors share will make *you* an expert on training and teach *you* how to reach *your* potential for muscle and might.

In response to the claim you can't get really strong and well-developed on intensive, twice-weekly, abbreviated workouts, Dr. Ken Leistner would have laughed. He could have reeled off a long list of his genetically average charges who got really strong and well-developed on such training.

And he could have given a list of some genetic outliers who also trained in that manner. Perhaps the most jaw-dropping is his adopted son, Kevin Tolbert, who, at 5-foot 8, did the following: squat 600 x 30 and stiff-legged deadlift 450 x 15 (at 248 pounds bodyweight), and bench press 510 x 1 and 400 x 15 (at 230 pounds bodyweight). Another is Paul Bretton: squat 500 x 1 and 375 x 25 at 16 years of age (5-foot 10, 200 pounds bodyweight).

Truly understand "abbreviated training *properly applied*," then apply it.

Caveat

There are drug-free bodybuilders, powerlifters and other strength athletes who've been champions in their fields of competition. Many of them are such genetic outliers that they were able to make astonishing progress from training routines that are utterly useless for drug-free, genetically typical trainees. *But* some of those champions, regardless of their genetic advantages, *did* train in a way that *is* appropriate for drug-free, genetically typical trainees to apply.

A few of those champions will contribute to **HG 2.0** *because they have great expertise to share.*

There'll also be grassroots material in the new magazine, just like there was in the original HG 1.0.

"Why should I trust you, Stuart?"

Through my around-1,000 articles published in US and European print magazines since 1981 (when I was 22 years old), my books, and **HardGainer** print magazine for 15 years, I've been a steadfast voice of honesty and reason in the training world for 40 years. Since 1989, I've dedicated my working life to promoting abbreviated training.

And I've helped countless trainees.

But I'm not an armchair coach. I built myself up from a skinny youth to 195 pounds, and deadlifted 400 pounds for a set of 20 reps. And I still train seriously today (2022), at age 63.

I'm much more knowledgeable about training now than I was when I published HG 1.0, a better writer and editor, and well versed in digital publishing. And I'm full of vigor for producing HardGainer 2.0.

My target readers are usually bodybuilders, but many powerlifters and other strength trainees have also benefited from my work. The approach I teach—abbreviated training *properly applied*—works for all those trainees and is easily tailored to suit the specific needs of each individual trainee.

It also works for all other men and women who are looking for a safe, effective, time-efficient way of building strength and muscle, including middle-aged and older trainees. The approach incorporates the modifications commonly required as one ages.

Women should train in the same way that men should. Even a little additional muscle yields substantial benefits. Aerobics alone won't do and are overrated; and tinkering with bands and tiny dumbbells also won't do. *Serious strength training is needed for serious benefits.*

But the approach doesn't require that you sacrifice your education, career, relationships, family, friends and/or health at the altar of the gym.

It's an approach that's eminently practical and doable, even if you have a busy life and limited time for the gym.

Most of my consultation clients told me they had read some of my books and understood my teachings. But as we talked, it turned out that most of them hadn't fully grasped my message or, sometimes, had misunderstood it. So, it was no wonder they weren't making much progress, if any.

They were still wedded to conventional training methods, albeit a scaled-down version; or they had decent routines in terms of exercises, sets and reps, but weren't applying themselves properly to their training or their recovery. For example, when I saw recordings of their workouts, their exercise form was poor and their effort was insufficient.

While the essence of my training message can be boiled down to a single paragraph, the successful implementation of it requires a great deal of the right understanding and then a great deal of the right application.

Take charge of your training!

Regardless of your genetics, gender or age, you have tremendous power to improve your physique, fitness and health—*if only you would employ that power.* Bodybuilding and strength training aren't hit-or-miss activities.

HardGainer 2.0, together with its additional content and its community, will support you. That package of remarkable expertise and experience will guide you, inspire you, and motivate you.

Six common reservations or concerns about abbreviated training

First reservation

"Why do most other sources of training information advocate a different approach to yours?"

There are at least three reasons:

1. The training industry is (and always has been) about producing "new" ideas, theories and products so that people can make a name for themselves, attract followers, and/or sell a training program or other product. So, training trends come and go. But most of what's touted as "new" is actually repackaged material from long ago.

2. Most training "authorities" are on steroids and/or have superior genetics for muscle and might. And they usually have no idea what it's like to be a stressed-out trainee with kids and two jobs, for example. They advocate methods that may work for them but have no relevance for the drug-free masses who have limited recovery ability and training time. The most influential of those "authorities" set the tone for the training masses. And other "influencers," not knowing any better, embrace and promote the same information and advice. It's often terrible guidance, but the message of the influential figures is slick and reaches the most trainees. So, that message becomes accepted as conventional training "wisdom."

3. It seems to be very hard for most people—including many "experts"—to believe that the no-frills, straightforward approach to training that **HG 2.0** promotes can be so effective.

The dissenting voices that challenge those positions or individuals get drowned out by all the noise and confusion.

Second reservation

"Your approach doesn't have enough volume, Stuart. Most competitive natural bodybuilders train at least four times a week, with more exercises and sets than you recommend. Also, some science shows that 10 to 20 sets per body part per week is optimal. You seem out of step with what the evidenced-based coaches and researchers are saying."

To build muscle and might as a drug-free trainee with typical genetics, you must train with sufficient intensity. If you're paying your dues when it comes to effort in the gym, you should be incapable of performing a lot of volume. And even if you *are* capable of it, you'll soon run into recovery issues. But overtraining doesn't build muscle and might. It's clear from watching many training videos (even of so-called experts) that most people have no idea what it means to train hard. What they describe as "failure" may actually be three to five reps short of it.

You can make gains without training hard only if you're on bodybuilding drugs, and/or if you have superior genetics. (The most outstanding natural bodybuilders have exceptional genetics.) High-volume recommendations often come from drug-users and only work for other drug-users. (This includes drug-users who claim to be "natural.") But much of the advice in favor of high volume is based on the results of studies that have been misrepresented and/or misunderstood, or *pseudoscience* that hasn't been carried out properly.

But doing too little volume isn't the answer. The drug-free, genetically typical trainee has to strike the right balance between doing enough to stimulate gains, but not so much that he or she can't recover. Countless typical trainees have transformed themselves using the methods promoted in **HG 2.0**. The volume of training we advocate is what works. We're not concerned with labels, theory or dogma, but with results. If we thought high volume worked best, we would promote it.

Third reservation

"Hard and heavy training on the major compound exercises with free weights is an injury waiting to happen."

It isn't if you do it correctly. **HG 2.0** will teach you how to do it correctly.

We're not against all machines. Good machines, properly used, are excellent. But bad machines, or good machines used incorrectly, are injuries waiting to happen.

It's possible to build a strong, well-developed physique safely with free weights *only*, with good machines *only*, or with a mixture of free weights *and* good machines. *The key is in the right approach.*

That means compound *and* isolation exercises (but priority given to the former), choosing only the exercises that *you* are well suited to, using only excellent exercise form (even on the final rep of a set), doing sufficient warm-up work, using a rep range that's safe for *you*, training with a volume and frequency *you* can recover from, getting sufficient sleep (and rest in general), controlling the stress in your life, and building strength *gradually*.

But all of that is light years away from someone who uses appalling form, abuses low reps, follows rigid programming that insists on a very limited set of exercises (one or more of which may not be suited to that trainee), trains too much and too often, never eats properly, doesn't sleep enough, and pays little or no attention to his or her health and overall conditioning.

The words "hard," "heavy," "basic," "compound," "free weights," and "progressive" may be considered "dirty" in some circles, but that's only because those words aren't correctly understood and/or applied in practice.

Context is forgotten in many training discussions.

Fourth reservation

"I like so-called 'canned' training programs, so that everything is laid out for me, step by step. Do you provide 'canned' programs, Stuart?"

No. Any program that focuses on compound exercises, excellent form, and progressive overload has the *potential* to be effective for building muscle and might. But a program that has been fully customized to the individual trainee has the potential to be *more* effective.

"Canned" programs typically insist on a specific set of exercises for all trainees, and specify a volume and frequency of training that's excessive for drug-free, genetically typical trainees. And some of them have predetermined, fixed progression schemes that take little or no account of each individual's circumstances.

The basic principles of resistance training apply to everyone, but we're all unique in how we respond to training variables.

A training routine should be personalized to suit the individual's structural configuration, age, goals, equipment availability, circumstances of life, recovery ability, and any limitations due to physical damage or health issues. But the customization should honor the fundamentals of abbreviated training.

Don't *seek the "perfect routine," though. The search for such a routine is the route to information overload and endless confusion. The customization I've outlined here is a completely different matter and can yield many interpretations of abbreviated training that will work for you.*

HardGainer 2.0 will provide you with the knowledge and tools you need to become *your own expert personal trainer*.

Fifth reservation

"What information can readers get from your magazine, Stuart, that they can't get for free online?"

If you know where to look, and *if* you're sufficiently knowledgeable about training to identify the good information, it *is* possible to find some of it online, but there's too little of it. And many of those who provide it then confuse the message by contradicting themselves in a different article or video. So, most trainees are left in perennial confusion. And they jump from one YouTube "influencer" to another and read endless blogs and articles. *But the more they "learn," the more confused they become.*

What they need is a single, reliable and consistent source of effective information. A source they can trust because it has a proven track record. **HardGainer 2.0** is that source.

The monthly issues will keep you focused and engaged so you won't need to hunt for "new" material, or change your routine yet again.

HG 2.0 is the expert online mentor you need in order to stay on the right path. Not only will you have access to a single, trustworthy source of training information, but also a source of inspiration and motivation.

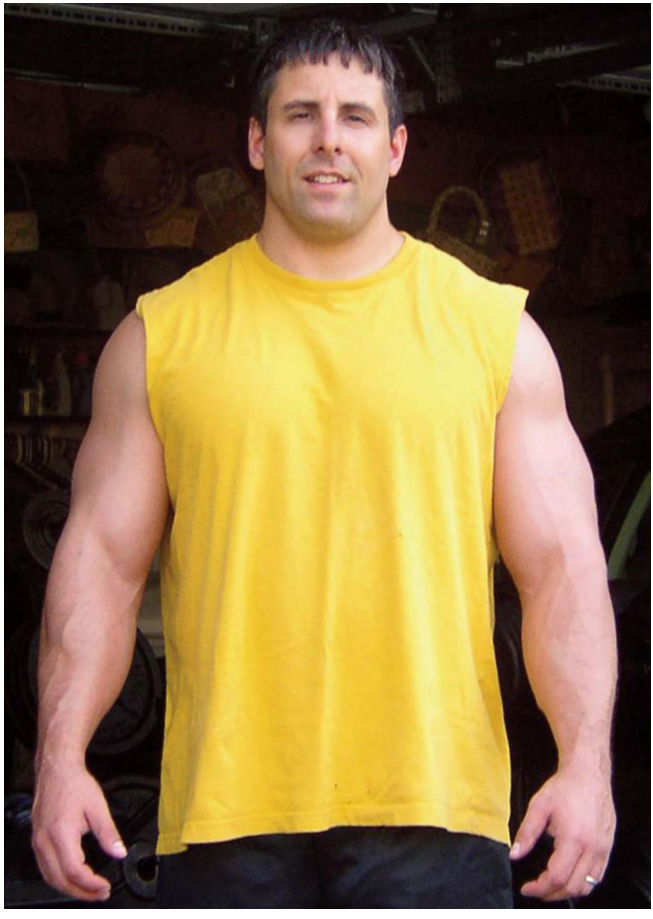
And once you subscribe to our magazine, and join our well-moderated and supportive Facebook group, you'll be part of a very special community—both offline and online.

Create an HG 2.0 folder on your primary device and keep a copy there of every publication you receive from us. Then you'll have permanent access to a collection of high-value training guidance, in one place, you can conveniently return to and study, again and again.

Sixth reservation

"I'm not a hard gainer. Should I stick with my high-volume training?"

So long as you're making progress, staying injury-free, and enjoying your training, you could stick with that approach. But I'm *sure* that if you adopted the approach promoted by **HG 2.0**, you'd get *at least* the same progress. In fact, because your recovery would be optimized, you'd probably enjoy *even greater progress*. And the reduced time-investment would mean more time for family and career. It's a win-win situation!



With youth, better-than-average genetics for muscle and might, and a burning desire to get very strong, here's what abbreviated training can do, without drugs: Chuck Miller, age 35, at his biggest.