

By: Aaron Whitten

# I DIDN'T KNOW SQUAT

Most trainees are aware of the squat's reputation as the King of Exercises. Entire books have sung its praises, and for good reason. Squats are unmatched for their return on investment. No other movement can claim the versatility of the squat. Squats may not be the only exercise in the gym but they may be the only one that can be held responsible for so much. Depending on how it is performed, the squat can enable a person to gain or lose weight, to increase strength and/or power, improve cardiovascular fitness, increase or decrease metabolic rate, improve bone density and even improve balance, both literally and between various muscle groups. Squats are used by athletes in all circles, from skiers to boxers and are employed by non competitive persons as well, ranging from ballerinas to cardiac rehab patients. With a résumé like this it is easy to see why so many experts

recommend the squat for nearly everyone. Some folks have gone as far as to say that the squat is all you really need and that other work is nearly superfluous. Success stories abound in natural bodybuilding involving the use of intensive squats, particularly those in which the proverbial 98 pound weakling is transformed with just the simple application of heavy squats.

It was stories like this that brought squats to my attention nearly two decades ago. I fit the mold of the weakling quite nicely and was determined to similarly fit into the category of the transformed success story. So squat I did and squat some more. Several things became apparent within a few years. First, this was brutally hard work, to the point that injuries were a frequent occurrence. It's darned hard to grow when you are injured. Second, despite the hard work, my quads were rarely sore, certainly not as

much as other muscle groups. Third, I was not experiencing the promised returns on my labors. However, due to the exceptionally thick nature of my cranium I decided to pour more effort into the same channels rather than taking time to analyze the situation.

There are dozens of variations of the squat and even more set/rep schemes, making a very large combination of possibilities of various squat training strategies. Over the course of several years I explored nearly all of them. However this was essentially how insanity is defined; repeating the experiment expecting a different outcome for no reason. Eventually laziness won out over stupidity, forcing me to reconsider my efforts. I needed to figure out why squats were not working for me.

What I did was to exhaustively analyze available information on the squat via the internet (there is a ton!) and compare it with

## 20 REP SQUAT WORKOUT

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### Monday

**Bench Press:** warm up, then 3 sets x 6-8 reps

**Bent Row:** warm up, then 3 sets x 6-8 reps

**Breathing Squat:** warm up, then 1 set x 20 reps

**Breathing Pullover (20-25lbs only):** 1 set x 20 reps

**Straight-leg Deadlift:** warm up, then 1 set x 15 reps

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### Wednesday

**Shoulder Press:** warm up, then 3 x 6-8

**Barbell Curl:** warm up then 2 x 8-10

**Parallel Bar Dips:** 1 x as many as possible, if you reach 30 reps, add weight.

**Close-grip Chin with hands facing you:** 1 set of as many reps as possible, if you can't make fifteen reps on your first set, add a second set so that the cumulative reps equals fifteen. ("Cumulative reps" mean you add the reps that you got both sets together.) Add weight if you ever get to 30 reps on your first set.

**Ab work**

**Calf Work**

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### Friday

Repeat Monday's workout, adding weight to any exercise that you reached the goal number of reps on the first set, try to add 5lbs to the squat each workout.

videos and pictures of my own form. This was not a speedy process and did not always reveal much. I reluctantly concluded that the assistance of those more schooled and skilled would be needed. I turned to coaches, experts and scholars. Eventually the picture came into focus. And like most perplexing issues, it was simple once uncovered.

My structure was not ideal for squatting. A person who is suited to squat will usually have short thighs and a long torso. They squat with an erect torso and feel the stress primarily on the thighs. I was just the opposite. It was difficult for me to maintain my balance and I tended to lean too far forward when squatting. The deeper I went, the farther I leaned forward. I felt it more in my low back than my quads. After lots of analysis and experimentation I came up with some guidelines that have worked for me. I think these guidelines will help anyone with an incompatible frame get the most out of the squat.

- Keep the bar high on the traps. If you go hold the bar lower, you accentuate the already shortened torso and will lean even further forward.
- Take a medium, shoulder width stance. Avoid the sumo stances which will also tug the torso forward.
- Elevate the heels slightly. This will essentially shorten the femur. Supporting the heels on ten pound plates is okay but actual squat shoes are better. Adidas and Do Win make some great shoes just for squatting.
- Flexibility is of paramount importance to good form. The key muscle groups to stretch are the hip flexors, groin, hamstrings, ankles and Achilles tendon. Simply sitting in the full squat position for 30-60 seconds is also very helpful.
- Flare the toes at approximately 35 degrees. This permits the gluteus to engage fully and allows for a deeper range of motion.
- Try the front squat as an alternative. This movement, where the bar is supported on the front of the shoulders rather than the back, can sometimes favorably alter biomechanics. Give it a shot.
- The trap bar deadlift while keeping your torso erect is another exercise worth trying. You can use the same types of programs as recommended for the squat, work up to heavy weights, and get very close to the same overall benefits as the full squat.

Ok, now I knew how to squat but I needed to determine the best routine to employ it. Probably the most famous and effective plan is the famous Super Squats book by Randall Strossen. This is maybe the best way for the novice or intermediate lifter to improve their squat and really induce some growth. It calls for twenty rep 'breathing' squats in conjunction with lots of milk protein. The high rep squats are just downright awful to perform but they are safe and effective. As for the milk, you can save money and prevent gaining body fat by using a quality protein powder. Beverly's new Provosyn fits the bill perfectly. You can mix it in water, milk, half n half or combine it with Mass Maker. If you really apply yourself to these squats in a progressive fashion while downing a couple Provosyn shakes daily you are nearly guaranteed to grow!

Once your form is solid and you have tired of the high rep squats, the old Bill Starr 5x5 routine will keep you gaining. The premise is simple; work with a heavy weight for five sets, once you can complete all five sets of five reps, add some more and start over. This has been used by thousands of collegiate and pro athletes for decades to improve strength and lean mass. Once you start really pushing, I found Muscle Synergy and Uplift to be a Godsend. It gets hard to drum up the needed enthusiasm after a few weeks of intensive squatting but those two products make me want to tear the weights apart no matter how tired I am!

The final and most productive squat specialization routine that I have utilized is the Smolov plan. This is truly a specialization course; very little if any other work is done, and believe me, you will be fine with that. The Smolov is the most difficult routine I have ever used, period. It is an undulating periodization scheme that has you squatting 3-5 times weekly. I made good use of the Smolov while recovering from an upper body surgery and was unable to perform

## WORKOUT BASED ON BILL STARR'S 5X5 PROGRAM

Train 3 days per week: Squat, Press, and Pull exercise each workout.

### Monday (heavy)

**Squat:** 5 sets x 5 reps

**Bench Press:** 5 sets x 5 reps

**\*Power Clean:** 5 sets x 5 reps

\*Starr used the power clean as his original program was designed to increase strength for football. You may substitute the Bent Row, Deadlift, Chin (w/weight) or Pulldowns with palms facing in place of the clean.

**Heavy Day:** Your first set should be about 50% of your current 5-rep max. Add weight each set until you reach 100% of your 5-rep max on your 5th set. If your 5-rep max is 225, you could start with 115 and add 25 -30lbs per set. This would give you sets of 115, 145, 175, 200, 225. If you are successful on all five sets, add 5-10lbs next Monday.

### Wednesday (Light)

**Squat:** 5 sets x 5 reps

**Bench or Military Press:** 5 sets x 5 reps

**Back Exercise:** 5 sets x 5 reps

Use the same weight as you did on Monday for the first three sets; then repeat the third set twice more. Given the previous example your weights would be: 115, 145, 175, 175, 175.

### Friday (Medium)

**Squat:** 5 sets x 5 reps

**Bench Press:** 5 sets x 5 reps

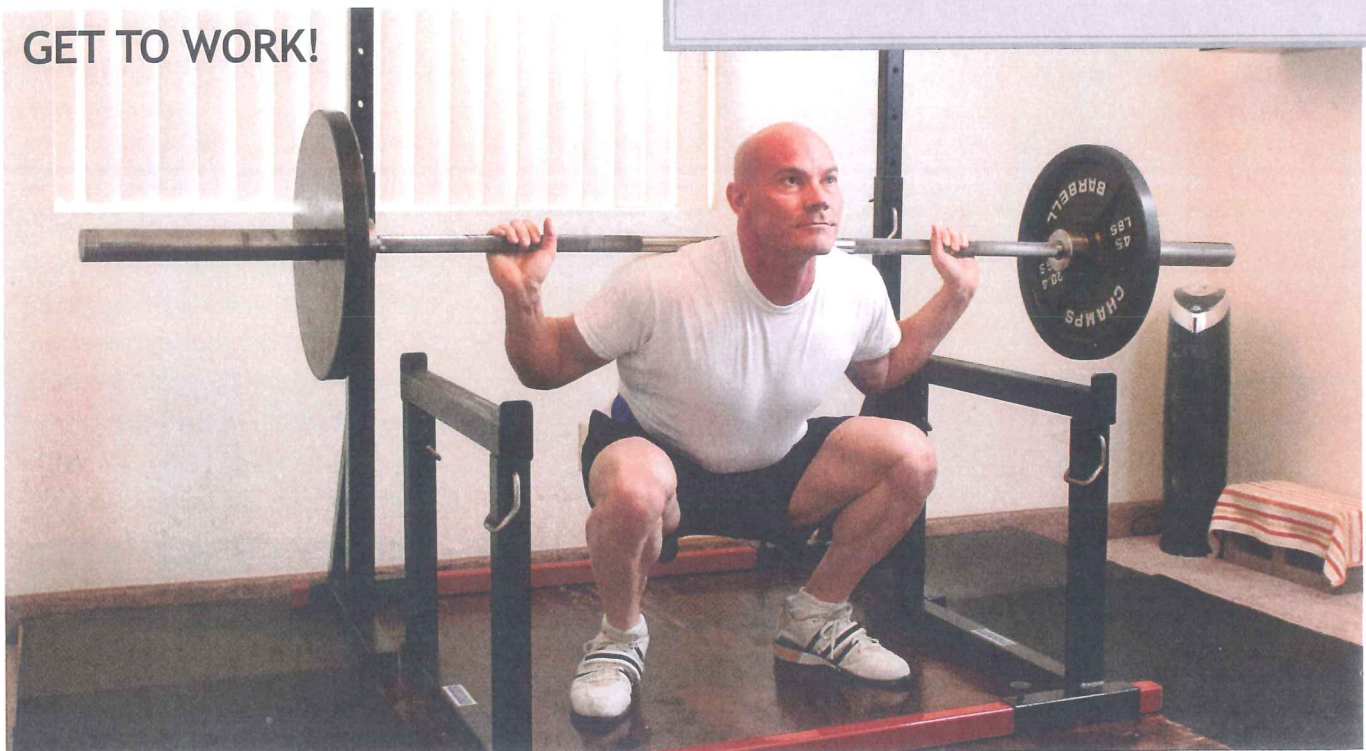
**Back Exercise:** 5 sets x 5 reps

First four sets are the same as Monday, then repeat the fourth set: 115, 145, 175, 200, 200.

anything but legs. The Smolov is advanced and should only be used by persons with rock solid form; this is not the time to modify or experiment with form. It promises up to a hundred pounds gained in the squat and it delivers. I used everything in my supplement arsenal to survive this routine: loads of Ultimate Muscle Protein, Super Pak, Glutamine Select, Synergy and Up Lift were absolute prerequisites. My results? Over 70lb gained in my squat for the first time in years and not only did my upper body not shrink, it grew! This is solid proof of the power of squats. Info on the Smolov can be found here: <http://stronglifts.com/how-to-add-100-pounds-to-your-squat-smolov/>. You'll find an excel spreadsheet here that does all the calculations for you. You'll just have to enter an accurate poundage for your current best, perfect form, squat.

Squats are the most efficient and effective movement you can perform if you take the time to master them. Have a friend take some pictures or better yet, video of your squat form and really analyze it. Look at your body type and play with different forms of the squat. Cut your weights in half and focus on perfecting your individual form. Get a foam roller, stretch extensively and consider buying some squat shoes. If all this seems like a lot of time and effort on one exercise, you're right. You can't get something for nothing and in the case of the squat, it pays off massively. No other exercise can affect your entire body like the squat; it is muscular fertilizer! Remember this simple and proven formula: Squats + Protein = MUSCLE! **Bev**

## GET TO WORK!



## SMOLOV SQUAT ROUTINE

<http://stronglifts.com> (then enter Smolov in search bar)

Since you'll be squatting 3-5 days per week on this highly specialized program, you should limit the amount of other exercise that you do. Aaron specialized on the squat solely when he used this routine to add over 70lbs to his maximum squat poundage.

You can do a little upper body training 2 days per week on this routine. Do no more than 2 or 3 exercises on each of these days. Here is an example:

### Day 1

**Bench Press and Lat Pulldowns:** (alternate exercises for 3-5 sets of 5 reps on the bench press and 6-8 reps on the pulldown – add weight each set so that only your final set of each exercise is near max.)

### Day 2

**Shoulder Press, Curl and Triceps Pushdowns:** (3-4 sets of 6-8 reps on each exercise.)

Do not train to failure. You can do these exercises individually, or as supersets or trisets.