

GET UP!

Volume II, Issue 1

August 2003

The Second Volume!

Our second volume begins with the "great" insight of the Summer of 2003...how to teach the Romanian Deadlift and how to use these RDLs in improving a lifter. Mike Rosenberg and Matt Spiller were wonderful in volunteering to be laboratory rats for the rest of us.

As we move into this second edition, I would like to thank ALL the authors who sent in work and insights and ideas this year. Let's keep learning.

Our mission? To teach everyone:

1. The Body is One Piece
2. There are three kinds of strength training:
 - Putting weight overhead
 - Picking it off the ground
 - Carrying it for time or distance
3. All training is **complementary**.

Teaching the Romanian Deadlift

Mike Rosenberg, Dan John and Matt Spiller
This article is a mishmash of internet forum discussions, practical training experiments and some quality time that the authors have spent together working on the Olympic Lifts. Mike is a Highland Gamer from Illinois and coach at the John Powell Camp, Matt is a discus thrower and physical therapist from California and Dan spends his days waiting for his tomatoes to finally turn red.

A Post to a Lifting Forum

The hard thing about the Romanian Deadlift vis-à-vis the stiff/straight leg deadlift is the "learning curve." Hop on a bench, grab bar, descend to shoelaces, come back up: Congratulations, you did a Straight Leg Deadlift.

The RDL requires that your butt goes back, back, back and you don't "go down" with the bar. The bar goes down, because your butt goes back. Any "bar down" motion or thought ruins the effect. It took me more than a decade to appreciate this!!!



If you remember my long boring discussions of going to the USOC training camp and watching Nico Vlad train, I learned about RDLs before they were known by more than probably ten people. I just missed the point...as did most O lifting coaches and a lot of other much more intelligent people.

To teach the RDL, I always have the lifter put his/her toes and balls of the feet on plates or the 2" x 4" s that make my platform. Then, I just make them go "butt back." You make a good statement about the hammies hurting the next day. If a lifter can get the bar to the patella tendon, they are doing something right in the rest of their training. They have good strength and flexibility. Getting it to the socks is a good goal...I wear high socks.

I also teach it by picking the bar off of a rack or a bench. If you deadlift it first, there seems to be a tendency to deadlift it back down versus butt backing it down. Also, anytime the athlete gets on the toes, the lift is over, drop the bar.

With the snatch and clean training from this position, it is merely my attempt to teach the modern methods of the snatch and clean. The Bulgarians are now teaching to stay on the heels the whole lift...not just until the "top of the pull" as I first was told about this approach. RDLs with the feet on boards teach the feeling of this "Heels."

The other great thing about RDLs is that you can keep some good volume...easily up to eights without a problem with proper weight selection. As you may know, I like the higher reps so the athlete has some "wiggle room" to screw up a rep or two and still have the bulk of the set a quality rep. I like to teach the athletes to explode each rep, but the nature of lifting sometimes makes it hard to get each rep perfect. With an RDL set of 8, you might screw up one or two, but most reps will be ass back hammy burners.

I know a lot of people push big RDL numbers, but I think you shouldn't go much over one's best snatch or clean. Like with pulls, athletes often

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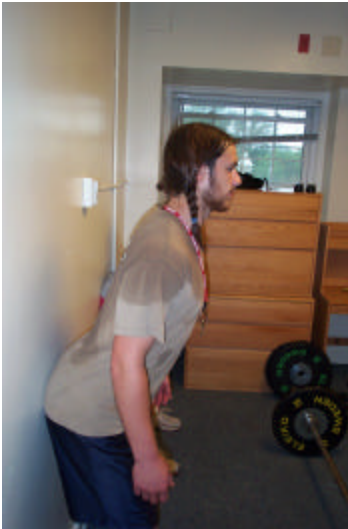
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will sacrifice carryover to performance for just more weight. I get letters from people who tell me they can do enormous overhead squats and pulls, yet can't snatch near that much (I have my doubts about depth and quality...). This is when the athlete needs to rethink training.

Insights learned at John Powell's camp this year in experimenting with the RDL...

Mike Rosenberg

- 1) Start a couple inches away from a wall.
- 2) Unlock the knees.
- 3) Keep shins perpendicular to the floor (move with your hips, not your ankles). If your shins are not perpendicular, you are moving the wrong joint.



(Editor: this is Dan...and Steph hidden behind him...practicing the "feel" in the dorm room in Ohio. Both athletes are simply doing some "butt touches" then scooting farther and farther from the wall...then, butt touching again.)

- 4) Move the bar down along your thighs.
- 5) Only move the bar by pushing your butt back and your chin forward (put your butt on the wall behind your -- push back hard -- put your chin on the wall in front of you --- really jut it out there)

- 6) When you brush the wall with your bum - straighten up - move out 1" and do it again. repeat this step until you find your distance from the wall. After your distance is set, think of it as a touch and go type of exercise...



(Editor: notice how they have both moved a few inches out. Steph has a good chin here, Dan needs to be a little more "chin out.")



(Steph and Dan will next be doing RDLs ...the bars are right in front of them.)
As noted by DJ, you will feel a big "X" in your hammies when you stretch properly, they will want to just pop off of your legs if you are doing it right.

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We tested this methodology on several first timers and accomplished athletes...seems to work well until we find something better...

Matt's Review of the RDL to the Snatch

Plus, an inspiring picture of Matt!



First step is to find snatch grip. Hold the bar with a grip width so that the bar hits you at where the top of your zipper would be. I had been holding the bar about two inches narrower each side.

Then put balls of feet up on two by four with heels on the floor. This keeps your weight on your heels. This is KEY.

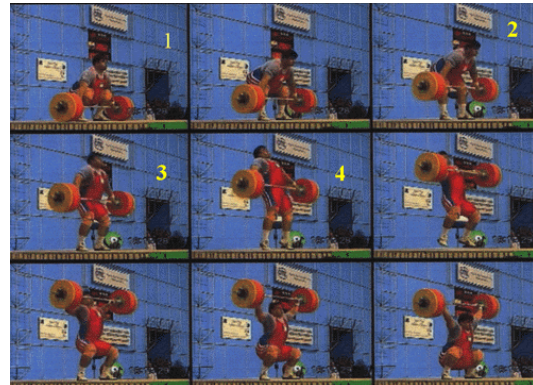
Then, you Romanian Deadlift the weight down. You do this by having "beach chest" (chest up, low back arch locked), armpits "tight" (like pinching someone's fingers in your armpit) and sticking your ass straight backwards, keeping the bar close to your legs. You are NOT lowering the weight. You are just pushing your hips backwards. As your hips go back, the weight will descend. BUT, the cue is "butt back", not weight down. Dan helped me cue the butt backwards by having me push my hips back until they hit a ski pole (the shaft, not the tip). Dan would progressively move the ski pole further away to get me to push my hips back farther and farther.

Also, as you push your hips back you make this "raptor-like" noise with your jaw open. It helps, don't know why. It just becomes part of the RDL, nothing you have to focus on separately.

Then when the bar got down to the top of my kneecaps, the cue was to put your "chin up" FAST. Not halfway towards the ceiling, all the way! The bar flew up. Dan progressed me multiple reps from 95, 115, 135, 145, 155. I missed 155. The bar felt heavy and it

psyched me out. Instead of following the cue to put my "chin up", I pulled the weight with my arms. I hadn't realized at first following the chin cue, I didn't even think of my arms!

Read that again!! I didn't think of using my arms. I didn't pull with my arms. My trunk followed my chin, my hips were thrust forward and the bar flew up into the catch position as I sank into a squat snatch. I didn't even think of shrugging, nothing about my arms, just my head extension.



Previous attempts of mine with the quick lifts focused on keeping the arms straight so I didn't pull with my arms. Doing it the way Dan showed me you don't have time to think of your arms. This is a BIG difference in looking at how to do the lift.

After the first few reps, I didn't need the 2x4, I just made sure to stay on my heels. Staying on your heels becomes part of the RDL technique, not a separate action.

After a few reps the lift just became "butt back - chin up". I couldn't believe the lift was this easy. I'm not known for picking up physical skills quickly. I'm no Bob Mathias. So, it must be the coaching. Man, can Dan coach. *So true, so true...*

Matt Spiller's Odyssey to Utah

What's the first thing you would feel like doing after driving an ass-numbing eleven and a half hours to Utah?

Dan thought it would be a good time to teach me how to snatch.

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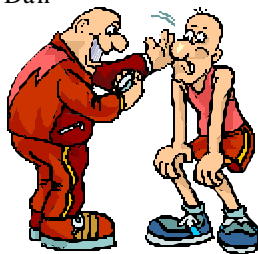
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Dan graciously invited me to his house for two days to just throw and lift. I've been unable to go to John Powell's discus camp the last three years so this was a fantastic opportunity for me.

When learning to snatch, I was expecting all sorts of complicated directions and having to focus on many things at once. This was much easier than I expected. So much for the snatch being complicated...

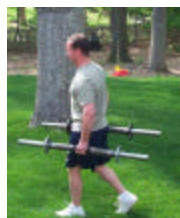
I thought making a lift with 145 (97% of max) was pretty good. Plus, this was from the hang, not the floor. I hadn't been lifting heavy or often recently due to focusing on throwing the discus in my competition phase.

Before I snatched, I warmed up with front squats with chains for 2x2. Being the first time I used chains, I was surprised how they MADE you lift fast. You have to lift fast to "outrun" the extra weight piling on. I've read how the extra weight helps to match the strength curve of the lift. And, I've read how chains are used for speed work. But, to FEEL the extra weight is totally different. Dan liked these because they taught you to lift fast. He used to have to tell the athlete to: "Down slow, up fast." Now the chains do it for him and he can save his valuable breath.



Dan's comment that if he could do it all over again, he would use chains for every press and squat shows how good this idea is.

After the lifting with the barbell was over, I got to try the original Rosenberg Bars™. 2 1/2 inches of solid metal weighing 55# in each hand. Dan prefers these for grip strength over the hand gripper type training. For discus throwing, I agree.



For abs, Dan is doing Armstrong swings more often. You take a four or five foot piece of PVC pipe with a "T" on the end, slap a 25# plate on it and swing it around like the Highland Games hammer throw. But, don't throw.

This workout format follows Dan's workout plan as detailed on his "Off Season Training" page on his website: <http://danjohn.org/2003directory.html>.

Dan recommended a similar plan to me for my "Heavy Weights" season. I periodize the year into Heavy Lifting, Heavy Throwing, and Competition phases. I plan on doing a three times a week weight training workout utilizing a day each for push, pull and squat. Then, I will have four conditioning workouts (A,B,C,D) that will be done in the park across from my house afterwards. Thus, I'll be doing the same weight exercises and conditioning exercises together only once a month or so.

Another conditioning tool Dan uses is Hoover Ball. Volleyball with a medball, with no spiking. This will get your heart pumping and your lungs huffing and puffing. Excellent "cardio" option.



"IT HAS THE VIRTUE OF GETTING AT NEARLY EVERY MUSCLE IN THE BODY."



(From the official "Hooverball" site)

I quickly realized that Dan's approach to improve throwing technique does not consist of telling the athlete what he is doing wrong and then having the athlete try the throw again following the new directions. What he does is find a drill that: "teaches the thrower" automatically how to do the movement better. Experiencing this new motor pattern, the athlete can then carryover this "feeling" to the competition throw.

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A lot of the drills use heavy implements. Heavy implements can “magnify” any mistakes you make, often causing you to fall on your face.

Although we focused on the discus throw, these principles apply to any rotational thrower, including shot putters and Highland Games contestants. All the following descriptions apply to right handed throwers. So, sorry to all you left handed freaks. You will also need to be familiar with Dan’s terminology, such as “1, 2, 3, etc.” as outlined in Dan’s excellent discus book. It can be found for free at: <http://danjohn.org/book.pdf>

Drills covered included:

2-3 with tire

Teaches you to stay upright
Teaches you to turn with bent legs
Straightening legs will cause you to lose balance and fall

You hold a tire with your right hand (glove recommended) and repeat 2-3s down a straight line. If you’re doing it correctly, you will follow a straight line. If you do it wrong, you will go off track. If you straighten your legs, you will fall, trust me. You want to “paw” with your legs as you turn down the line. It is also recommended to do this drill up a hill.

Nickersons

Helps “erase” all the little errors you make with the throw
Focuses on the main footwork of the throw

Hold a medicine ball or weight and start at the end of the throw. Hold the object out in front of you as it would be just before release. Support the object and your right hand with your left hand. Whip the implement backwards behind you to start the throwing pattern backwards. So, you start in 3 and move backwards through 2 and 1 to the start of the throw. Then, move forwards through the discus throw pattern. Repeat backwards and forwards many times fast.

I also did these with the 56# weight going backwards only. Standing in 3, swing the weight straight forward, then as it goes straight backwards it pulls you through the throw pattern backwards.

56 throw for distance

Teaches you to stay upright
Teaches you to hold the stretch

Stand with feet apart holding the 56 pound weight in your right hand. Imagine you are standing with both feet on a line. You are going to work your way down the line to your left. Swing the weight across the front of you, then behind you to start the throw of the weight. As you swing the weight around from behind you to in front of you, let it pull you around as you pivot on your left foot and swing your right foot around to land on the line. Keep pivoting on the right foot swinging your left foot on the line. Continue to pivot on your left foot and step forward into the 1 position. Then complete 2 and 3 and throw.

Float Float Sting

Teaches “rhythm” of throw

Holding a discus perform 1-2-3-shuffle-shuffle-1-2-3-shuffle-shuffle-1-2-3-throw. The shuffle-shuffle is basically hopping forward with both feet with your feet staying in the 3 position, pushing off with your right foot.

Tire overhead

Teaches you to stay upright, in all phases of throw

See the book.

Stone throw with right foot turn

Teaches right foot turn/push

Hold a heavy (about 80#) rock in front of you with both hands. Stand in the 3 position, but have your right foot turned pointing 90 degrees to the right. Pivot on the ball of your right foot so that it is pointing forward then throw the rock straight forward with both hands.

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Stand Shot put with right foot turn

Teaches right hip/foot turn/push

Stand in the 3 position, then turn away from the direction of throw. Holding the 16# shot at your neck with your forearm perfectly vertical (the "pillar of power"), turn your feet to face the direction of throw, then put the shot.

Dan sure can coach. And if you forget to say this out loud, he will cue you. (Editor: yes, I do do that, don't I?) He's constantly monitoring his athlete, even more so than the athlete is monitoring himself. He knows when to hand you a beer and when to add more weight to the bar. His plans are flexible and change rapidly based on how the athlete is responding. This can only be achieved by experience, lots of it. And, if he hasn't seen what the heck you're doing before, he can figure it out.

On day three, I was doing snatches with the "proper" technique but losing them out in front. I couldn't figure out why. After a minute, Dan figured out that my fast twitch fibers weren't twitching fast. I was doing "chin up to ceiling" correctly, but too slowly.

Dan helped me find a "set" technique that I could continue to practice on my own at home. I focus on starting the throw keeping a bent left leg and leading with my right knee. At 2, I "paw" myself around which helps me turn the right leg all the way. However, I can't focus on "putting the plate up on the shelf" also. It's too much to focus on all at once. If I focus on "putting the plate up on the shelf", I don't turn my right foot all the way around. So, for now, I focus on the right foot more. Once, my "set" technique is ingrained I can focus on other points.

Dan offered to let me look through his extensive library of track and field and weightlifting books and videos. I was fortunate enough to be able to photocopy a lot of disc related information, much of it out-of-print and one-of-a-kind. I'm still going through all of it.

Learning the rotational throws without a coach isn't easy. Dan's book helped a lot and

training with Dan in person helped a lot more. Now I'm training regularly with Dan's friends here in California. I look forward to the next time I make the trek out to Utah to throw and lift. An Old Email...from a few months ago...

I just found a post that Dustin 3 had put up a few years ago. It discusses the old East German training theories. It really interested me because so many of these ideas have surfaced among the resources that I use and respect. A quick and inadequate overview:

1. Squat once a week, generally with 5 sets of 5. For part of the year, all five sets are the same weight, other times, one increases all five sets.
2. "Hip Snatches," or High Hang Snatches into the split are done twice a week. The reps are 3-2-1-3-2-1-3-2-1.
3. Presses are done four days a week. Bench, incline, decline and military are rotated through each week with lots of the lifts done off of "pads" or cushions, so when they come down, the bar has a little "pop" off the pads.



It just seems something to think about.

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