

Dick Notmeyer on “Life and Lifting”

Blue Plate Specials

Building the lower back, the *spinae erectors*, was done on ancient sets of wooden blocks covered in what, at one time, may have been yellow-green shag carpet. Hooking one’s ankles under a bar fastened between two wall studs, the athlete positioned the *genitals* between a space in the blocks. The exercise was the hyperextension, but filled with danger. A small, square bit of pad was placed on the cement floor to prevent head banging. The “Blue Plate Specials” were 102.5 pound blue weights which Dick would hoist on the upper shoulders and head. Part of the fun of the exercise was holding the weight, doing the hyperextensions and trying not to let the weight smash your forehead between padded cement and blue plate. Doing this exercise “*to failure*” has the same meaning as the entrance to Dante’s Inferno, “Abandon all hope ye who enter here.”

Those who survived were rewarded with very strong lower backs.

Behind the Neck Presses

The most complex exercise ever invented is Dick Notmeyer’s “Behind the Neck Presses.” We will discuss this in a step by step manner, although it will still not make sense:

1. Place the bar at the end of the bench. Part of the fun of this exercise is loading extra plates. You see, with the bar straddling the bench, adding weight to one side makes the other side flip up. Great fun for the whole family when the bar swings up and careens into a lifting buddy.
2. Sitting on the bench, grip the bar in the snatch grip.
3. Stand up with the bar. Lean back to “pull the shoulders back.”
4. Dip the bar to the knees, snatch the bar overhead, and sit on the bench. All in one movement, ideally.
5. Begin pressing the bar behind the neck. Get that goofy, hyper-smile grimace you can look at in the mirror.
6. On the last rep, let the bar come down and stand up.
7. Gingerly, replace the bar on the bench.
8. Add weight on one side allowing the bar to flip up and hit a training partner. Laugh. Have Dick once again explain that you need to keep your hands on the bar when adding weight.
9. Repeat until everyone has been hit by the flipping bar.

Arm Work

Arm work at the Pacifica Barbell Club involved a highly scientific, and systematic, program of fooling around on the preacher bench. The key was to insure that one’s arms were draped over the preacher bench in clear view of the mirror. The athlete begins by squashing his arms across the preacher bench and stating: “I wish my arms looked like this.” A few meaningless sets of curls with the E-Z curl bar were done.

Triceps Work has a famous story, which I doubt is true. In the dark recesses of the gym’s history, a young trainer lay on a bench and began doing triceps extensions. Struggling to get those triceps “pumped,” the lifter tried to bounce the weight, as we often do in Bench Presses. So, he focused at the top of the extension, brought the bar down fast, and attempted to bounce the bar off of his forehead. He succeeded in bouncing the bar, but, for some reason, could not finish the rep.

Recent research has deemed that the P.B.B.C. arm work program to be referred to, in science circles, as “screwing around.”

Ab Work

Each day, the various team members and trainers would make the pilgrimage to 790 Moana Way and learn the nuances of the Olympic Lifts. But before going to the platform, one must work one’s abs. The ab machine was a standard slant board with a small pole to help one hold steady while getting on and off.

Dick was the master of ab work. He could do multiple sets with weights held behind his head. Multiple sit up record boards were littered throughout the ab machine area. Very, very few people attempted to break these records.

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Bench Press Club

The goal of every member of the P.B.B.C., whether lifter, thrower, or trainer, was to move up to the next twenty-five pound level on the Bench Press Board. The Board was stricter than any powerlifting meet.

1. No arching, bouncing, wraps, cheating, uneven pressouts, or anything else.
2. Bring the bar down under control, wait, wait, wait, wait, for Dick’s clap.
3. Press the bar out.
4. If Dick wasn’t there, it didn’t count.

The Club started at 200 pounds and moved up in increments of twenty-five pounds. It also included the strange case of the three members of the “Red Star Club” being all next to each other.

The Red Star Club

The most exclusive club, and with the least interest in joining it, belonged to the members of the Red Star Club. The members died.

The Hangman’s Noose

Above the platform at the Pacifica Bar Bell Club a hangman’s noose greeted every lifter into the gym. This was a lasting reminder of the most famous of the Red Star Club’s members, Joe Vega. He had followed Dick’s advice to the letter, then fell for a woman who liked thin men and dropped all his gains. Then, she dropped him.

He decided to start training again. On his last visit, before leaving, he strung the noose. He would die in a pool hall before ever returning.

For a few years after Joe’s death, Dick would hear rustling in the weight room and the clanging of weights. Reg, the dog, would stare into the gym until Dick would finally come in and say “Joe, I gotta go to work in the morning, cut it out!” The gym would quiet.

Fun Time

Howard Will, the cigar smoking and dry martini swilling health enthusiast, coined this term for the time spent doing squats. Any squatting motion could be included under “Fun Time,” however, the term is used best when attempting as many squats as possible with bodyweight loaded on the bar. When doing up to fifty reps in this exercise, every rep above thirty is just fun, fun, fun. Really, you should try it.

Country Music

To insure the highest levels of focus and intensity, Dick chose to allow his athletes to listen to Country Music. This insured that no lifter would be caught spending time listening to the music or being unduly sidetracked by a favorite tune. It also allowed group singing of Eddie Arnold’s great yodeling ballad, “The Lonesome Cattle Call.” Cats from all over Pacifica would come to the gym after these sessions.

The Incline

Perhaps the finest piece of equipment in the gym was the Incline Bench Press. Commercial quality with sturdy foot rests, the incline was used most of the time as a seat. But, if you needed to use it, the incline could be used for training.

Widers

The Black Widow population of Pacifica seemed centered around the two by fours that housed the P.B.B.C. gymnasium. Eric Seubert seemed to have a particular aversion to poisonous creatures, so he would occasionally go on “Wider” hunts with a weightlifting boot and a torch made of paper towels. Safety was not an issue, but the “Wider” population would drop dramatically.

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Clackers (Spelling Unknown)

Stupid behaviors including statements, actions, trippings and general stupid behaviors were dealt with by “Clackers.” The “Clacker” was a small, pronged bell that would be rung with a chorus of lifters yelling “Clackers.” Pete Hoffman owns all the gym records for clackering behaviors.

Snatch Grip Deadlifts and Shrugs

Although nothing unusual, this exercise involved a wide grip deadlift, focusing on pushing the platform away with the legs, not shooting the hips up. After three reps, the athlete finished by making huge circles with the shoulders, the “shrugs.”

To make the lift easier, Dick would get into the lifter’s line of vision and ask questions, then say “you don’t know” and “what do you know?” You see, the lifter was making the international sign of “I dunno.” Dick was making a joke. You had to be there.

Signing In

During each workout, Dick (and only Dick) would write the various names of the gym members training that day. The ebb and flow of names provides a short history of the gym and the seriousness of the trainers.

Record Board

Breaking P.B.B.C. gym records is not an easy thing to do. The record board was based on weight classes from 1968 and includes Press, Snatch, Clean and Jerk, Squat, Bench and Behind the Neck Press. Record holders include national champions, international competitors and a lot of crazies.

The Dessicated Liver and Brewers Yeast Incident

Although perhaps not familiar with most club members, in the late Seventies, a serious of terrible smells of toxic proportions nearly leveled the gym. Eric Seubert and Dan John had read that large amounts of Dessicated Liver and Brewers Yeast mimicked anabolic steroids. They ordered two thousand tablets of each and began eating them in handfuls of fifty or more three times a day.

What they did not understand was the digestive tract. Yeast and liver merely “ferment” at these levels, providing an “air” pocket to grow in the system. This “air” needs to be released, usually during Front Squats.

It was before the era of Hazardous Materials Teams and lives could have been saved with some foresight and planning.

Nothing feels as good as a nice snatch

Motto of the Sports Palace, the team P.B.B.C. members would compete for at regional and national events. The motto epitomized the tremendous feeling of completing the lifting action in the first of the Olympic movements. Perhaps it also underscored the confidence boost one gets from “getting on the board” in a meet. Other teams would laugh at this motto for unknown reasons. Jealousy?

What did you have for Breakfast?

This question: “What did you have for Breakfast?” is the answer to all questions and the question to all answers. “I want to gain weight, I want to lose weight, I want to lift more” were all answered by Dick with “What did you have for Breakfast?”

A good breakfast: Meat, eggs, other stuff

A bad breakfast: Not meat, eggs, other stuff

Note: the all-time answer by a young new lifter: “I had a great breakfast: seven bowls of Cheerios!”

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The Old Guy

Dick’s nemesis in the Pier to Park race was a ninety-seven year old man who would heckle Dick mercilessly through the year. “The Old Guy” was ultimately beaten by Dick in this race. Dick had the dignity not to trash talk him in the hearse.

P.R.

It means “Personal Record.” For most, it meant one’s best snatch, clean and jerk, or other major lift. For others, it meant best triple in the behind the neck press with dumbbells on a Thursday in July.

Gym Dues

The P.B.B.C. was not a cheap place to work out. Gym dues, however, were able to remain the same from the beginning of gym history until its cluttered closing. Twenty-five cents a week was the standard fee, or about one dollar every four weeks.

“Jumping out of the window” Club

The roots of this particular club are difficult to find, although gym historians believe two basic theories. One, this behavior’s roots come from the Plyometrics craze of the mid-Seventies. Theory two has more supporters: it was a stupid thing to do and extremely difficult, so let’s make a contest of it.

Correct performance:

1. Stand behind the line. (Originally, it was on the platform mats)
2. Leap out of open window. (There have been no “closed” window incidents)
3. Land outside. Try not to hit head on top of frame, but it could still count.

Chalking Up

Dick’s advice carried over to every aspect of behavior at meets. Chalking up, preparing the hands to lift by adding chalk, was an art form.

Correct performance:

1. Stand with a slight twist to the audience so your right arm (or left if it is bigger) faces the head judge and your chest “twists” away.
2. Grab chalk and bring your right arm next to your body as you inflate your chest. Keep forearm at a ninety degree angle, forearm parallel with floor
3. Dig biceps into inflated chest. This causes the biceps to look huge.
4. Wait for “ooo’s” and “aah’s” from delighted fans.

When Joe Vega was preparing for a lift at a powerlifting contest, a young “wannabee” bodybuilder and aspiring actor named Arnold Schwartzegger gasped when he saw Joe’s arm. Dick was amazed this novice lifter did not know this trick.

Slapping the Ceiling

The P.B.B.C. program lends itself to great leaping abilities. One day, a small cadre of runners came to the gym to look around. One asked Dick: “What good is lifting?” Dick simply said: “Jump up and touch the ceiling.” The runner could not, he couldn’t even get the beams. “Dan, come over here.” Dick handed Dan a 45 pound plate and said: “Touch the ceiling.” Holding the weight, Dan leaped up, slapped his palm against the ceiling, then returned to training.

“That’s what’s good about lifting.”

Movie Manners

Dick occasionally filmed meets. Part of his instructions included: “Do not *adjust* yourself while I am filming.” Unfortunately, if one broke this commandment, the rewind button would play over and over again.

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The 25 Pound Cat

The story of the “25 Pound Cat” can either make one trust Dick’s methods or make them run away screaming. The 25 pound cat was a feline taken under Dick’s care. Dick decided to test his beliefs in Protein Powder on the cat and, eventually, the cat grew to be the size of a small car. The cat died fighting a raccoon.

So, if anyone questions the value of protein supplements, Dick can always argue what it did for his cat.

One Arm Salute

The official “secret handshake” of the P.B.B.C. is the single arm biceps flex.

1. Inflate chest to a ridiculous level.
2. Hold right arm to side, parallel to floor.
3. Curl arm and “peak” bicep.
4. Look off into the vast unknown with a passive expression that masks the raw power of one’s person.

“...Never use this new found strength for evil gains ...”

Part of the agreement of becoming a P.B.B.C. lifter was to swear to not use one’s “new found” strength for the pursuit of evil, or, technically, “evil gains.” The oath was stated in a solemn occasion that includes much secret mumbo-jumbo and extraneous flourishes. This oath, as far as we know, has never been broken.

Dick’s Nap

The posted gym hours were basically from 2:45ish to 5 something. Dick worked an early, early morning shift and took a few hour nap before everybody showed up. Much of the fun of the first minutes of training included watching Dick’s facial stretching and contortions as he tried to “unslumber.”

“Just flip through these and find the body you want . . .”

The highlight of the first day for all aspiring lifters was when Dick would hand them a muscle magazine and tell them: “Just flip through these magazines and find the body you want and I will design a program for you to look like that.” “How long?” “Well, for a normal kid, a year, a year and a half. But, for you, maybe only six months.” “Really.”

Yeah, really.

“Like Europeans”

After Dick returned from the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, he had acquired a distaste for the European method of standing in lines. The Europeans, it seems, do not respect personal space and would crowd, ahem, “too close” behind Dick in lines. This, of course, led to hours of Europeans squatting, Europeans benching, and Europeans chalking up. Well, you had to be there . . .



And, as you know, it was wonderful to be there.

(Eric, Dan and Dick at Dick and Joy’s 50th Wedding Anniversary Party...reading this glossary)