

Spring Fever

Now that Oscar has been decided, the NFL season is over...save for wondering how Maurice Clarett got so slow..., the Editorial Board has officially declared it to be Spring. Go outside and train.

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*.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Dan,

Just a quick note to let you know how much I have enjoyed reading both “Get Up” and your new book “From the Ground Up.” You have some great stuff in the both about oly lifting and throwing, but by far the most helpful items for me (so far) have been your advice on training logs, and your “Rapid Ascent” workout (which I shorten to RAW in my log, as I sometimes want to add that extra “s “ to the word ascent, in the same manner as my 5th grade students often do).

I have been lifting since my mid 20’s (that was a long time ago!) mostly doing bodybuilding type stuff, not making much progress (lifting to failure, literally and figuratively) until I came across Milo a few years back. Started training heavier, trying a lot of different programs, and made some gains, which at this point was great, since I made few in the first 10 year of my lifting career. A few years back I decided to keep a log—I’m not sure why really—perhaps I was anticipating great gains, and thought I’d record them for posterity.

Well, I never really thought to look at them, until I read your comments about keeping a log and “mining it” for useful information. I decided to go back and review my logs to look at all I had accomplished. Boy, what an eye opener! No progress! It seems that I have been making the same mistakes over and over—skipping workouts, not finishing sets, and not keeping accurate records, among other bad habits. No wonder I wasn’t making progress.

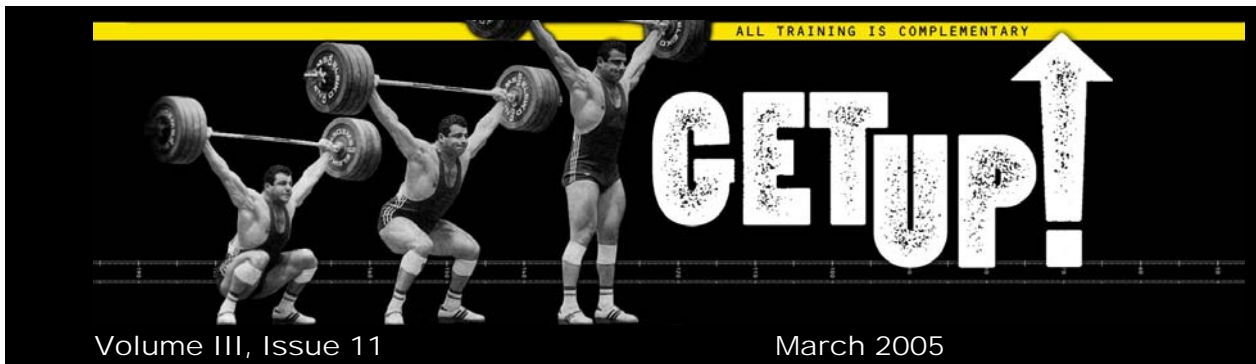
A slightly humbling experience, to say the least. Needless to say, I’m now keeping accurate records, and reviewing them each week. I also made a list of the most common mistakes I was making, and pasted that in my workout log as a reminder. Seems to help.

In reviewing my logs, I saw that I was all over the map—One week I’d lift kettlebells, next week it would be nothing but squats, the next week it would be something else. I realized that I needed a basic, two day a week program (I’m doing CrossFit the other two days, which does work for me) that I would stick with. Stumbling across your Rapid Ascent workout, I decided to give it a try. Even though it seemed too simple (after all, I’m not a beginner—that’s what I told myself). Surprisingly, it is exactly what I need to get some basic lifting in and to balance out my other workouts.

So much for the quick note. Many thanks for all the great info, it has been of great help to me (even though I am not a master’s lifter or thrower—yet).

Clay Jones

Clay is an educator in Northern California and a welcome addition to our Get Up! community.



Join the 300lb Overhead Press Club

Keith Wassung

Keith Wassung is a former natural powerlifting and Olympic lifting champion, with an impressive athletic resume in football, track and wrestling. He is the author of nearly 40 publications relating to health research and lectures extensively around the country to both Doctors of Chiropractic and to Medical Doctors.

The overhead press has always been the premiere shoulder exercise for strength and development. Few exercises are as satisfying as the overhead press. I believe that if you could find a remote, primitive island in the world and left a loaded barbell on the beach in the middle of the night, within a week, the men of the island would be trying to lift it over their heads. The heaviest recorded weight that has been pressed in an overhead manner was 535lbs by Ken Patera, in the early 1970's. Patera, who became famous as a professional wrestler, may have been the strongest man ever to compete in Olympic lifting, but he lacked the technical proficiency of his competitors

Pressing big weights is a real kick and it is rare to see in most gyms. Many years ago, I visited the original Golds Gym in Santa Monica with some friends. We were dressed in street clothes and were wandering around, watching all of the bodybuilders train. We came to a seated press unit and my friends coaxed me to do some overhead presses. I did not want to do this knowing that I was amongst people who routinely pressed 300lbs for 8-10 reps, or at least that is what I was led to believe by reading the various magazines. I started warming up and as I added weight, I began drawing on-lookers. By the time I had 315lbs on the bar, about three-fourths of the gym members had gathered around to watch (talk about pressure) I did 4 hard reps with the crowd enthusiastically cheering me on.

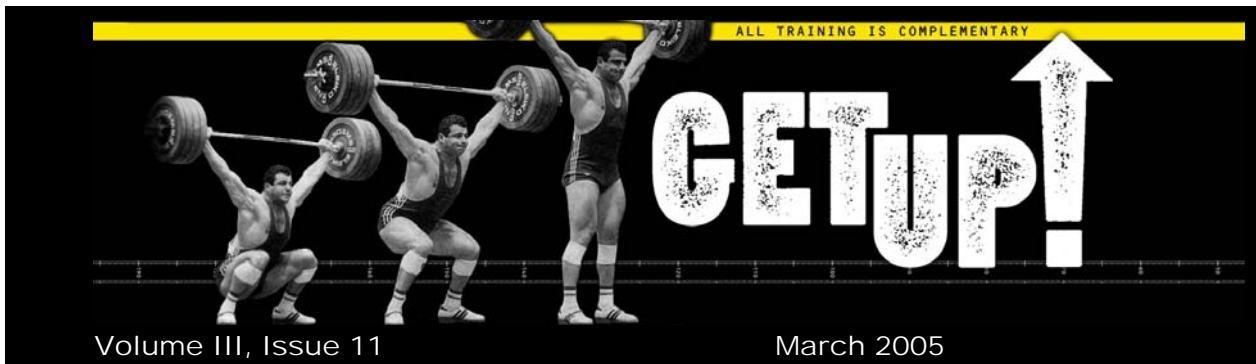
I believe that if you can bench press 225lbs, then you have the capacity to eventually perform an overhead press with 300lbs. This may take you a year or it may take five years, but the effort will be worth it.

One of the most common questions that I am asked is what is the best combination of sets and reps to do in order to achieve increased strength and development. My answer has always been that it really does not matter as long as you are training in a progressive manner. Progression and overload are two very important principles that must be followed, yet are often overlooked in many people's training program. Strength and development is as much of an art, as it is a science. You have to experiment, keep track of your numbers in a training log and make adjustments as necessary. I have always believed that the best way to make consistent, long-term progress is to do a wide range of repetitions in your training,

In order to increase your standing overhead press, you have to develop near perfect technique, strengthen your weak points and get your body physically and mentally prepared to lift heavy weights over your head.

Technique

The body has to work in harmony with itself as a unit. Each muscle or set of contracting muscles has an opposite set of muscles, which are referred to as the antagonistic muscles. For example, the triceps are antagonistic to the biceps when doing barbell curls. To maximize your training, the antagonistic muscles need to be set or balanced against the contractor muscles. When standing in the traditional upright stance, there is little balance and once the lifting begins, the antagonistic muscles actually begin draining the contractor (the ones used in the exercise) muscles of strength and energy. To place



yourself in the strongest standing position, you should place one foot approximately 3-4 inches in front of the other in a staggered stance. This will place you in a much stronger stance permitting more work to be performed. Boxers, martial artists, baseball players and track and field athletes also use the staggered stance. If you ever see pictures of past Olympic lifters such as Vasily Alexeev or Paul Anderson, you will notice that their feet are staggered when elevating weights overhead.

Practice with a somewhat narrower grip-many people use the same grip on their overheads that they do on the bench press but bringing your grip in just a bit will give you a stronger and faster press. Take the barbell from the uprights and get set into your stance, maintaining tightness in the mid-section and lower back. When you begin pressing the bar, you want to be looking at a very slight up angle. This will take your head slightly back and will allow the bar to pass in front of your face without having to change the trajectory of the bar. As the bar clears the top of your head, you will want to push the bar up and slightly back in a straight line so that you end up with the bar directly over the center of your head.

You would be surprised how many people perform this movement incorrectly. Instead of pressing so that the weight ends up overhead, it ends up actually in front of the head. The leverage that your shoulders have to work against when you're in this adverse position can really put undue and unnecessary stress on your shoulders-the joints, not the muscles, and will inhibit you from pressing the maximum amount of weight in this exercise.

Lock the bar out, lower back to your shoulders and repeat for the desired number of reps. It is important to start each press from a stopped position. It is easy to develop a habit of lowering the weight and then rebounding off the shoulders to start the next rep. By starting each rep from a

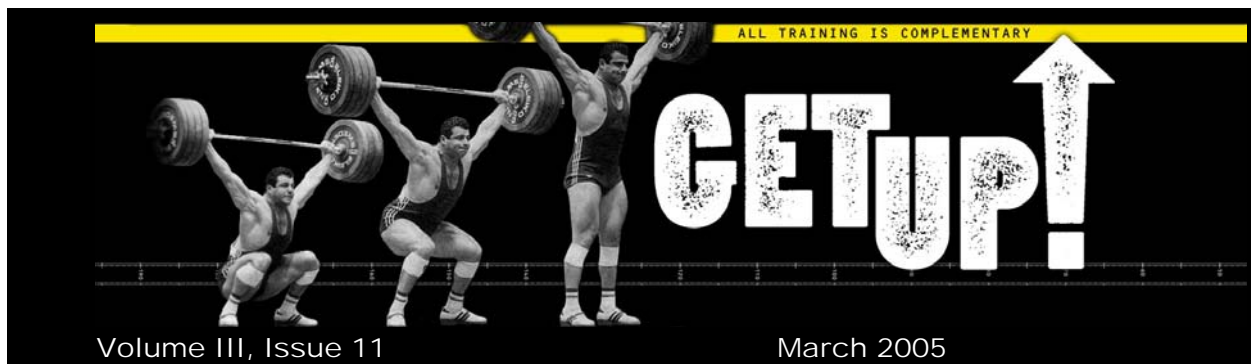
“dead” position, you might initially have to reduce the weight you are lifting, but you will be much stronger in the end, especially when performing maximum singles.

Strengthening Weak Points

One of the limiting factors in the overhead press is the strength and flexibility of the lower back and mid-section. Train your mid-section as hard as you train anything else. Mid-section weakness is very common among lifters. It is not that the mid-section is weak, but it is weak in comparison to other parts of the body that are worked in a progressive manner. If your goal is strength and power, then traditional abdominal isolation exercises, such as crunches and leg raises will only take you so far in your quest for optimal strength and development.

The purpose of the mid-section is primarily for stabilization and therefore this area needs to be worked in a static manner. Do as much of your mid-section training as you can while standing on your feet. Perform overhead lockouts, overhead shrugs and learn to do overhead squats (Use a search engine and type in overhead squats, Dan John to learn this valuable exercise from the master himself) I like to elevate objects such as dumbbells or a keg over my head and then go for a walk around the neighborhood or up and down the stairs. I walk until I cannot keep the weight overhead, then I place it on the ground, rest for 20 seconds and then keep moving again. These types of exercises will build your mid-section and have a tremendous impact on your overall strength and physical preparedness.

If you have been working hard on basic exercises such as squats, dead lifts or rows, you have no doubt experienced either a stiff back or overworked lumbar muscles to the point where you cannot relax or tighten them completely.



Your back can become as "stiff as a board" with the lumbar muscles so hard to the touch or so fatigued that they are like a steel spring that has been overstretched. It is essential to have the back properly stretched and warmed up prior to performing any type of overhead presses. Hanging from a chinning bar for a minute or two each day will decompress the lumbar spine and increase flexibility. I also like to do some hyperextensions and some very light bent leg dead lifts in order to prepare the lumbar spine for overhead presses.

Overload & Adjunct Exercises

Marathon runners traditionally trained by running in excess of one hundred miles each week always at or near marathon pace and speed. The legendary running coach, Arthur Lydiard of New Zealand was one of the first coaches who realized that long distance runners could improve their race times by performing sprint training in their workouts. He used to have his marathon runners compete in the sprint events at the club level. All of his runners hated sprinting but they all loved setting records and winning world and Olympic championships. Coach Lydiard improved his runner's performance by employing a form of overload. The first principle of weight training is overload. Overload refers to placing greater than usual demands on the muscle group being worked. In essence, to increase muscular performance, a muscle group must be worked harder than it usually works to complete everyday activities. As muscle strength and/or endurance increase, the amount of resistance or repetitions necessary for overload must increase as well. The Overload Principle is a concept based on "overloading" the muscles by lifting more than it is use to doing.

The primary method of overload for the overhead press is the seated overhead press. This exercise will allow you to work the pressing muscles of the upper body, while minimizing the

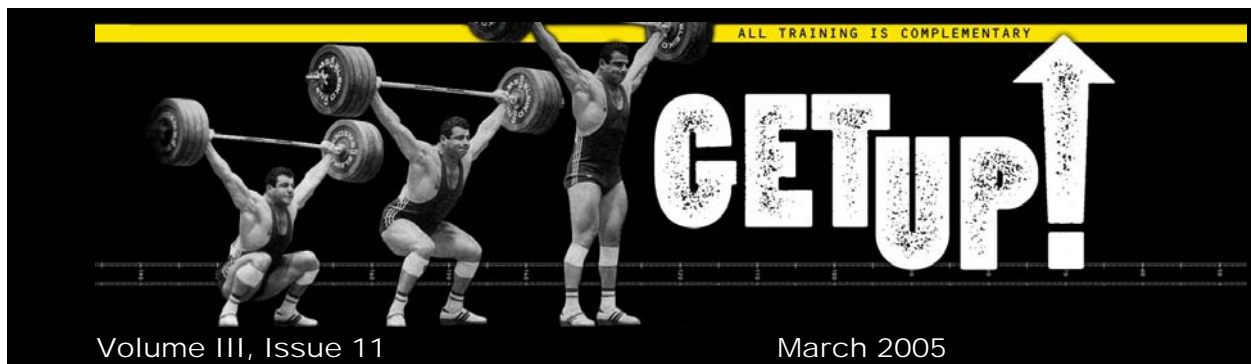
stress on the lower back. I have found that by alternating the standing press with the seated press, I can use heavier weight and train with a much greater frequency that if I were to only perform standing presses.

When performing the seated MAKE SURE that you do this with the back braced-do not do this movement sitting on the end of a flat bench or on a stool as this places a great deal of stress on the lumbar spine, which is what we are trying to avoid in the first place. The design of the seated press machine if very important.

You don't want the back of the unit to come up in higher than your shoulders-if it does, you can't get your head out of the way of the bar. You also want to be sure that you can brace your feet against something in order to drive the low back solidly against the backboard of the unit. If you do not have the ideal apparatus as your gym, then might have to mix and match some equipment pieces in order to achieve the desired effect. This is why you should always keep a roll of duct tape in your gym bag!

I also suggest doing the seated presses starting from the bottom position and not where someone hands it to you from the overhead position, and then you bring it down and back up-you want to mimic the mechanics of the standing overhead press as much as possible. For some variety, you can do a seated 80-degree incline press as a core exercise. This also takes the lower back out of it and really allows you to get used to lifting heavy weights overhead. I believe that if I had never done the seated presses and the 80-degree presses, I would have never exceeded 300lbs in the standing overhead press.

The next movement is a heavy push press done in the power rack. Use a weight that is roughly equivalent to your best single rep in the standing overhead press. You put the pins 4-5 inches



below the starting position. squat down and get set with the bar, explode up elevate the bar to just over the top of your head, and then slowly count to 4 on the way down, set it on the pins, explode and repeat for 6 total reps-this is the most brutal thing I have ever done for the upper body-you will likely need a spotter (just to yell at you, rather than for safety reasons) and if you feel like or want to do a second set, then you did not use enough weight on your first set. This will do as much to improve your overhead strength capacity as anything I know.

If you need to improve the strength of your triceps then consider doing some overhead presses while using a narrow grip. I use the same grip that I would for a narrow grip bench press with the index fingers being on the smooth part of the bar and the middle finger on the knurling. You will find that your arms may prevent you from lowering the bar all the way down to the upper chest/shoulder region. Use whatever range of motion works for you. As an added twist, you can use this same grip to do overhead lockouts. Place the pins in the power rack so that the bar is even with the top of the head and then press the weight to lockout.

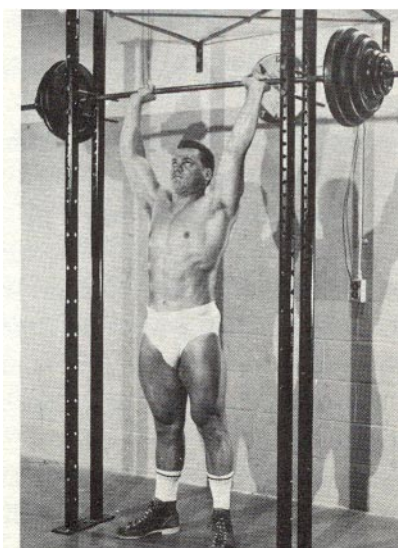
Barbell bent over rows are an excellent adjunct movement for the overhead press. It is safe to say that barbell rows are an excellent adjunct movement for just about every lift. Work this movement hard and don't be surprised if you see increases in all of your lifts as well as increases in muscular development. One of the great aspects of the bent-over row is that there is a wide variety of techniques and variations to choose from which means that just about anyone can find a method of performing this movement regardless of their body structure. The important thing is to ensure that your technique is consistent so that increased poundage is the result of strength gains, not in favorable advantages in the biomechanics of the lift.

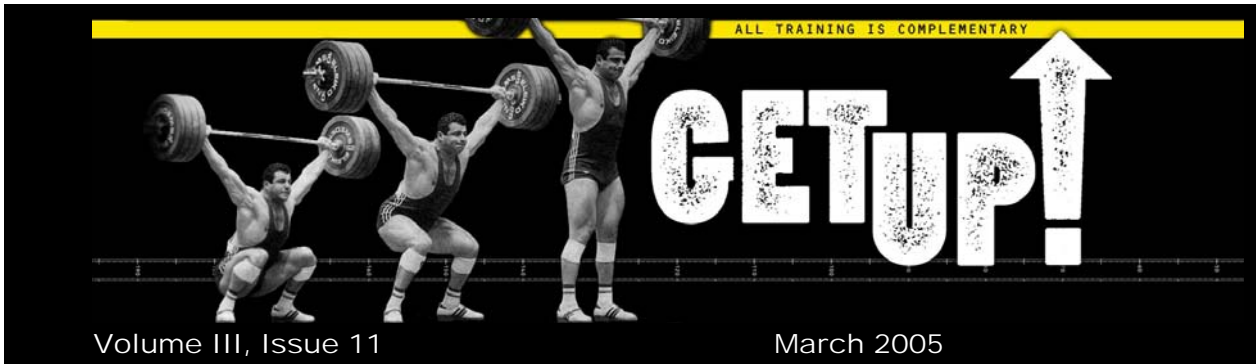
FINAL THOUGHTS

The frequency in which you train the overhead press is entirely an individual decision. If you are focused on improving the bench press, then consider adding in the overhead press about once a week. If you want to specialize on the overhead press, then you can do it as much as twice per week. I personally always did best training the overhead press about three times every two weeks. I would suggest doing nothing but standing overhead presses during one workout, then the seated presses and the adjunct work on the second workout. Make sure you are keeping your shoulders healthy with proper warm-ups and rotator cuff training. Best of luck on your quest to 300 and beyond.

It's not the best athlete who wins, but the best prepared."

- Arthur Lydiard,





Kettle Bells and Throwers

Editor in Chief

This is part of the upcoming talk for the National Kettlebell Convention.

Foundation Statements:

1. "Any drill that 70% of the fighters cannot catch on to right away has to be eliminated, no matter how good it is."

Steve Baccari

2. "If it is important, do it every day. If it isn't, don't do it at all."

Dan Gable

3. "Only recruit two things: speed and smarts. You can teach everything else."

Coach Ralph Maughan

4. "Rome wasn't built in a day...but I wasn't the foreman on that job either."

Dan John

Kettlebells and Throwers: My Approach

Things we "do a little different:"

- We don't warm up.
- We don't run.
- We don't do "standing throws."
- We don't jog.
- We think everyone can win the State Championship.
- We rarely train for more than an hour.

The "New Circuits"

One Kettlebell at the Track Option

Crosswalk...Throw...Kbell

Snatch...Throw...Military

Press...Throw...Waiter

Walk...Throw...

The German Javelin

Program...with Kbells

One hand Clean x 10

One hand Military Press x 10

One hand Snatch x 10

One hand Front Squat x 10

Switch hands and repeat!!!

Try one full circuit.. then, two, then three over time...

Throwing 101: What Kettlebell

Enthusiasts can learn from throwers:

1. The need for "Continuous Acceleration."

2. Push the "Car up the Hill"

3. Check for Leakage

4. Make it whip

5. Don't be a fool when you talk about "strong."

More Next Time!!!

Published by Daniel John

Daniel John, Editor

Copyright © Daniel John, 2004

All Rights Reserved

Any unauthorized reproduction is strictly prohibited.