

STARTIN' OUT

A special section dedicated to the beginning lifter

'Mass' Routine as told by Bev Francis



BEV FRANCIS...SIX times she was a World Champion in Powerlifting.

Most people agree that the most effective method of producing gains in strength is to use high intensity training, and this method has been discussed widely in many articles.

However, I believe that many beginners and women in particular, who have not been exposed to severe and highly intense exercise, must first learn how to push, or pull against resistance. To a person who considers a 15 lb. turkey as "heavy", a 30 or 40 lb. barbell is going to appear almost immovable.

The best way for this person to get used to "shifting a weight" is to use a weight that they can handle with confidence, but in order to work the muscle, they must move this weight many times. The sheer bulk of work involved in doing 10 or more sets of prescribed weight, a set number of times, will work and exhaust the muscle, but in a different way than completing a relatively heavy set to absolute exhaustion. The beginner is not really capable of pushing to exhaustion. His brain will tell him (or her) that the body is exhausted, before it actually is, and the real value of the intense workout is lost. The mind must be trained along with the body, to accept work and to push through, even when the "going gets tough". A long repetitive workout, like the type I am suggesting, develops mental toughness and the ability to

concentrate, as well as developing a physical foundation of strength and muscle density.

The basic workout I use for this purpose is 10 sets of 10 repetitions with a predetermined weight. To do this workout, you would first do warm up sets of 10 repetitions, starting with a light weight and working up to your workout weight in jumps of 20-30 lbs. (less if you are going to be working under 140 lbs.). This may take anything from 3-6 sets. When you have reached your desired workout weight, you do 10 sets of 10 repetitions, never changing the weight. Take as much time as you need between sets, so that you feel you have recovered enough to do the next set. If this workout was easy, next time add 5 lbs. to the weight and repeat. If you were unable to finish the workout, next time lower the weight and try again.

After a couple of trial and error sessions, you will find a level that is hard, but which you are able to complete.

To add variety and to keep a system where you are able to complete workouts (as it is very satisfying to complete a pre-planned "mass" workout) you can do sets of different numbers of repetitions. I used sets of 8,6,5,4, and 3s, still keeping the weight constant throughout the workout and still doing 10 sets. As you do fewer repetitions add 5 lbs.

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to the bar. For example, if you were doing 10 sets of 10 repetitions of 160 lbs., then, on other days, you would do: 10 sets of 8 repetitions at 165 lbs., or 10 sets of 6 repetitions at 170 lbs., or 10 sets of 5 repetitions at 175 lbs., or 10 sets of 4 repetitions at 180 lbs., or 10 sets of 3 repetitions at 185 lbs.

When you successfully complete these 6 workouts, done in any order you wish, add 5 lbs. to all of them and start again.

Doing workouts this way means you are never repeating exactly the same workout, and you always feel that you are achieving something, establishing new personal bests.

These workouts take a long time, but both your bench press and squats can benefit greatly; you become very tough and develop a steadiness that will help you when you have to face maximum weights either in training or in competition.

In fact, after doing these tough and time consuming mass workouts, an intense short workout, of pushing to the limit for a couple of sets, seems like an easy workout!

A couple of other points in favor of mass workouts: 1. The repetition of the movement, both bench press and squatting, with a weight that feels heavy but is well within the lifter's personal limits, will enable the lifter to develop good style; to get the bar "in the groove", something that cannot be achieved without repeating a movement over and over again. heavy as would be used for an intense workout, means less chance of

injury as the lifter can maintain and practice perfect form. The lifter does not have the worry of being "stuck" under an extremely heavy weight.

3. The lifter gets used to pushing against a resistance, even when fatigued, and therefore learns the ability of "digging a little bit deeper" when they find the weight becoming difficult to shift.

4. Finally, the lifter becomes self-reliant, not depending on spotters, assistance clothing or a brief "psych" to complete the workout. The lifter can only depend on himself, his ability to concentrate and to be patient. (Patience is a virtue that too few powerlifters and bodybuilders possess)

I have put forward this method as a good scheme for beginners (particularly women) to develop basic strength, lifting skills and muscle thickness, but I think even the advanced lifter can benefit from this sort of training from time to time. It allows the lifter to take a break from heavy weights, while still working the muscle within the same movement pattern.

While I agree that short, intense workouts are the best for peaking for a competition, I feel that there is a definite place for other forms of training, particularly when a lifter reaches a plateau in his strength development. Then it is time to experiment and try out some different forms of training. "Mass" training is one of these methods, that I think is not only very safe, but also very productive in a variety of ways.