

TRAINING

When to Change Weight Classes as told to POWERLIFTING USA by Louie Simmons

Almost every day lifters ask me whether they should go up a weight class, go down, or stay where they are.

Let me relate from my personal experience. I competed in national contests in four weight classes, from 181 to 242, over 17 years. I totaled Elite in five weight classes. My reasons for gaining weight were different at different times.

In 1970, after my stay in the service, I resumed powerlifting. My bodyweight was 172, and I competed at 181. I never tried to reduce to compete in the 165s. Back then, I was fairly muscular, and there were no easy weight-petting in the 181 class, eventually totaling 1655 in 1973. During those 3 years, my bodyweight increased to the 190s. I would lose the weight in 7 days. It was hard to do by diet alone and sometimes a rubber suit. My weight and total had increased at the same rate. However, I injured my back after achieving the 1655 total, which limited my ability to train.

After my back had healed and I started to compete again, my training lifts were surpassing those that I hit with the 1655 total. However, when I lost weight to compete at 181, I could no longer make the lifts in meet conditions. Although I was making weight more easily (my knowledge of weight reduction was better), I was losing muscle mass too.

My sole purpose was to become better regardless of weight class, so I let my weight go up to 203 pounds. My total increased to 1825 in 1977-1978 and was the fifth or sixth best in the country at that time. My coefficient had gone up on a pound for pound basis. Gaining weight was a good move.

I was getting ready to lift in the Bob Moon Memorial Meet. Everyone at Westside was lifting at this meet, and I would be wearing my first 4 inch power belt, which I got from Pat Malone. Unfortunately, I hurt my back and had done nothing for 2 weeks prior to the meet. Not wanting to be left out, I lifted anyway, at 208 pounds. Well, I totaled 1850, which was the ninth best on the 220 ranking list. Two weeks later I totaled 1890 at 212 pounds; this total ranked me sixth at 220!

I was not thinking coefficient but ranking, so I stayed in the 220 class and tried to gain weight so that I would be a full 220 at the YMCA Nationals in Beckley, West Virginia. I came down from 230 to 220. The result was a 1950 total and first place. I squatted just 17 pounds less

a 1675 total. He had a good deadlift, but nothing else. I told Chuck that he would start to reach his potential at 242, but he wanted to beat the lifts that I had done at 220. He couldn't out-squat me. I did 775; he did 765. He couldn't out-bench me. I did 507; he did 485. He did out total me, 1985 to 1950, due to a deadlift advantage of 740 to my 722. However, within 1 year at 242, his best lifts add up to 2200 (860, 545, 793). He didn't just beat my total, he destroyed it. Like Laura, Chuck finally grew into his body structure.

Tom Waddle has a similar story. At 242 he could only do 1855. He was stuck there for years. However, after only 10 months at 275, he totaled 2060. Doug Heath could only get so much muscle mass on his small structure. My dream was for Doug to total Elite in five weight classes like myself, but his body could not carry sufficient mass to supply the strength to total Elite at 165, which is 1527. Doug's best total is 1470 at 132. Sometimes body structure works against you. Some people can get strong enough, but not big enough, and some can get big enough, but not strong enough.

Age had a significant effect on which weight class Joe McCoy would compete in. At 17 years old, Joe competed in the 165 pound class. He became a teen world champ, doing 573, 363, and 529. Joe took it easy for 2 years and then resumed training. At 20 he totaled 1545 at 165, but he had a hard time making weight. This total was made in May 1993.

At the APF Seniors in July, he failed to make weight after a severe diet and long visits to the sauna. It was clear to us that Joe should go up a weight class. In October 1993 Joe made 1660 at the Ohio State meet. He made rapid progress as a 181. Joe broke the junior world record in the bench press four times during 1994, taking it from 468 to 512. However, during this time it became increasingly hard for Joe to make the 181 weight limit. It was tough at the Junior Nationals and even tougher at the Senior Nationals, although he won both. He again made it to 181 at the WPC Worlds, but his lifts suffered badly. Thus, Joe went up to 198. He had no choice as to which weight class to lift in. Being quite young and continuously gaining muscle mass, he had to move up again.

Sometimes one must let nature dictate which weight class to compete in. The following are some of my observations for you to consider



Ed Coan has been successful from 165 lbs. all the way up to 220 lbs.

than Chip McCain's world record. My body fat at this time was 13-17%. It was easy to make weight, but my 1950 total did not increase, although my individual lifts did; my best lifts were 775, 507, and 722, a theoretical total of 2004.

Was it bad luck or was the weight loss affecting me again? I was now 36 and still not an expert on weight loss and rehydration. I decided to lift at a light 242 at the 1987 YMCA Nationals, where I did 810, 523, and 699, for a 2033 total. I did this at my normal bodyweight. Cutting weight had apparently killed my total for over 6 years. The weight loss had caused loss of muscle mass and reduced leverage. I lifted in the 275s to get my fifth

place. I was not thinking coefficient but ranking, so I stayed in the 220 class and tried to gain weight so that I would be a full 220 at the YMCA Nationals in Beckley, West Virginia. I came down from 230 to 220. The result was a 1950 total and first place. I squatted just 17 pounds less

before you change weight classes.

Body Structure: Are you too tall for a particular weight class? Do you have the bone structure to go up a class or two? I believe one should gain weight as long as at least two lifts go up dramatically. Usually, with a large weight gain your deadlift will suffer. To what extent this occurs may help determine how much you gain.

Adding Leverage: You can easily gain leverage from added muscle mass or even water retention. Edema can raise totals by increasing leverage.

Advantages of Lighter Weight Classes: If you are in a lighter weight class, 132 or below and you like winning titles or trophies, you may want to keep making weight. Going from an Elite total at 132 (1246) to an Elite total at 148 (1394) is a big step, coefficient-wise, compared to going from a 242 Elite total to a 275 Elite total (1890 to 1946).

Age must be taken into account before losing a large amount of weight to compete at a lighter weight class. Losing weight can be quite stressful for a master age contestant. Gaining weight could be as dangerous, if not more so. It's a good idea to consult a physician before doing either. High blood pressure, sugar levels, etc., should



Mike Bridges competed from the 148 lb. class all the way up to 198 lb. He was a man with a mission and a method to achieve it.

To Maintain Your Weight Class: Years ago, Walter Thomas recommended the following to stay in a weight class: do all low-rep training; reduce your special (assist) exercises; squat only once a week; include isometric exercises in your training; and learn to watch your diet. Also, don't eat after 6:00 pm, and cut out meat fats.

To Increase Your Weight Class: If you want to go up a class increase your squat volume and add more special exercises. Concentrate on the large muscle groups (back, hips, legs, and shoulders). You must eat, eat, and eat some more. Sleep is very important also. Take a good vitamin supplement and a good GH releaser. Don't be afraid to retain some water; it will increase your leverage. Sometimes I use an anti-histamine/night-time

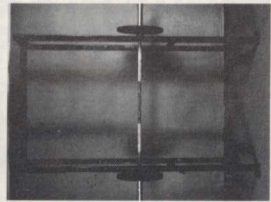
of changing weight classes.

of their lifting careers they competed in a heavier weight class. On the other hand, compare John Kuc when he was a superheavyweight and when he came down to 242, at which weight he was never defeated. I hope I haven't confused you, but rather made you think of the advantages and disadvantages

of changing weight classes.

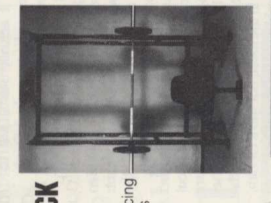
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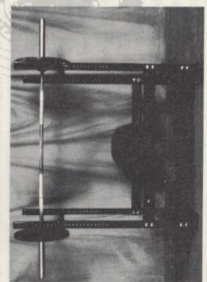
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