

STARTIN' OUT

A special section
dedicated to the
beginning lifter

DOING SINGLES as told by Doug Daniels

The topic of single reps has been controversial for as far back as I can remember. World Champion 'A' swears by singles. He does little else, reasoning why lift anything less than your max? However, World Champion 'B' believes singles are a waste of time, as strength is not built by rep schemes lower than 5s. Of course, World Champion 'C' believes in something in between. How does the average powerlifter balance these differing opinions and develop a routine that he can follow? Hopefully, this article will provide you with an approach that will enable you to use singles to your best advantage.

To start off, each lifter reacts differently to training, just as any person reacts differently to any type of stimulus. That's why many lifters maintain they gain better using one type of rep scheme over another. This could be because of a variety of reasons. I've heard high-tech explanations that particular lifters can activate more muscle nerve fibers simultaneously than other lifters. For those of us who don't have the latest muscular-fiber-impulse testing gear on our nightstand, we really can't agree or disagree, but at least it sounds pretty good.

Some lifters have mental hang-ups with singles. To them, multiple reps are easy, but psyching up for a big single can be un-nerving. Because of this they cannot muster the necessary mental and physical strength to have great success using max or near max singles. Other lifters confidently deal with single reps on a consistent basis and stand a better chance of benefiting from their use.

In some respects, singles and multiple rep sets are just plain different. With a multiple rep set, the weight used is lighter and thus we have a greater margin for error on execution of each rep. If you rep out a set of 5, getting out of the groove will seldom stop you from getting at least 3 reps. However, on a single rep set, one little mistake and that's it. Single rep sets are also more of an athletic performance. Think of a single rep set as a broad jumper's leap. You get one chance, at least one per round. It would follow that lifters who can execute singles with their most efficient lifting technique on a consistent basis can benefit more than lifters who lack this ability.

Now that I have listed a few reasons why some lifters can gain from singles and

some can't, what about that stuff I promised earlier on concerning using singles to our advantage? First of all, the end goal of

competitive powerlifting is to produce the heaviest single rep. The judges don't care what you can do for 8 or 5. I don't believe a lifter's routine should be based around singles. I believe optimal long-term results come from a well-rounded routine revolving around a mixture of various rep schemes. Below is a sample 12 week contest squat cycle leading up to a competition. I list only the heavy work rep scheme the week's workout:

- Week 1: Reps of 8
- Week 2: Reps of 8
- Week 3: Reps of 8
- Week 4: Reps of 5
- Week 5: Reps of 5
- Week 6: Reps of 5
- Week 7: Reps of 3
- Week 8: Reps of 3
- Week 9: Reps of 3
- Week 10: Reps of 1
- Week 11: Reps of 1
- Week 12: Reps of 1

The first 6 weeks build a strong power base. Weeks 7 through 9 make up a power building transition period to the last 3 weeks which are the contest prep period. During the final 3 weeks, a lifter spends his core time on singles, transferring the power built in the previous 9 weeks and off season while also solidifying his lifting technique and mental state.

These last 3 weeks are crucial in preparing for the athletic part of powerlifting, the max single. On week 10, the lifter should attempt a single with 95% or so of his previous best max. Week 11 attempt should be around their previous max. The final week, a new max should be attempted. By slowly working into singles, the lifter can build momentum and confidence for the meet while still building strength.

My 12-week routine is just one example. Lifters who are single-challenged, for whatever reason, may want to start singling 1-3 weeks earlier and start with 85-90% of max. Experienced lifters may not need as many weeks. Elite lifters can get by with few or no singles during a contest prep period. One thing to keep in mind is that a max single rep is very strenuous for both the mind and body. Too many singles can burn a lifter out before the meet. One to two singles per workout may be all that's required. As I mentioned earlier, there is a smaller margin for error with singles, so great attention to form, spotting, and lifting safety must be exercised. If you practice form and safety, etc., on ALL your sets and reps, the heavy max singles will be easier to perform in the safest and most efficient manner.

I don't believe there is one best rep scheme for everyone or maybe I'm just not smart enough to know of it. Either way, in the end, the goal of powerlifting is to lift the heaviest single. To meet this goal, novice lifters must attempt a certain amount of singles in training. By working singles into your routine in the manner I suggested, you stand to improve your lifting technique, build strength, gain confidence and hopefully register a higher contest total.



Big Jim Williams was a huge (literally!) advocate of doing heavy singles in training... in fact, his bench press program was virtually all singles (admittedly submaximal), and he did his program several times a week!