

General Physical Preparedness

By: Louie Simmons

General physical preparedness (GPP) is a term that refers to a degree of fitness, which is an extension of absolute strength. Many don't believe in it at all. Here, I am referring to the people who say if you want to be good at the powerlifts, just practice the powerlifts. Of course, this leads others to say that powerlifters are out of shape, and the above-mentioned group is.

Many times the ones that advocate only the classical lifts are the very ones that complain that powerlifters are out of shape. We all squat, yet we are not built identically. Some develop large quads, some develop big glutes and hips, and others may have very powerful hamstrings. It's obvious to me that if one muscle group is developed to a greater degree than another, then the smaller muscle groups are holding back your lifts.

What's the answer? You must do special exercises for the lagging muscle groups. But before you can pursue an increase in volume by way of special exercises, you must be in excellent shape. General physical preparedness raises your ability to do more work by special means.

There are several ways of raising work capacity. One method that we use at Westside is using the pulling sled for the hips and glutes. We pull the sled with the strap attached to the back of our power belts. We walk with long, powerful strides, maintaining an upright body position, pulling through with the foot, which stresses the hamstrings and glutes. This is common practice for throwers overseas.

I learned about pulling from Eskil Thomasson, who is Swedish. Before he moved to Columbus, he visited Finland to see why so many Finns deadlift so well. Many of these strong deadlifters were lumberjacks. They routinely had to pull paper wood down to the main trail, where the tractors could pick it up.

Another style of pulling is with a double handle held behind your back and below your knees. The torso is bent over, and the strides are long. This is great for building the hamstrings.

To work the front of the hips and lower abs, attach a strap to each ankle and walk, pulling the sled by your feet. Vasily Alexiev use to walk in knee-deep water for roughly 1000 steps after a work out. This is similar to what we are doing but with the advantage of being able to add or reduce weight, which varies the resistance.

For building the outside of the hips and the inside of the legs, position the straps around the ankles and walk sideways, first one way, then the other, left then right, forward and backward.

For the quads and front of the hips, walk backward with the strap around the front of your belt.

To start this type of work, I recommend doing six trips of 200 feet each. Use only one style of dragging until you feel confident of your ability to include more work. We do this low body work on the squat day, Friday, and on the max effort day, Monday, plus on the days after (Saturday and Tuesday), using 60% of what was done on the previous day. This contributes greatly to restoration.

For legs and upper back, as well as building your grip, try pushing and pulling a weighted wheelbarrow. This has had a great effect on my knee that suffered a patella tendon rupture. I thank Jesse Kellum for this exercise. He used his for knee rehab for pro-football players. Pushing the wheelbarrow up a mild grade really increases the work on the lower thigh muscles. Again, start with six trips of 200 feet. Only when you have adjusted to the additional work should you increase the number of trips.

Now back to the sled, but this time for the upper body. When George Halbert sees an increase in upper body mass, the process must be working, and that process is pulling a sled with the upper body. There are many methods of doing this. One duplicates the motion of a pec machine. Start with the arms behind your back. Slowly pull your arms to the front. Walk forward slowly and let the tension in the strap pull your arms to the rear, and again pull forward.

One can also do a front-raise motion with the palms facing down. For the lats, start with the arms behind your back, raise your arms, palms up, like a double upper-cut, by first flexing your lower lats. The farther forward hands go, the more the upper lats are worked. By walking backward you can do rear delt work, upright rowing, and external shoulder work.

A good reactive method for the bench press is to hold the straps out in front of you, and as you walk forward and the slack is removed, drive the sled forward in a shock fashion. This is very taxing but is great for reversal strength.

Do the upper body sled work for time, not distance. Mix the different styles together. Start with 5 minutes of pulling and work up to at least 20 minutes. I do 30-40 minutes. Walk slowly and don't jerk the sled. Only the reactive bench press method should be jerked.

Use the rule of 60%: Start heavy on day 1 and reduce the weight each day for 3 consecutive days. Then go back to a heavy weight the fourth day, e.g., 90

pounds, 70 pounds, 50 pounds, each weight representing one day. The same applies to pulling the sled for lower body power and to the wheelbarrow.

This work will greatly increase your physical ability to train as well as work as restoration. This style is resistance work for those seeking greater overall strength, power- and weightlifters, football players, or anyone that needs to raise work capacity to reach a higher level of excellence, which is anyone who took the time to read this article. But are there different routes to this type of work? Yes.

GPP work is very common in track and field overseas, but is still very much overlooked in the United States.

An experiment was conducted at The University of Pittsburgh. Head strength coach Buddy Morrison brought in a sprint expert, John Davies, who is very well versed in GPP work for running. John works with many pro players and has consistently lowered their 40 times. While his GPP work consists of weightless drills, such as jumping jacks, line hops, mountain climbers, and shuffle splits, it perfects running and jumping skills in addition to lateral speed. As John simply puts it, "I have never met a North American Athlete, from the major team sports, that the inclusion of this work will not cause a remarkable change in their optimum performance. Simply, without this solid base, substantial gains are limited and success is restricted to those more genetically gifted.... The median improvement in 40 yard dash times over eight weeks was .25 ... This work is not for the weak of heart as the overall work volumes are enormous."

John Davies' training, as mine, is regulated up and down in a wave fashion to ensure restoration and to raise work loads.

If you are not after the highest possible level of power and speed, don't waste your time. But if you want to call out "Who's next?", like the immortal Goldberg, give this a try.