

# TACTICAL BARBELL

DEFINITIVE STRENGTH TRAINING  
FOR THE OPERATIONAL ATHLETE



# 3RD EDITION

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Consult a physician prior to beginning this program or any new fitness regimen

## ORIGINS



Congratulations on saving years of wasted time and effort in achieving your strength goals. To borrow an overused cliché, this is truly the program I wish I had when I started on the path to tactical fitness.

This book is for the man or woman who wants raw useable strength and durability **WITHOUT** sacrificing athletic ability. This book is for you if you want a program with **measurable** results that doesn't require you to spend hours under the barbell to the detriment of your other physical attributes. I designed this book to provide military, SWAT, and emergency service personnel with a definitive barbell program to incorporate into training. Due to time demands and the variety of skills required, a tactical operator can't train like a powerlifter, and can't be sore for a week recovering from leg day. But at the same time maximum strength is a major requirement that can't be ignored. Tactical athletes have to become experts at everything, which can be quite a juggling act. This book will deal with giving you the piece that is strength, in a way that doesn't force you to specialize and neglect your other skills.

Although this book is primarily aimed at those in the operational arena, it's also for the general training enthusiast, athlete, fitness fanatic or weekend warrior that wants a hard, muscular physique that delivers real world strength. Athletes or those preparing for an event will find a strength program that can be used annually or seasonally in blocks, depending on the sport/event.

A SWAT operator may have to breach a fortified drug house, run behind a police dog for long distances, and wrestle with bad guys, all while wearing heavy body armor and carrying cumbersome gear. Infantry soldiers have to patrol dozens of miles into an area carrying 80lbs of kit or more, and then conduct gruelling house to house combat. All while sleep deprived and fatigued. We all know how physical a firefighter's job can be at times.

This book is **NOT** a cookie cutter program. There are simple, yet definitive sets of pieces that you can move around and incorporate within your lifestyle and current training. Many tactical types train a martial art or sport on the side. More to juggle. The right strength program can boost your results in those areas. The wrong type can take away from your performance and eat up your time.

I've included several step by step templates to choose from, that take into account the amount of time you can allot to strength development, in relation to your other training requirements and lifestyle.

This program came about through my own experiences and requirements. I've spent almost twenty years in the military and federal law enforcement. During my career I've spent a considerable amount of time in physically demanding units, as an infantryman, paratrooper, and later as a Hostage Rescue Team member for federal law enforcement. At the start of my journey into the tactical world, I was 150lbs and practically a teenager. I wasn't particularly strong, but I was motivated to excel in my field, mostly out of necessity. In those days, fitness

and strength were an absolute job requirement in certain military units. As you can guess, my interest in peak physical fitness started at this time. I wanted to increase my strength, and I *needed* to increase my strength in order to perform.

During my time in the military, I was exposed to exercises and operations involving sleep deprivation, overexposure to the elements, hours of ruck marching with loads that weighed 50-100lbs plus, attack maneuvers during the day, digging trenches and setting up defensive perimeters all night. Anybody that's spent time in an infantry, spec ops, or combat arms unit will know exactly what I'm talking about here and may be nodding (or shuddering) in recognition.

Cardiovascular fitness was vital, but as you can see, functional strength was a key requirement as well. The military did a great job of keeping our cardiovascular system primed during regular unit PT, but they didn't spend much time if at all on strength training. The closest we got was high repetition push-ups, pull-ups, and carrying around heavy logs. These are great exercises and have their place, but for developing maximal strength they are pretty limited in my experience. I always saw military PT as being more about developing *the will to keep going* versus *training* or *improving* actual physical skills. Curious thing, even though I did lots of push-ups and pull-ups daily in the military, my total numbers in those exercises stayed relatively the same. After I started proper functional strength training, my numbers shot up considerably – even though I was not training any extra high repetition push-ups or pull-ups.

In the beginning I made a lot of mistakes. I got into the typical bodybuilder style of training. I got a little bigger and looked more muscular, but I wasn't really getting much stronger. Not only that, constantly being sore made my other duties, and training suffer. Morning PT with the military started to become painful. My new muscles had a bit of a 'puffy' look to them as well. It started to dawn on me that bodybuilding wasn't making me much stronger in real life. Not only that, it was beginning to hinder me during military exercises or operations in the field. And if I wasn't 'pumped' in the gym, my muscles stopped looking all that impressive. I had peaked with a bench press of about 185lbs. Not very impressive at all. I was stuck and couldn't seem to lift heavier. Of course, there were days where I felt great and energized and I'd lift a few pounds more than usual, but then I'd drop back down to what seemed like my baseline eventually. And vice versa. Other days when I was fatigued I wouldn't be able to lift as heavy. This occurred with all my lifts in the gym. I saw others that were my size lifting far heavier than me, so I couldn't accept that I was reaching my limits.

There was an extremely fit special operations soldier that would train at the base gym once in a while. He was a serious individual, and didn't spend a whole lot of time socializing during his workout. He looked impressive. He was muscular and ripped in the way that fighters or boxers are, as opposed to bodybuilders. He had a dense hard look to him, and he did things in the gym that appeared superhuman, even to the other soldiers. I noticed a few interesting things about his weight workouts. He would lift extremely heavy. His sets consisted of low repetitions, and he would always rack the barbell before reaching failure. He looked relaxed and almost surgical during his weight training. I never once saw him use cables, medicine balls, or anything like that. Nor did I see him perform isolation exercises like bicep curls or calf raises. His workouts seemed very basic, squats, bench press, deadlifts. I was curious as to how he could lift as much as he did, be as muscular as he was, and perform functionally the way I knew special operations soldiers had to. He advised me to look into something called 'periodization' and progressive strength training. He told me there was a major difference between bodybuilding and developing strength. At the time those concepts weren't well known in my circles and it sounded pretty far-fetched to me. I mistakenly and ignorantly wrote his success off to genetics in my mind.

Then the day came that changed my strength and barbell training for good. I was in a bookstore, and was browsing the fitness section. I was looking for a new program. Arnold's Bodybuilding Encyclopaedia had been on my mind and I had saved up for it. While I was browsing, I saw a very plain looking book on 'Periodization', by Eastern Bloc authors I'd never heard of. Curious after my chat with the spec ops soldier several months earlier, I looked through it. The book had charts, graphs and various complicated looking calculations. Things I'd never seen before in a workout book. I actually had Arnie's book in my other hand, and couldn't decide which book to purchase. I ultimately went with the periodization book, because Arnold's book looked like more of the same of what I was already doing, and the new book was something I'd never seen. It must've appealed to my military mindset at the time, with its penchant for organization, structure, and having a plan.

The book I had picked up was geared toward bodybuilding and powerlifting. Still, it opened the doors for me and introduced me to the concepts of periodization, and other Eastern bloc training ideologies. Many of you may be familiar with periodization, for those that aren't, not to worry it'll all be made clear. It forms the basis for this program.

Within less than a year and a half of utilizing a type of periodization, I brought my bench up to 300lbs. Not terrible for someone that weighed about a 150lbs, and had plateaued at 185lbs. My squat hit the high 400's, and I was doing weighted pull-ups with 60lbs-100lbs on my back. Now I wasn't setting the world on fire with those numbers back then, but I want to give you an idea of how I started to progress. Keep in mind I lived on an Army base, and had full time military duties which included morning PT every day while in garrison, (translation – 'fun' runs anywhere from 2 to 6 miles five days a week). My lifting routine would be interrupted by weeks or months of field time for field exercises or operations. My diet in the field was inconsistent, and long periods of uninterrupted training time were nonexistent.

In the field we did no PT and lived on rations. Our ration packs didn't contain organic boneless skinless chicken breast, or low carb entrees. We slept in shifts. Even with these obstacles, my strength increased dramatically. Not because I was special, but because I had learned effective training principles.

As my functional strength went up, everything became easier. As mentioned earlier, my push-up and pull-up numbers shot up. We had several monthly Company PT tests consisting of maximum push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, 10km run etc. so I was clearly able to note any progress over time. In every one of the PT tests I took part in post periodization, I regularly hit the top three. I also achieved one of my goals of passing our brutal paratrooper selection course, and earning my wings. I attribute much of that success to the introduction of periodization in my strength training. Functional strength made everything easier, plain and simple!

My original introduction to periodization had been somewhat bodybuilder oriented. Being obsessive and a bit of a bookworm, I read and researched further and started becoming familiar with concepts in the strength world. Concepts such as low rep training, strength vs hypertrophy, frequency, and the general uselessness of isolation exercises as compared to compound lifts. My program changed over time, while still keeping the core fundamentals that made it successful. I added new techniques to meet my unique needs far more effectively.

In the 2000s I left the military and started a new career with Federal Law Enforcement. During that time, I spent several years on a Hostage Rescue Team. Once again, fitness had become an occupational priority.

My cardiovascular conditioning requirements had changed, but my need for a high base level of strength had increased. The HRT gig required far less of an endurance base than the military, but I still needed a high level of strength. Picture running up a flight of stairs wearing heavy body armor, carrying weapons and various tools, and then dealing with the

situation at hand. Usually that would happen after having spent hours outside, containing a residence or stronghold prior to entry. If an operator just had a great cardio base, but little strength, it wasn't going to happen. At this point in my life, I no longer lived on a military base. I was out in the 'real world', older, with dozens of mundane chores and other duties eating up my time. I also started dabbling in mixed martial arts. My program had to adapt further. My world was no longer based around my training time, although I still had a very real occupational need for maximal strength. I couldn't spend two hours in the gym at a time under the barbell. I had to go for long runs, I had to work on anaerobic conditioning, MMA classes, not to mention work related skills that needed some of my time. But I did not want to sacrifice even a little bit of the strength I had developed. I subscribe to the theory that it is a foundation piece from which all other physical skills benefit.

I played around with various other strength programs at this time, but none met my particular requirements. Some were designed exclusively for powerlifters, others didn't leave me enough time or energy to devote to cardiovascular training. Some just plain didn't work and made me plateau fast because of a load progression that increased too quickly. Some had no progression at all.

So I returned to my original programming and made even more changes. I modified it so I spent far less time in the gym, made it flexible enough that I could increase or decrease the amount of sessions per week, and focussed on core strength principles. I ruthlessly eliminated any hypertrophy elements. It worked. My strength shot up again. I was spending less than half an hour per strength session in the gym. I had energy and time to devote to training other attributes such as aerobic/anaerobic conditioning, and I was able shift my focus when required.

Zulu template was born. In addition to Zulu, several specialist templates were developed for various situations. When I wanted to focus more on mixed martial arts, I would sometimes switch to the now popular Tactical Barbell Fighter Template. If I wanted to bring up lagging or weak lifts, I'd do a couple blocks using Gladiator template.

As you progress through this book, I'll give you Zulu and the additional specialist templates. You'll be shown in detail how they can be used to greatly increase your strength while adapting to your situation. Tactical Barbell has been used successfully by numerous military and law enforcement colleagues. They range from tactical operators and detectives, to people with family commitments and very limited gym time. And still others that do nothing else but focus on training. MMA types/combat athletes tend to find great success with this programming. They are usually only able to devote two or three sessions a week to strength training. You'll notice that there are a variety of ways to incorporate Tactical Barbell in your training, but the backbone/system remains the same throughout.

The result of my modifying, adjusting, and experimenting like a mad scientist for two decades is the program you hold in your hands. This is from the trenches, not untested theory that sounds like it should work. This is what has worked for me, and for a number of tactical types, from Major Crime detectives and patrolmen, to military special operations personnel.

The included method of testing will clearly show you whether or not you've increased your strength on this program, a simple enough measure of effectiveness.

## WHY 3<sup>RD</sup> EDITION?



It's been a year since the release of **Tactical Barbell: Definitive Strength Training for the Operational Athlete**. The feedback has been tremendous. We've received correspondence from across the globe. Police officers in Australia, Canadian ERT members, SWAT teams, marathon runners, mixed martial artists, marines, and British paratroopers are all finding success with TB.

Tactical Barbell was originally designed for a very small niche, the operator or tactical team member looking for a minimalist approach to get strong *fast*. That strength framework also had to be compatible with existing training, usually intense conditioning or endurance work. TB delivered – 'Operator' and 'Fighter' became widely used programs in the tactical world.

However TB spread far beyond its intended audience. Our new users came to include civilian athletes, serious strength trainees, mixed martial artists, personal trainers, weekend warriors and everyone in between.

As a result, we learned from YOU. Tweaks, insights, and modifications, were brought to our attention from both the tactical *and* civilian strength community. A certain MMA club will no doubt recognize its input in enhancing the popular Fighter template. And as always, we are grateful to our small crew of HRT members and soldiers that tested the new Zulu template.

This exposure to a wider clientele also brought on a new set of needs we had to adapt to. Tactical Barbell had to evolve and meet new requirements, some being;

- The option to include more major exercises per cluster

- The option to include/add accessory work

- Briefer sessions for intermediate/advanced strength trainees

**We are proud to introduce our new flagship strength model, and master template – ZULU.** Zulu template not only easily addresses the above, but it's also an enhanced model for our original client – the tactical athlete. Zulu allows you to comfortably choose 4-6 major lifts instead of 2-3. But, here's the part we're really excited about – with Zulu, **strength sessions take on average only 20-30 minutes**. Think about how much time and energy that frees up for you to work on things like conditioning, accessory work, kettlebells or sport specific training. Zulu is a superior model for *both* our original tactical base, and our new clientele with their wider variety of goals.

### **BEGINNER TO ADVANCED PROGRESSION MODEL**



We've added an optional progression model for the beginner looking to increase strength in the most optimal manner. This progression will incorporate both Operator and Zulu templates. The original Operator is still one of the fastest ways for beginners to get strong. But once you start entering intermediate territory you have to take a different approach to managing your sessions. As you start lifting heavier weights, your workouts should be briefer, with fewer exercises. That's where Zulu comes in and takes over.

### **FIGHTER TEMPLATE**

Fighter has been our most popular template after Operator. It's been our go-to model for those looking for a twice weekly lifting program. It's become extremely popular with the mixed martial arts community, marathoners, military, and other athletes looking for supplementary strength work that doesn't interfere with skills training. We've enhanced Fighter to make it more high-speed/low-drag.

### **ACCESSORY / ASSISTANCE WORK**

This is a big one. Clients love accessory work – whether it's functional or aesthetic. Zulu template allows for far more assistance work. As mentioned above, with Zulu, your main strength session will take about 15-30 minutes. You will be given clear examples of how to integrate assistance/accessory lifts with Zulu.

### **OTHER CHANGES**

We're cutting Grey Man. Gladiator stays, but it will be a specialist template to be used for short periods of time only. Like Smolov's distant cousin twice removed. Except instead of only hammering squats, you'll be able to hit two major lifts with a high frequency/high volume approach. Perfect for a minimalist push/pull program for example. Great for bringing up lagging lifts or problem areas. Use sparingly.

We remain true to the Tactical Barbell approach in this addition. The backbone of the programming remains the same, frequent, submaximal lifting while avoiding unnecessary fatigue. We keep things simple and effective. Results matter to us above all. We don't change things for the sake of change, so we think you'll be *extremely* pleased with the new material in this 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

## PRINCIPLES

### RESULTS

First and foremost Tactical Barbell values results over elegant, popular, or attractive appearing methods that may not deliver. **Results speak.** Just because something is new or different does not necessarily make it more effective. Just because something is complicated or has more moving parts does not necessarily make it superior. This program has a built in mechanism for you to measure your results. Tactical Barbell is for the operator or trainee that needs a reliable, repeatable system for gaining strength.

### SIMPLICITY

Tactical Barbell fully buys into the notion that ‘simplicity is the ultimate sophistication’. In the tactical arena, simplicity wins out over complicated. You won’t find medicine balls, cables, pulleys, balance boards, or vibrating belts in this program. Fluff free. Tactical Barbell takes the direct route to goals and focuses on excelling at the basics.

### EXPERTISE

You shouldn’t be satisfied with mediocre or average programming. Tactical Barbell will deliver the tools to set you on the path to well above average results. Everything has been tested, used, and taught by those in the field. No coaches here coming solely from a position of theory, whom have never served fulltime on a tactical or military unit.

## PROGRAM GOALS

*'Iron is full of impurities that weaken it; through forging it becomes steel and is transformed into a razor-sharp sword. Human beings develop in the same fashion'*

Morihei Ueshiba – Founder of Aikido

Chances are, if you're in the tactical arena, military, or SWAT, there is a Jack of All Trades aspect to your training. Operators are always trying to figure out how to not only get good at everything; strength, endurance, short burst anaerobic capacity, but also how to become far above average. It's a juggling act. Some programs deliver great anaerobic training, but may be lacking in strength or endurance development. You start excelling in that area, but find your strength and endurance start lagging. Other programs deliver great strength training, but the way they're structured leave you with less time or energy than you'd like to work on your conditioning or martial arts skills. Or they may require you to carry a lighter cardio load and consume an excessive amount of calories.

I am going to give you a system of strength training with barbells that will greatly increase your functional strength. All while still leaving you time and energy to train your other physical attributes; conditioning/cardio, or occupational/sport specific skills training.

You will be able to plug this program into your current training lifestyle. You can make it the focus of your training, or you can adapt the programming around your priority work. Tactical Barbell will allow you to choose how much or how little of your time you want to devote to strength training.

The programming is simple, and you'll be able to measure your results through periodic testing. Tactical Barbell contains a system of calculated load progression. When you go into the gym for your strength sessions, you will know what exercises you're performing, how many sets, how many reps, and how much weight you are lifting every time. Weeks in advance.

Although the system is template based, the workouts are customized to you. Every weight you lift will be based on your own personal one repetition maximums. Meaning the total amount of weight you can lift once. Don't stress if you're unfamiliar with this is or how to test it, it'll all be made crystal clear. You'll be surprised at how simple using maximums are, and you'll wonder how you got by without them. What I want you to take from this, is that whether you're currently squatting 500lbs or just the bar, the program will be tailored to you and your current numbers.

Our standard clients (tactical police and military) tend to use Zulu template year round paired with a conditioning program. Mixed martial artists and combat athletes have to divide their time between a multitude of attributes; sport specific skills training, conditioning, and general endurance, to name a few. They can't focus solely on strength to the detriment of their other abilities. Popular powerlifter approaches aren't always optimal. Tactical Barbell's twice a week lifting template – Fighter – has become extremely popular with that particular niche. Fighter is also being widely used by athletes in general; trainees that are athletes first, and lifters second.

Tactical Barbell is also a good fit for those that approach their training in a seasonal fashion. You can use a particular template off-season, and taper to a more suitable template in-season.

Beginners can take their strength to advanced levels using a mix of templates. Use Operator to bring base levels of strength up relatively quickly, and then switch to Zulu when intermediate loads are reached. Throw in Gladiator for a block or two to target lagging areas if needed then back to Zulu.

A very fit firefighter uses the program like this. He does a 12 week strength phase, followed by 12 weeks of Crossfit, 12 weeks of strength, 12 weeks of Crossfit...and so on. Needless to say this guy's a machine. When he's doing a Tactical Barbell phase, his

conditioning consists of simple high intensity interval runs or longer ‘fun runs’.

Another interesting Crossfit combination comes from a paramedic. She uses the Tactical Barbell Fighter template twice a week, along with 2-3 crossfit WODs. Fighter gives her an unmatched level of strength development, and Crossfit fills in the anaerobic/work capacity/cardio gaps in her training. She occasionally avoids or slightly modifies any WODs with a heavy barbell lifting component, so as not to interfere with TB Fighter strength work.

A federal gang investigator on the program loves variety. He’ll do short Tactical Barbell phases, and then he’ll try whatever catches his fancy out there in the fitness world. He’ll return regularly to this material. He treats Tactical Barbell as his baseline go-to workout. He’s not an athlete with one particular focus or goal, but he puts up heavier weights than a lot of the average gym rats I see.

I myself have experimented with periods of doing nothing but strength training for the bulk of the year, and I have also incorporated kettlebells, MMA style conditioning, and other various programs. The combinations and results are endless.

This is not a program specializing in bodybuilding or competitive powerlifting. There are plenty of far more suitable resources out there for those specific goals. However as a bodybuilder or powerlifter you can still benefit by incorporating this program into your annual training plan in block fashion, if you so desire. The flexibility of Tactical Barbell should be beginning to dawn on you, with the ability to manipulate exercises, templates and blocks of training time.

Bottom line, this book is aimed at **barbell strength training for tactical athletes**. People that would benefit from having raw strength far greater than the average person. With the added complexity that they have to be equally developed in other attributes such as general endurance, work capacity, or occupational skills. This book will give you the strength piece of the puzzle for your unique operational world.

This program is *also* for the civilian or anybody that’s fanatical about fitness. You will get a top of the line strength program that’ll put you on par with any tactical athlete.

Basic nutrition will be touched on briefly in this book. Nutrition these days seems to be a very personal thing with all the various new diets and styles of eating out there, so I won’t go into great depth. Nutrition also tends to be goal specific.

Supplements. I am going to give you my personal experience with a variety of supplements. Some have made a **significant** difference in my own training, and others were a total waste of money.

On mass. There are those that want to get huge, and those that don’t want to put on any extra weight at all, but still want the strength. Both are possible and rely heavily on manipulating food intake, cardio and rest intervals. I’ve been 150lbs with a very heavy bench or squat, and at times I’ve also been 185lbs with relatively lighter loads, depending on my cardio load, training goals, and other factors. But, not to worry, I have included a bonus template for those of you that want to be built like linebackers - Mass template. You probably won’t have much energy left over to do anything else, but you’ll see dramatic changes in body composition if you decide to give it a try. Not the best choice for the typical tactical operator, unless for some reason you need to put on weight. In my experience there are many out there that not only want to be strong and muscular, but for whatever reason also want to be big. Not to mention, size can be function in certain situations.

#### **EXERCISE CLUSTERS – CUSTOMIZING YOUR PROGRAM FURTHER**

Zulu, and each specialist template, has a set of suggested exercise clusters. A cluster is simply the term we’re using to refer to a group of exercises. We will offer you cluster suggestions, but experienced lifters or athletes can modify or create their own, as long as they are compatible with the maximum strength development principles outlined in this program. Tactical Barbell was primarily designed for use with compound barbell lifts, but high tension

bodyweight exercises such as one arm push-ups, pull-ups, and muscle-ups, are all compatible and can be incorporated in the core model.

If you end up using a specialist template instead of Zulu, you might be using a minimal number of exercises. If you're new to the functional strength game, you may be surprised at how few exercises you really need. You might be shocked at changes in body composition, and strength produced by only 2 to 4 lifts. This won't be news to those of you that have been around the strength game for a while.

I am not going to provide you with specific aerobic/anaerobic or conditioning workouts. This book's focus is only on tactical strength development. I will give you a thorough understanding of how you can integrate your conditioning and any other training with Tactical Barbell. Think of your weekly training broken down into the categories 'strength', 'conditioning', and 'skills'. This program will give you the strength portion, in a way that allows you to schedule your week with maximum flexibility and prioritize as needed. We are currently working on a conditioning book which will be released in the future.

## HOW TO USE THE PROGRAM

*'Action is the foundational key to all success.'*

Picasso



**Read the entire book before choosing and customizing your program.** It'll allow you to understand the flexibility of the programming and the options available to you. And you'll understand what I'm talking about and the terms I'm throwing around. Figure out what your situation is, how many days a week you can strength train, and what other training you have every week. Have an idea of how much time you can spend in the gym each session. If you can spend more days in the gym but are limited for time, Zulu template is a perfect fit. If you can only spend two days a week in the gym, but have some flexibility with your session time, you could consider selecting a higher number of exercises and pairing it with the two-day-a-week Fighter template. If strength is very low on the list of priorities for you but still needs your attention, you might choose a minimalist exercise cluster to go with Fighter template. This is a very popular combo for endurance athletes such as marathoners or triathletes. Not ideal for the strength oriented, but it'll get the job done and you will be pleasantly surprised at the results from this spartan approach.

Some common situations for the tactical athlete to consider:

Are you currently serving in the military; infantry, or some other physically demanding unit? When you're in garrison is your training schedule vastly different from when you're overseas on ops? What about equipment availability. May be in garrison you can dedicate four days a week to training, but only two when overseas. You'll find the various templates cover off all your changes in lifestyle, and can be switched from one to another as your circumstances change. The versatility of the exercise 'cluster' concept will have you covered for any equipment deficiencies.

Are you a combat athlete that trains fight skills three times a week? Need to increase your strength but only have two free days a week to spare for weight training?

Are you a 9-5 office worker, with no other physical demands and you want to train an equal three sessions a week on strength and three sessions a week doing cardio?

Are you primarily interested in strength for a seasonal sport? May be you want to establish a solid base of increased strength by doing a heavy four day a week strength template for a few months prior to tapering off and working exclusively on your sport specific skills?

Can you spend three days a week in the gym strength training, but only an hour or less at

a time after work, because you have family or other commitments?

Zulu template will be the go-to template for most, tactical or not. But if not, then pick the template that fits your strength goals based on your situation and commitment. There are several specialist templates that range from the minimalist Fighter to the hardcore higher volume Gladiator template.

As your training, goals, and life situation change, so can your templates. This year May be Zulu template met your needs, but next year you start MMA training so you decide to switch to the more minimalist 'Fighter' template to allow more time for skills training. Fight training is mentioned quite a bit throughout, because in my experience many tactical types, military, law enforcement, train a martial art of some sort on the side.

After you pick your template, pick an exercise cluster. Clusters are exercise groupings that allow you to customize and tweak your program further. There are minimalist clusters with only two lifts, ranging up to clusters with 6 or more. When choosing a cluster, it's important to understand your recovery capabilities. More on that later.

Have an idea of how you're going to structure your strength training. Are you going to train strength year round, only a few months out of the year, or intermittently every few weeks or months?

Then head into the gym and test your one repetition maximums for all your exercises. You'll plug your numbers into your chosen template, and execute. For the purposes of this program, you don't have to test a one rep maximum, you can test a 3 to 5 rep maximum and calculate from there – so don't stress if the idea of testing a one repetition all-out effort isn't your cup of tea. Testing is very simple, and it will all be made clear in an upcoming chapter.

So to recap:

Read the entire book

Decide how many days a week and what level of commitment you'll have for your strength sessions, taking into account other demands on your training time and your goals

Familiarize yourself with Zulu template, or one of the specialist templates if you're going that route

Pick an exercise cluster

Test your one repetition maximum on all the exercises in your cluster

Plug your numbers into your template as required

Execute!

Retest and repeat and change templates as required

Here are a couple examples of the program in use;

Max is a police officer in a busy municipality. He's in his early 30s and is also an amateur boxer. Max trains all year. He trains at his boxing gym three times a week, which includes skills, bag work, conditioning and sometimes sparring. The training is demanding and takes a toll on his energy levels for the week. Max wants to up his game, and believes additional strength training and cardiovascular conditioning will benefit his boxing. Max also believes increased strength will serve him on the street as a cop. As a boxer, Max does not need powerlifter levels of freaky strength. But more strength potentially converts to more power for Max if trained correctly. Power for a boxer is extremely beneficial. If Max were to choose one of the 3 day a week strength templates with a 3 to 4 exercise cluster, it would probably be too much. His heavy strength training would fatigue him and might be detrimental to his boxing training sessions. Max has to take into account his lifestyle, age and recovery abilities. Max can't afford to go to work feeling exhausted and zoned out all the time. Being a police officer requires him to stay sharp and on his toes all day.

Max is a smart cat however, and chooses Fighter template. Max trains strength twice a week with a minimalist cluster containing only 3 major lifts. He continues to box three times a week. Remember, Max also wanted to improve his cardio outside of his boxing sessions.

Max adds a longer endurance type run once a week (5 to 10km steady state cardio). Because his strength workouts are relatively brief, he decides to add 20 minute higher intensity cardio/anaerobic type sessions **AFTER** his barbell training (think MMA style bodyweight workouts, tabata, burpees etc.).

Max now trains six days a week. Boxing three times a week, brief strength training sessions twice a week, and one long cardio session. Depending on his energy levels, he'll add short intense anaerobic sessions after his strength training. If Max has an exceptionally draining week at work, or an important social function, he might drop the long cardio session and now he has two full days off during the week to recover. Or he may keep the long cardio and drop the short anaerobic sessions following his strength training. The point is Max now has flexibility, and he's improving his physical ability without taking away from his boxing. In fact, Max's power and stamina have improved due to his functional strength training and extra conditioning. Max looks denser and more powerful, but he does not put on a bulky physique that might slow him down in the ring due to its high metabolic price. Max is the perfect example of the typical 'tactical athlete' I have come across that can't figure out how to incorporate an effective strength program into their lives.

On the other hand we have John. John works as a data entry clerk and is a civilian analyst at his police department. John is in his mid-twenties. He has no interest in sports and is not an operator. He just wants incredible amounts of strength and decent conditioning. He has a family, and his job is a very steady 9 to 5 type of gig which involves him living in a cubicle and working on a computer every day. John begins using Zulu Standard template, which has him training four times a week. He decides to go all out and picks a cluster containing six major exercises. Remember, other than his new strength program, John's lifestyle is relatively sedentary. John performs 3 exercises per session, four days a week. John also goes for a 2 mile run two times a week on the days he's not strength training. He takes one day off completely. John sees incredible results within a relatively short amount of time because his focus is narrow, and his schedule allows him to stay consistent. He also has very few other demands on his energy levels. John decides he wants more mass. He maintains his training schedule but ups his calories and tightens up on the quality of his nutrition. Now he is big, strong, and has a decent cardiovascular foundation.

## **THE KEY TO YOUR SUCCESS**

**All this program requires for you to be successful is to show up and go through the motions.**

You will know weeks in advance what exercises you're going to perform, number of repetitions, and exactly how heavy your load will be. All you have to do is **execute that plan**. It may be simple, but it's not always easy. There is no guess work with this program, no superhuman willpower required, and it won't take any strength that you don't already possess. That is the nature of a periodized program like this. However, if you miss workouts frequently you will stop positively adapting to the increased loads. You'll start backsliding. Keep doing this often enough and you'll be spinning your wheels with no result.

You don't have to work like an animal to get results with this program. **Aim for being consistent**. Physically put your body in the gym or on the track when you're supposed to, even if you feel exhausted and you think your workout's going to suck that day. Don't try to fire yourself up. Just go through the motions if you have to. Keep doing that over and over and you will be pleasantly surprised over time with the massive changes. Your motivation will increase as you experience success. Motivation tends to grow *after* success strangely enough.

A technique I have used with civilian trainees that have a hard time sticking with the program is this. I will set up a thirty day challenge. I will challenge them to finish every assigned training session for thirty days no matter what. Sometimes to gain leverage I will



ask that they write me a cheque for a substantial amount of money. If they fail the 30 day challenge I cash the cheque and go shopping. I generally find after about 30 days they get into the groove and it becomes habit. They are also invested by this time and pleased with the results. You can use the same principles to gain leverage over yourself, whether it's with nutrition or training sessions. Give a friend or training partner a cheque, set up some sort of check in system so they can monitor you, and go. If you prefer positive reinforcement, write yourself a cheque, and reward yourself with a purchase if you successfully complete 30 days with no deviation.

### **JERRY SEINFELD'S SECRET**

I came across this shortly after writing the above about consistency, and it confirmed everything I've believed about it, which is that it is the trump card. The up and coming Seinfeld gave the following advice to a fellow comic that was following in his footsteps. Advice that Seinfeld believed contributed to his success.

*He told me to get a big wall calendar that has a whole year on one page and hang it on a prominent wall. The next step was to get a big red magic marker.*

*He said for each day that I do my task of writing, I get to put a big red X over that day. "After a few days you'll have a chain. Just keep at it and the chain will grow longer every day. You'll like seeing that chain, especially when you get a few weeks under your belt. Your only job next is to not break the chain."*

*"Don't break the chain," he said again for emphasis.*

You can apply the above principle to this program. Your only job is to go into that gym on the designated days. It's inconsequential whether you have a good workout or a bad one. Go through the motions if you have to. A year later when you look back and see your new strength numbers and your transformed physique, you'll be pleasantly surprised. Consistency and persistence can move mountains.

Write it down if you have to - **CONSISTENCY WINS**

## TACTICAL ATHLETES

The term ‘tactical athlete’ is thrown around frequently throughout this book. I will define what that is for the purpose of this program. Tactical athletes are a unique breed. Tactical athletes are those that may need to physically operate at an extraordinarily high level in stressful situations or demanding and dangerous environments. Due to the requirements of their chosen profession, tactical athletes are rarely specialists. They need to have mastery over a variety of attributes including strength, conditioning, and job related skillsets. Training time and energy has to be divided accordingly, therefore it is challenging and counterproductive to specialize to an extreme degree in any one skill. They have to be far above average in many.

For this program, tactical athletes can include any of the following;

### **Military Personnel**

Especially infantry, spec ops, and combat arms units.

### **Law Enforcement Members**

SWAT, Emergency Response, patrol etc.

### **Emergency Services**

Firefighters, paramedics, Search and Rescue etc.

### **Athletes/Martial Artists**

Our programming isn’t confined to the above, although it was developed with them in mind. There are many trainees that don’t fit into the above categories that require an effective strength program, with enough flexibility to meet changing goals.

Some examples of our current clients include; general fitness buffs, entry level trainees, and hard-core strength athletes looking for extreme results. On the other end of the spectrum we have the trainee who needs the bare minimum.

The way this program’s structured makes it ideal for those that require some measure of maximum strength, and need an adaptable progressive program which doesn’t take away from their existing skills training. Athletes involved in sports or competition requiring a high degree of maximum strength will find this program can be used conveniently in a block or seasonal fashion if required.

A note to those concerned about aesthetics: a body that can generate double or triple the amount of force it used to, is going to go through some dramatic physical changes. In other words, as long as you have your nutrition and conditioning somewhat in check, you will be more than satisfied with your ‘look’.



## STRENGTH VS HYPERTROPHY

If you've been in the strength and conditioning world for a while, you'll probably already know the difference. Feel free to skip this. For those who have never been exposed to this concept I'll give you a general overview.

In this program we are interested primarily in developing strength, or *the ability to generate force*. For the purposes of this program, hypertrophy refers primarily to *developing muscle size*.

Think about it in terms of bodybuilders vs powerlifters. A bodybuilder's primary goal is to train for aesthetics. They are judged in their sport by how they look, NOT by how they perform. Some will lift heavy weights by virtue of their training regimen, however they may not be proportionately strong. A powerlifter needs to be strong in a way that allows him to generate force and lift the heaviest weight possible. They are judged on their performance, not on the appearance of their physique. Powerlifters lift far heavier weights than bodybuilders, yet they don't resemble bodybuilders and can sometimes be much smaller.

A wrestler needs the type of strength that allows him to generate force against his opponent. A gymnast needs incredible amounts of strength to generate the force required to perform various physical maneuvers. What does a wrestler's musculature and build look like? How about an Olympic gymnast? Have you ever taken your boyfriend or girlfriend to a Cirque De Soleil show? Cirque De Soleil is an incredible display of maximal strength. For those concerned about aesthetics (most of us); if you are the typical tactical athlete that also maintains decent nutrition, not to worry, you will definitely look the part using Tactical Barbell.

So what does all this tell us? Training for size and strength are two different animals. Yes, of course there's overlap, but we're focusing on optimization. Training for size or hypertrophy may cause increases in strength, just as training for strength may cause some residual hypertrophy or size. But if size is your goal, strength training is not the most efficient method to get there, just as if you're primarily training for strength, bodybuilding is not the way to do it.

If bodybuilders represented the pinnacle of athletic **strength**, then you can bet every Olympian or professional athlete that required strength in his chosen sport would look like a bodybuilder. They are in the ultimate competitive field and will use whatever works to get the job done. Make sense? Bodybuilding is a unique and demanding discipline unto itself, however in this program the focus is on functional strength. The type that a wrestler, or gymnast displays. People are surprised when they meet real life military spec ops personnel and find many are small, wiry or average looking. Most look nothing like Arnold Schwarzenegger in Commando. Because this program is geared towards the tactical operator, mass is not going to be the primary focus. Having said that, depending on your chosen template, how much you eat and how much conditioning you do on the side, you can still get big. In fact if you're a male and you're not careful and disciplined about your rest intervals, you might get more residual hypertrophy than you want.

Being a tactical athlete, you need to extract the ingredients that make powerlifters brutally strong, and adapt them to a lifestyle that also allows you to develop your other tools. Most of you can't take a full-bore powerlifter style approach to training. For example, you can't put on a ton of weight to give yourself a better mass-strength ration, and you can't discontinue cardio to speed up recovery for lifting. This is where Tactical Barbell steps in.



Now for certain athletic endeavours, size IS a requirement. Think football, or hockey. However, the pros also train functional strength in addition to hypertrophy, so not only are they big, but they are strong. And we haven't even touched on power generation. Getting complicated? That's why strength and conditioning are a science. Read the works of the Eastern bloc strength scientists and you'll realize we're just at the tip of the iceberg. We're going to keep it simple here, and call what we're doing functional strength. Some don't like the term 'functional strength' and yes, I agree with you, all strength is functional. I use the term functional for novices who still associate 'strength' or 'barbells' with bodybuilding and muscle-bound physiques in order to separate the two. It's just easier. If you're an advanced or experienced strength athlete, ignore the term 'functional' if it bothers you.

Your strength gains on this program will benefit all the other aspects of your training, and not slow you down. Think sprinter, combat athlete, and gymnast.

Weight training generally causes two types of adaptation to muscle tissue. Sarcoplasmic hypertrophy, and myofibril adaptation.

Sarcoplasmic hypertrophy is generally induced by a bodybuilder style of training, 8-12 repetitions against a submaximal load, the goal being to increase muscle size. Concepts like muscle failure, isolation exercises and several exercises per body part play a role in developing muscular hypertrophy. This is not the most efficient way to develop functional strength. This is great for aesthetics, and becomes functional if one has a need for mass or weight in their given endeavor, such as the aforementioned linebacker. To simplify, sarcoplasmic hypertrophy primarily gives you muscle size. *Too much hypertrophy can be detrimental to athletic performance depending on your sport or activity.* Notice I said *too much*. Some trainees can comfortably function with more size than others, there are a lot of factors involved.

Myofibrillar development is generally increased by intense contractions against maximal loads for about 1-6 repetitions, resulting in an increased ability to generate force (strength). Myofibrillar adaptation is what this program is all about. Again, to simplify, myofibrillar improvement primarily gives you strength.

The two can be complimentary, more hypertrophy may allow for more myofibrillar development, which allows for more hypertrophy and so on.

In this program we're generally going to try and avoid *excessive* sarcoplasmic hypertrophy. Make no mistake, you will probably become far more muscular through this program, but we're going to try and minimize the excessive bulk. Food and conditioning load play a factor, but so does training method.

I have included a template for those that do want some mass/hypertrophy in addition to

strength. Some athletes involved in sports such as football or hockey may have a genuine requirement for hypertrophy in addition to functional strength. Breachers or MOEs might fall into this category as well. The template I've included is still not a typical bodybuilding program however. If traditional bodybuilding is your game, there are more direct routes to your goals out there. Think of it this way. The **Mass** template I've provided still has the primary goal of strength, but there will be far more residual hypertrophy than the other templates.

So to sum up, don't mistake bodybuilding for strength training. Bodybuilders and strength athletes may use some of the same tools, i.e. bench or squat, but they are training in very different fashions for different goals. Muscular mass and muscular strength are not the same thing. Consider athletes that require the ability to generate force (strength), such as gymnasts, powerlifters, sprinters, fighters, etc. Watch them perform. Watch the Olympics, watch a UFC competition. Do any of these athletes have the mass of a professional bodybuilder? Do they need to be strong? Can you be big and strong and conditioned? **Yes** you certainly can. There are many big athletes that are extremely well conditioned. Again, professional football easily comes to mind. It all depends on your needs and training goals. For example, wrestlers need to be extremely strong, but they also have to watch their size and can't gain unnecessary mass due to weight class. They can't become bulky like Mr. Olympia. But you can bet their coaches have them on programs that are making them incredibly strong – without the mass of a bodybuilder. How are they doing that? That is the angle this program is coming from.

## STRENGTH VS CONDITIONING

*'The first virtue in a soldier is endurance of fatigue; courage is only the second virtue.'*

Napolean

The goal of strength training is **to increase the amount of physical force you can generate**. Large heavy loads are handled which triggers strength adaptation. The adaptation results in increased muscle mass, thicker stronger bones and joints to effectively handle increased loads. Surprisingly, decreased body fat is also part of the package. Most importantly, your body increases its ability to generate force.

Conditioning on the other hand, is training to increase things like cardiovascular performance and muscular endurance. Your energy system(s). We tend to think of conditioning as jogging, sprints, skipping, etc. But, conditioning is not limited to traditional cardio. You can use weights, bodyweight exercises, burpees, hit a punching bag and swim. Some conditioning programs combine various techniques such as sprinting, weights and hitting the heavy bag in one session.

You may be familiar with group conditioning classes that combine weights with anaerobic/aerobic activity. Even though you may be playing with barbells and getting a massive pump, you are not strength training. Your strength, or ability to generate force will not go up very much. For substantial strength increases you need to incrementally progress with maximal and near maximal loads. Weights that you can lift for 1 – 6 repetitions. This generally requires a focus solely on strength in a session. If you are fatigued from doing 400 meter sprints followed by 100 burpees, and you attempt to lift maximal weights, you're setting yourself up for long term failure in strength development. And possibly injury. You are not training in the most efficient manner for strength. You are improving your anaerobic capacity and your conditioning. If you're doing the same but lifting relatively light weights for higher repetitions, you can add muscular endurance to the mix. Not effective strength training.

Think about it. I want to train my strength. In order to increase the amount of force my body can generate, I have to lift loads in the 70%-100% range for 1 – 6 repetitions while avoiding muscle failure. Over the course of my training as my loads reach the 90%-100% range, my repetitions will be lower and lower. I want to succeed in lifting the assigned weight, so that my body can adapt by learning how to generate more force, and lift it easier the next time around. If I fail because I am fatigued from doing a hundred burpees two minutes earlier, I won't be able to safely lift a 90% load for 3 repetitions. **My maximum strength is not improving, because I am too fatigued to provide the appropriate response to the stimulus required to increase strength.** My anaerobic capacity is improving because of the hundreds of burpees, and I may gain a little bit of strength from the virtue of handling heavier objects, but that is all.

If I want to improve my conditioning, let's say with a focus on strength endurance and the anaerobic system, I could sprint, do a hundred burpees, and then do 50 repetitions of barbell bench press with a *light* weight. Let's say 20% to 60% of my one repetition maximum. But my maximal strength, or the amount of overall force I can generate on the bench press won't be going up because of that session. Get me? Why is the amount of weight important? Because the more weight I can bench or squat, means the more force I can generate, which equals greater strength.

Using the above example let's discuss the occasional feud between body weight exercises and barbells, to add a different perspective. We'll compare push-ups and the bench press. Some newcomers to tactical style fitness have this attitude that push-ups are more 'functional', more authentic, and better than the bench press. They believe the bench is only for gym rats concerned about getting a pump and checking themselves out in the mirror. They know better and only do real exercises like kipping pull ups and burpees.

Let me add my two cents. The purpose of maximal strength training is to train the body to generate more force. You do this by lifting very heavy loads, which force your body to adapt. As mentioned previously, the loads have to be heavy enough, so that you can only lift them for 1 to 6 repetitions. If the loads are light, your body isn't shocked enough for that particular type of strength adaptation to occur. So very little or no strength improvement takes place. If I can lift a light weight a hundred times, no great maximal strength adaptation takes place, but my strength endurance may increase. So I may not be able to lift heavier in the future (i.e. generate greater force) but I can perform more repetitions of the light weight. That can be a form of conditioning, not necessarily maximal strength training however.

Can you see where I'm going with this yet? With push-ups, I am limited in how much of a load I can use because of my bodyweight. Now if you're a beginner or you can only do three push-ups without falling flat on your face, guess what, you are training maximal strength! But only until you can do about ten to twenty push ups, then you're back to strength endurance generally speaking, and your ability to generate force WON'T increase substantially (i.e. you are not getting stronger).

Hmmm...so how do we solve this? Let's add artificial weight to increase my body weight so I'm back to only being able to do three push-ups before falling on my face. I put a fifty pound plate on my back. Now I'm happy because I'm working on maximal strength again. But, we've run into another problem. I need more weight again. 50lbs on my back isn't going to be enough anymore, because I can easily do twenty push-ups with it. It's going to be awkward to put 300lbs on my back while I'm doing push-ups though...maybe we can create a bench of some sort with a rack so I can handle super heavy weights and still strengthen the same muscles (i.e. pectorals, triceps, shoulders etc). We can call it the bench press!

The argument about push-ups or bodyweight exercises being more functional than the bench press or traditional weights, is a moot point. They both serve a purpose. It all depends on what attribute you are training. If you are training to increase maximal strength, then something like the bench press wins hands down, simply because it allows you to lift more weight in an incremental fashion, thereby generating more force. For the *goals of this program*, an exercise like the bench press is far superior to the push up.

Push ups are a great exercise and are suitable for many other purposes. One armed push ups, for example, are a great maximum strength developer depending on how many you can do. On the flip side, the bench press could be used for conditioning or muscular endurance. Load up the bench with a very light weight – and lift for high repetitions.

Conditioning is extremely important. It's the other side of the coin. Just understand the differences and how to train the two attributes so you get the most benefit.

Conditioning may call for high intensity, all out efforts, high repetitions, and other techniques to improve your cardiovascular output. Think of it as training your various energy systems. Other conditioning techniques may focus on muscular endurance such as high repetition push-ups, pull-ups, or presses with lighter loads.

Strength training calls for a different approach. You have to be rested between lifts. You are avoiding muscular failure in order to give your body the best chance at lifting the near maximal load, thus forcing adaptation. You are not working out, you are training. You may not look very busy, resting for long periods of time on the squat rack before doing another low repetition lift, but we're concerned with results, not in whether we appear to be working out hard enough. Save the impressive displays of athleticism for your conditioning days or your sport. When you develop massively above average levels of strength, you won't be concerned that you look too relaxed in the gym on your strength days.

For the tactical athlete both strength AND conditioning are a must. If you neglect one or the other you are doing yourself a major disservice. Just understand that your strength will increase far more dramatically if you train it as a separate entity. When you become strong,



and you also train your conditioning equally, you may be far more athletic than the average trainee that mixes and matches everything in one session. Those types of programs are great for GPP type phases in your training or anaerobic work. Never mistake those types of workouts as strength training. Even if you're doing Olympic lifts, presses and the rest. Don't mistake the tools you're using for the system you're training. Training in that fashion has its own merits, but without a system of load progression any strength gains will be limited.

Who's going to be stronger in a year, someone that incrementally and systematically lifts heavier and heavier loads with a planned progression, or someone that sporadically lifts different weights at different times without any planned load progression, mixed in with burpees and box jumps? Both styles of training have their place, but its apples and oranges.

Think of the old Tortoise and the Hare. When you approach your strength training, be the tortoise, grasshopper. Go slow and focus on progressing. Slow and steady. When you're conditioning, be the rabbit. Go all out if required.

Conditioning is very important for the tactical operator. Again, just understand how to properly train each attribute. If you only train strength and neglect conditioning, you may become incredibly strong, but you're going to be a mess getting up a flight of stairs, and you won't last long in the tactical world. **DO BOTH equally**. When it's time to train strength, train strength. When you're conditioning, change gears and work on your conditioning.





## PERIODIZATION

*'I didn't give myself enough breaks during the training year to recover. I didn't understand the power of periodization.'*

Alberto Salazar

Periodization is just a fancy way of describing planned training progression. There are many styles of periodization. There's block periodization wherein you train physical attributes separately for a period of time before moving on the next. Periodization can also refer to how you manipulate frequency/volume and progression when it comes to strength training. You've no doubt heard of the terms linear and waved periodization. There are people that love it and people that aren't thrilled by it. Based on my own trial and error it works for me like no other programming I have tried. There are many different periodization models, some of the more popular strength programs you may have heard of utilize linear periodization and are very effective. Other Soviet or Bulgarian models exist that are equally or more impressive but may be less well known to general enthusiasts.

In a nutshell, periodization for our purposes is this. You are going to find out what you can currently lift, your maximums. Based on your maximums I am going to provide you with templates that use your numbers. You'll be lifting various percentages of your numbers until you approach your limits, at which point you'll back off, go light, and start again. Then you'll retest, and do it all over again, with your new maximums. This is long term game.

When I first got into weight training, the theme sold to me was 'Go 100% all the time bro – push your limits dude – if you're not constantly progressing you're doing it wrong – no pain no gain man!' Followed by a high five.

Now depending on your goals there is a time and place for that kind of attitude. Everything is relative. For example if I was doing an MMA style conditioning workout involving intervals of explosive activity that called for all-out effort, then yeah, that's a good time to go 100% to force adaptation through overwhelming stress.

The problem with this when it comes to strength training is this. Strength is like a skill and should be trained like a skill. This is what I've noticed with new trainees struggling with strength training. As beginners, they pick up weights and make gains for a **little while** no matter what they do, just from the virtue of handling heavy objects for the first time in their lives. They will train with fury and 100% effort every workout. Then they will relatively quickly hit a plateau. On days where the stars are aligned and they're well rested, they may break their plateaus by several pounds. Then next workout they're back to where they've started, or a few pounds lower which they'll chalk up to having a bad day, or just being tired. The average gym rat trains on emotion and feel. At this point frustration may set in and they start adding in various assistance exercises to hit the muscles 'from all angles' in order to break through their seeming limits. This may or may not help. Generally it doesn't make much of a big picture difference for those without some sort of progression model. As the years go by they may make small incremental changes in their numbers if at all, but usually they tend to stall out. For those inclined, performance enhancing drugs may enter the picture at this stage.

Now no program will keep you progressing forever in leaps and bounds, but periodization will definitely put the math in your favor and take you to your potential. In my experience it's far superior to going in to the gym and lifting by feel and trying to go 100% all the time. When you attempt to train at your maximum all the time you are most likely going to burn out and possibly get injured. When training without a plan I stalled at a bench press of 185lbs at roughly 150-155lbs of bodyweight. Terrible. I was struggling with 185lbs for months and couldn't really bust past it by more than a few pounds depending on how I felt during any given workout. This was the same with the rest of my exercises. Once I started periodization I almost doubled my bench in a year or so. My other lifts shot up dramatically. With the proper

plan in place I easily surpassed what I mistakenly thought was my limit and continued progressing.

Now are you going to see this kind of progress every year you use periodization? No of course not, no program on earth exists that keeps doubling your lifts every year, continuously. People new to strength training or periodization make big leaps and bounds in various exercises, then the gains may slow down, but there is a general upward trend. An advanced lifter that's been in the game for years benching 500lbs and deadlifting close to a 1000lbs will be making very small incremental improvements, in contrast to a new trainee that's just starting. However, with no planned progression, the chances you'll be making significant strength improvements over time are slim. Fail to plan, plan to fail.

Maximal strength training is a different animal. You're not lifting the barbells to challenge yourself, you are training to improve a skill. Not working out or exercising so you can enjoy an endorphin rush. Your goal is to increase your strength in the most efficient manner possible. You are not working on your aerobic capacity. You are not working on your anaerobic conditioning. You are not working on strength-endurance. You are working on increasing the amount of force/tension you can generate. If you combine attempts to lift maximal weights with anaerobic conditioning in one workout, you don't get much stronger and you might be setting yourself up for injury. You may get a great anaerobic workout, but you are not developing maximal strength in the most efficient manner. Leave the high intensity, all out sessions, for when you train those attributes in your conditioning program, or when you're in the ring.

There's a reason professionals have an 'in season' and 'off season'. You can't go 100% forever and keep making progress. There are times to dig deep, and there are times to lay back, hone your skills, and recover for the next push. You want to have longevity, not be one of the masses that get excited and energized about something for a short period of time and then move on to the next shiny object, goals left unmet.

Enter periodization. Periodization starts you off slowly, ramps your efforts up over time and then brings you down for a planned and calculated recovery. Then you do it all over again and push to a higher peak.

Periodization gives you a plan. Before you set foot in the gym, you'll know what exercises you're going to perform, number of sets, number of reps, and the load, generally 6 to 12 weeks in advance. Sounds a little different from hitting the gym and doing a 'chest and tris day' right?

The model calls for you to use certain load percentages based on your unique maximal lifts. Certain weeks in the model are meant to be easy, and others, high intensity. When it comes to strength training, intensity generally refers to weight of the load in relation to your one rep maximum, not how much you're sweating.

Train hard, but train smart. Actually, you are better off going for consistency vs hard. Don't mistake frantic activity for progress. The only thing that matters are results, not who's sweating the most. Your test of spirit may not involve playing with barbells or doing kipping pull-ups in the gym. It may be in the ring, leading a platoon in Afghanistan, or kicking down the door of your local fortified crackshack. Look at this program, or strength training in general, like a whetstone, simply a tool to keep your edge.

Another very important concept about the periodization model we're going to use. It takes a little longer than some think for the body to adapt to a certain load or stressor. Think about this. If I put you to work breaking concrete blocks with a ten pound sledgehammer, would you adapt after just one day on the job? Would you come in the next day and fly through it? What about one week on the job? How would someone who's been doing that job for five years compare to you after you've spent two weeks on the job? Get what I'm saying here? This is the issue I had with some of the strength programs I tried. You were encouraged to

increase the weight very quickly, sometimes every workout. This is a fine approach and it has its place in the right situation for the right trainee, but in my personal experience it wasn't an effective approach for me. Questions to ask yourself – can you progress every workout while you add weight each and every workout? Do you think your body adapts completely after a one time exposure to new stimulus? A little bit? For beginners may be? Would your body's adaptation be greater if you stayed with that stimulus for a longer period of time?

As in, what would happen, if instead of adding weight *every* workout, you added weight and then stayed with that same weight for several workouts? Would the adaptation be solid or more established for lack of a better term?

In the Tactical Barbell model, we are going to stick to one load for several workouts before moving up. We will make bigger jumps in weight progression, but then we'll also be staying with that load for a longer period of time. **EVEN IF IT FEELS TOO EASY** and you're ready to move on. Very important for success in the long term. We are going to build your strength on a solid unshakeable foundation.

## **LOAD**

I've incorporated a very simple progression model, that'll generally keep your weights within 75%-95% of your one rep maximum. I won't get into the science here, but these are generally accepted as good ranges to use for maximal strength training. If you want the science, look into the works of Pavel Tsatsouline, Verkhoshansky, Medvedyev or Tudor Bompa. I highly recommend it if you're interested in that kind of thing.

## **REPETITIONS**

As mentioned above, generally reps in the 1 to 5 range are great for strength building. Higher reps, 6 to 12 are used more for muscular hypertrophy (think classical bodybuilding), and even higher reps have been touted as effective for everything from power endurance to fat burning. I'm going to keep it simple here. There are others out there that can address the science and intricacies far better than I. For the purpose of this book understand we'll generally be using between 1 to 6 reps per set to achieve our goals.

## **REST INTERVALS**

**This is one of the most important parts of the program and a key element of being successful with this program.** It's generally accepted, and it's been my personal experience that you should be rested for each set to build strength. Avoid muscle failure. Yes you read that correctly: **AVOID MUSCLE FAILURE**. Muscle failure is primarily helpful for muscular hypertrophy, not strength. We are not training for size.

I am going to give you the Golden Rule now for this program. **DO NOT** deviate from it. **DO NOT** be flexible with it. **DO NOT** exercise your right to be a special little snowflake and change it. You want results with this program? Ready? Here it is:

## **THOU SHALT REST A MINIMUM OF TWO MINUTES BETWEEN SETS**

Not a minute, not 90 seconds. *Not even if you feel completely rested before the two minutes is up.* Don't trust your body in this case. Notice the Golden Rule states 'a minimum'. That's right. The idea is that you are fully rested for the next set, so that we avoid muscle failure. Take as long as you need, as long as it is a minimum of two minutes.

Two minutes will still give you residual hypertrophy in my experience. If you want to be even more dogmatic about your strength training and minimize hypertrophy further, classic strength training calls for 3 to 5 minutes of rest. You decide. I find 2 to 3 minutes a happy medium. If I'm feeling fresh after a set, or working in a circuit fashion, I use 2 minutes. Or if during a particular workout I'm not recovering sufficiently with only 2 minutes, I'll bump it up to a 3 or 4 minute rest interval. My preceding sets give me feedback for the length of rest

interval I'll be using for future sets. In one session my rest intervals can range anywhere from 2 to 5 minutes. If over time you find you are getting a little too big for your liking on this program, that's your cue for you to increase your rest intervals and/or manipulate your diet and conditioning.

On some training days calling for heavier loads in the 90% range, or with weights you've never handled before, it's not uncommon to rest **even five to ten minutes** before attempting a challenging load.

17 year old high school student/sprinter Allyson Felix deadlifted 300lbs while weighing about a hundred pounds herself! Her training strength training protocol consisted of using **five minute rest intervals**. This ensured 90% ATP recovery and minimized size gains. In short she got stronger without gaining mass. Now if you want to really limit the amount of residual hypertrophy I suggest you do the same – and make your minimum rest intervals longer. Of course you have to watch your nutrition as well. Rest intervals are just one variable in controlling hypertrophy. If you are fine with some muscle mass then stick with the two minute rest intervals.

The Golden Rule only applies when training maximal strength as outlined in this program. Not for hypertrophy, muscular endurance, power, or conditioning etc.

For the purposes of this program, muscle failure is the enemy. For those of you who have been in the strength game this is not new. For others this may seem like a crazy concept that goes against everything you've heard.

Here are a couple questions to ask yourself if it isn't making sense to you yet:

If I lift a heavy weight for five repetitions, take a short rest, and attempt to lift it for another 5 reps, but fail, how will my body adapt? What if I continue training this way through all my sets? I continue falling short of that five reps throughout my sets but I'm getting a 'pump', am I letting my body adapt and gain strength? Answer – you are most likely developing sarcoplasmic hypertrophy.

If I lift a heavy weight for five reps, take a longer rest period, and successfully hit five reps with this heavy weight and I do this for all my sets, how will my body adapt? I will be successfully lifting a heavy weight, and completing every set without muscle failure – what kind of adaptation will occur?

So for all you die hard strength types that don't want even a bit of extra mass along with your superhuman strength, or if you have weight categories to worry about, I'm going to make a suggestion. Take the Golden Rule even further and rest for a minimum three to five minutes to allow for complete ATP regeneration and minimal sarcoplasmic hypertrophy. This may be of particular importance to fighters, military operators, triathletes, distance runners, or anyone concerned with weight, or weight class. For the rest of you, stick with two to three minutes. For now, a general rule of thumb to keep in mind is the longer the rest interval, the more strength gains without the mass. Goes without saying food and conditioning load are key ingredients in putting on mass as well. They all work hand in hand.

## **THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE**

Now that I've drilled that into your head, I will muddy the waters with one exception. I was debating whether to even include this.

If you're an advanced/experienced lifter, you can ignore the rest interval rule and rest as needed. What's advanced? For the purposes of this program, if you are benching over 300lbs, and have a squat of 400lbs or higher. Or if you have a competitive powerlifting background. Chances are, if you are within those perimeters, then you will most likely adhere fairly closely to the Golden Rule anyway.

The Golden Rule exists because most beginners don't give themselves a chance to develop strength properly – they cut themselves short with the bad habit of going for muscle failure. It's been pounded into your head by bodybuilding based sources for years – go for

failure, feel the pump, drop sets, a million reps etc etc. So the Golden Rule exists to untwist that idea. Short rest intervals absolutely have merit for aesthetic bodybuilding and for developing hypertrophy. However they can be an obstacle to developing strength in the most efficient manner possible.

The idea of the Golden rule is to ensure that you complete each set and every rep while avoiding failure. Advanced strength trainees generally have a good idea of when they're ready to go for the next set and if they'll be able to complete all the reps without muscle failure. Sometimes that's less than two minutes, at other times it's more than five. Hence the exception.

## **STRENGTH BLOCKS**

In this program, a block is 6 weeks. There is no re-testing of maximums for at least 6 weeks. In my experience, the optimal length of a strength phase is 2 blocks, or 12 weeks. That seems to be the ideal amount of time to really develop a solid foundation of strength before re-testing your maximums.

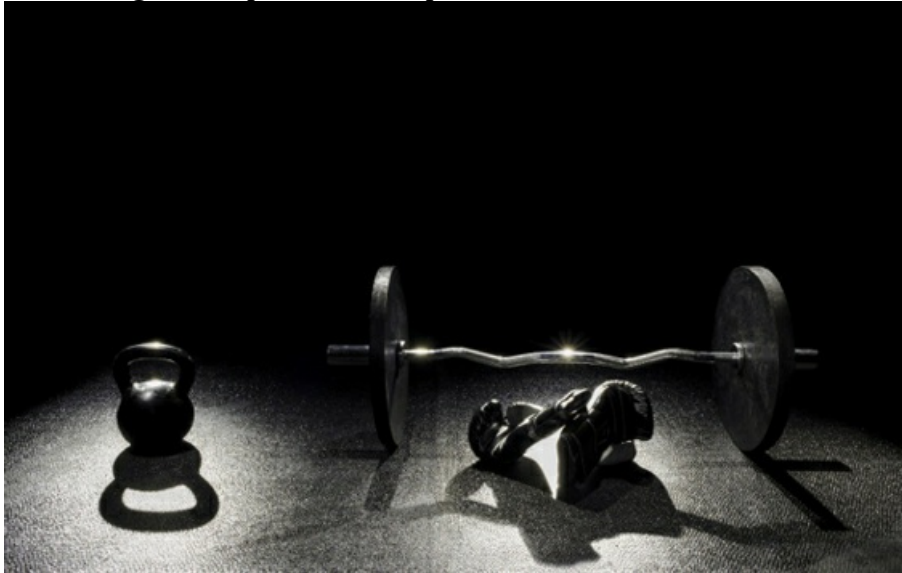
Strength blocks are very versatile and easy to plug into whatever situation you have. Just because you are doing a strength block, does not mean that you train only strength. The entire point of this program is for you to train strength along with your conditioning and other skills. However, there are a few different ways to do this depending on your goals. If you choose a template with three times a week strength training with a cluster of 4 exercises, then yes, it is most likely going to be your priority for that time period and will take a considerable amount of your energy away from training your other attributes. If you choose a more minimalist template with two days a week of strength training and a two exercise cluster, then strength is not prioritized and leaves time to develop other skills that may be more important for your job or sport. Don't worry about this too much right now, it'll all be clear after we get through the templates.

## EXERCISE SELECTION – CLUSTERS

*'I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.'*

Bruce Lee

You will be provided with suggested exercise clusters to go with each template. There are minimalist clusters with two major exercises, standard clusters with three, and heavy clusters with four or more. You will choose based on your training parameters. Certain clusters are recommended or designed for particular templates.



If you're able to train frequently, but have less than an hour available to you each session - you might choose a minimalist cluster. Or if you only want to dedicate two days a week to strength training, but you are willing to spend over an hour in the gym during each of those two sessions – you might choose a heavy cluster to go with that template. Don't worry about too much at this point. After you finish reading the program completely you'll have a better grasp of how to select a cluster. Things to keep in mind when choosing:

Are you using Zulu, or a specialist template?

How much time and energy are you going to spend on other training?

Will your other training take care of certain exercises? For example, some military personnel do a lot of pull-ups almost daily during unit PT. They might not choose a cluster containing pull-ups or weighted pull-ups.

May be you're only going to spend two days a week on strength training but you want a 3 or 4 exercise cluster.

Or you're going to strength train three days a week – but you need a shorter less energy draining workout so you pick a cluster with only two major compound lifts and one bodyweight exercise.

May be you need very minimal strength training and you decide to go with only two exercises two days a week. Not ideal, but May be your sport or lifestyle has a very low maximum strength requirement, but just enough that it needs your attention. Marathoners and some track athletes come to mind.

Are there exercise clusters that appeal to you or might be beneficial to your specific needs?

The various templates along with their recommended clusters will be covered in upcoming chapters, so just keep these considerations in mind. More advanced strength athletes can create their own clusters.

Once you pick a cluster, you'll stick with it for the entire duration of your training block.

You can change up clusters when you start a new block if you desire or if it fits with your goals, but it's generally recommended to stick with the same cluster for at least two blocks. We are not focussed on variety for variety's sake, we want results. If you become bored with your exercise selection mid-block, too bad ride it out. For the maximum strength game, if you keep changing things up, you will slow down your progression. Change things up in your conditioning workouts if you get bored easily. Keep the strength training relatively consistent.

## **MINIMALIST CLUSTERS**

Minimalist clusters consist of only two main exercises. They are great for athletes or tactical types that are heavily involved in other forms of training or dedicated to a specific sport which place great demands on their energy systems. They're also perfect for people who have a very limited amount of time but want to increase their strength. For the absolute minimalist, plug these in the two day a week Fighter template and you're set. They can also be used to great effect with a three day a week template like Operator. And of course, they're the only type of cluster allowed for Gladiator template. This is great for people that can train frequently throughout the week but with a limited time frame. A colleague of mine that works in an Economic Crime Unit hits the gym five days a week but only gets 45 minutes or less after work to train, due to family commitments. She finds training strength three times a week with two major exercises ideal, as it fits within her allotted time.

Now I don't have to explain this to experienced or advanced strength athletes, but some of you that are newer to the game may be scratching your head wondering 'are such a low number of exercises enough to get ultra strong?' Absolutely. Look into the works of outstanding strength guru and ex-soldier Pavel Tsatsouline. Or as mentioned above, research the minimalist strength training Coach Barry Ross administered to high school sprinter Allyson Felix, the 17 year old with the 300lb deadlift. Under Ross's coaching, Felix broke all of Olympian Marion Jones' high school 200m records, and ran the fastest 200m in the world at the age of 17. Ross credited much of that success to a very minimalist strength program consisting of deadlifts, push-ups or bench press, and some core training and plyometrics. So the deadlift was the only consistent barbell exercise, along with the bench press if not substituted with push-ups.

## **STANDARD CLUSTERS**

Standard clusters generally refer to 3 main lifts. They are for trainees who place a high or equal emphasis on strength in relation to their other skills. These clusters are very versatile, and go well with Fighter, Operator and Mass template. I find the quickest changes in body composition for clients when using a standard cluster paired with Operator or Mass. When clients start having more demands on their time or energy, I would simply have them switch to a minimalist cluster or have them keep their cluster, and switch to a two day a week template.

## **HEAVY CLUSTERS**

Heavy clusters are used almost exclusively with Zulu template and consist of four or more major lifts. Some trainees find four the ideal number, others prefer five, six, or even eight main lifts.

## **A WORD ON CHOOSING CLUSTERS**

This doesn't apply to those using Zulu, only to those using a specialist template. Be aware of your recovery abilities when choosing a cluster. If your lifestyle is not conducive to great recovery, then choosing a cluster that contains the squat, deadlift, and bench press may not be the best idea. You'll be doing those exercises several times a week depending on your chosen template. Can you handle deadlifting and squatting three times a week? Food for thought.

If you're unsure of your recovery management skills, start with a less intense cluster and

change it up in the future after a phase or two if needed.

Another way to use this to your advantage is to start with a heavier cluster for a block, and then switch to a lighter cluster for the next block as your training starts to become taxing. Maybe you don't have a problem with deadlifting, squatting, bench pressing and pressing three times a week, as long as it's only for a few weeks. Or maybe you don't like the idea of deadlifting three times a week. Choose the appropriate cluster accordingly.

You'll have to make the decision based on your background, experience, and recovery capacity. Tactical Barbell provides enough flexibility within the program to customize your training.

If you're new to the game and don't have an idea of your capabilities at this time, err on the side of doing less and ramp up as necessary. This concept applies to every part of this program.



## EXERCISE INSTRUCTION

The exercises I've included in this program are well known, and can be found all over the internet along with video demonstration. However, I have included some basic instruction here on some of the main exercises found in most clusters.

### SQUAT

A very effective, compound multi-joint movement. Has long term beneficial effects on the body's natural anabolic hormones. Increases testosterone and growth hormone over time. There's a popular saying in bodybuilding circles that goes something like 'if you want bigger arms, squat more'

Your stance should be roughly shoulder width or wider, with toes pointed out to a 35 to 45 degree angle. Keeping your toes pointed outward will provide your knees with the proper alignment when squatting. Place the bar roughly at the base of the neck, slightly lower, or however it feels comfortable to you and allows you to complete the movement. Where the bar goes depends a lot on your unique body mechanics and what's comfortable to you. Try to grip the bar as close to your shoulders as you can without straining or hurting the shoulder. Elbows down. Chest out. Back arched. To descend, push your knees out and your glutes back. Lower until your thighs are parallel to the ground, you can go deeper if you like. Once you hit bottom, forcefully push up back to your starting position. Repeat. Don't go too fast and don't go too slow. Maintain control by keeping your entire body tight. Keeping your body tight recruits more muscle fiber and stabilizes your lift. Exaggerate your grip on the bar, i.e. grip it tightly.

Keep your eyes straight ahead or looking slightly downward throughout the entire movement. Don't look up.

Different variations of the squat (i.e. the front squat) are fine to use with this program.

### BENCH PRESS

A great upper body exercise, strengthens the triceps, chest, forearms, shoulders and more.

Lie down on the bench. Take a comfortable, stable grip on the bar, slightly wider than shoulder width. Grip width can be unique to the lifter, so if you prefer a narrower or wider grip then stick with that. Tighten the entire body, exaggerate your grip on the bar – grip it tightly. As you lift keep your shoulder blades back, almost like you're pinching a coin in between them. This will help you keep your chest spread during the lift. Your lower back should arch slightly. Keep your feet planted on the floor and DO NOT lift your glutes off the bench. Bring the bar down, roughly aligned with your nipples, almost touching your body. Drive the bar back up. It should ascend in a bit of a natural 'c' movement so it ends up above your face. It'll descend the same way, ending up near your nipples or slightly lower.

Remember to keep your body tight throughout the lift. Imagine flexing every muscle as you lift off and maintaining that flex throughout the set. Descend under control, and add a bit of explosiveness to the lift/ascent. Lock out *under control*, without snapping your joints or elbows.

If you're interested in using different variations of the bench (incline or decline) for whatever reason, go for it. Just make sure it's a barbell version for the best results.

### DEADLIFT

The deadlift is on par with the squat, and may surpass it in terms of benefits depending on who you ask. The deadlift is another great multi joint exercise. It'll give you an iron core, strengthen your glutes, legs, back, forearms, grip strength and more. Lifting heavy things off the ground is probably as functional as it gets for most.

Stand with your feet roughly shoulder width or slightly wider apart. Toes pointed slightly outward. Start with the bar over your feet near your shins. Reach down and grip it with your hands outside your feet. I like to grip one hand over and one hand under, or what's called a

‘mixed grip’. You can do that or do a straight overhand grip with both hands. Your upper back and shoulders should be tight over the bar. Stabilize/arch your lower back and don’t round it. Keep your eyes focussed straight ahead or use a slightly downward gaze, like you’re looking at something on the ground about ten feet in front of you.

Now squeeze the bar off the ground, don’t jerk it. Grip it tightly, squeeze your glutes, and think ‘*squeeze the bar off the ground*’ to yourself. The legs and glutes should be starting the movement, not your back. Lift the bar up the shins and along your body. Keep the bar close to your body during the entire movement. Chest out. Stand erect and lock your knees out. Lower the bar in a controlled fashion back down the same path it took up. After it touches the floor, repeat.

Different variations of the deadlift are fine to use.

## **OVERHEAD PRESS**

Your feet should be roughly shoulder width, or slightly wider or narrower depending on your preference. Start with the bar on your shoulders (front, not behind the neck). Take a grip just outside your shoulders. Lift your chin up (out of the way of the travelling bar) and press the bar overhead. Keep your lower back arched and your chest out. Keep your legs and the rest of your body tight during the lift. Bring the bar back down the same path, and repeat.

I find keeping a slight bend in my knees helps maintain stability during the lift.

## **WEIGHTED PULLUPS**

This is one of my favorite lifts. I use a backpack, as I find a backpack provides more stability and allows me to incrementally increase loads far more efficiently than hanging weights from a chain around my waist. A weighted vest works very nicely as well. This exercise in particular will give you extremely well developed arms if you can’t shake your weakness for big biceps.

Put the backpack on containing your weights and tighten the straps so it’s a snug fit. Take a shoulder or slightly wider than shoulder width grip on the pull-up bar. Exaggerate your grip, i.e. grip the bar tightly in your hands. Take an overhand grip (palms away from you) Squeeze yourself up with an explosive movement, and then lower yourself *under control*. The pull up bar should be at your neck or even your chest at the top of the movement. If you can’t get your chin above the bar, you’re lifting too heavy. Lower yourself with control all the way down to a dead hang, then explode up and repeat the movement. No kipping. Do whatever feels comfortable with your dangling legs. I sometimes like to cross them at the ankles and bend them behind me out of the way.

## **A WORD ON LIFTING TECHNIQUE**

Here are a couple simple tricks to incorporate in your lifting. Tighten your entire body when preparing to lift off. Keep your body tight throughout the lift. This activates your neuromuscular system and stabilizes your body for the heavy work. You might add a few pounds to your maximums just by doing this. It helps to squeeze the bar tightly with your hands as well. Do this even with your warm up lifts, light weights, everything. It’s a good way to practice ‘activating’ your muscular system.

When lifting, there are a couple different techniques you can use with this program. You can ‘grind’ your lifts out, that is lift tight, under control, and squeeze the weight into the appropriate lift. Think of the energy used in arm wrestling. Grinding, slow strength.

Another option is to use speed/explosiveness during the positive motion of the lift. By positive I mean when you’re exerting the most force against the weight. For example, during the bench press it would be when you push the bar up and away from your chest, or when you stand up from the bottom of a squat. When you pull your body up over the pull-up bar. You are still lifting under control, you are simply moving your muscles as fast as you can against the weight. This still might look slow from the outside looking in, especially if you’re lifting

heavy. Again, I can't stress enough you are still lifting under control and within the boundaries of the movement. Don't snap your joints, jerk, or throw the weights around. Fast positive motion, under tight control. During the negative portion of the lift, lower the weight under control and stay tight.



## THE TEMPLATES

Now we are getting into the meat and potatoes of the program. **Zulu is the main template recommended for all.** But some of you will fall into specialist categories or want to try different approaches.

I've included detailed examples of how trainees use Zulu, and the specialist templates. This will give you an idea of whether a particular template is right for your situation, and how you can incorporate it with the rest of your training/life. Here's an overview of the program so far, to keep things on track:

Decide how many blocks you'll be running. Blocks are 6 weeks in length for all templates. 2 blocks or 12 weeks is the recommended optimal amount of time unless otherwise stated. I strongly suggest you run the program for 2 blocks before re-testing your maximums to get the best effect. Experienced or advanced lifters can retest every block if desired. Some intermediate/advanced lifters respond better to testing more frequently (i.e. every 6 weeks) others make better gains over a longer period of time. Choose accordingly.

Choose a template. For most, this should be Zulu. Either Standard or I/A version.

Choose an exercise cluster from the suggested list that comes with the template.

Experienced trainees or those with very specific goals can create their own.

Go to the gym and test your maximums using the methods outlined in a later chapter.

Take a day or two off.

Plug your numbers into the template.

Execute. Follow the loading/reps/sets schedule as laid out in your chosen template.

I'll get into testing your maximums later in the program. Don't worry about it for now.

Tactical Barbell revolves around 1 main strength template (Zulu) and 4 specialist templates. Within each template I will list only the days that you strength train. I will leave the scheduling of your cardio, MMA training, crossfit or squash game to you. There is one mandatory rest day per week.

To get the most out of this program, I strongly suggest you do no extra *heavy* barbell or dumbbell training on non-TB days. Stick to conditioning or your sport specific training. I've given the templates nicknames, like 'Gladiator' or 'Operator', in part because it sounds more Gucci than calling them 'Template #1' or '#2' etc. Also each one has a bit of a story behind it, and was developed for a particular client associated to the name.

### ZULU Template

This is your default template. Zulu is Tactical Barbell's flagship strength model. This is what you'll use unless you fall into a niche or specialist category better served by one of the other templates. Zulu revolves around a cluster of 4-6 main lifts+ performed over 4 days during the week. If you like, and if you can handle the volume, you can use up to 8 major lifts/exercises. For the tactical athlete, it is most optimal with a 4-5 exercise cluster however.

Each session lasts approximately 15-25 minutes. Sometimes 30 depending on how many exercises you have in your cluster. Zulu is very flexible because of all the time and energy it leaves you to train other attributes. You've taken care of your strength training in 20 minutes. After your session you can do whatever your goals require you to do. You can do high intensity conditioning work, kettlebells, skills training, or simply go for a run. Or you can do nothing at all and call it a day.

There are two versions of Zulu. **Standard** and **Intermediate/Advanced (I/A)**. Standard can be used by anyone from beginner to advanced, looking for a 'Do This' style program where everything is laid out step by step. I/A is for those intermediate/advanced lifters that have a more in depth interest in strength training, and want more flexibility when it comes to weekly volume and intensity. I/A gives you broader perimeters to work with and allows you to customize your strength training to a higher degree if you know what you're doing.

Zulu is the main template and is recommended for all unless you're in a category that would benefit more from one of the specialist templates listed below.

## **OPERATOR Template**

Operator was the original Tactical Barbell base strength model. It was designed for tactical types looking for a minimalist approach to strength training. The lowest dose for the best effect. Operator is one of the fastest ways to increase overall strength.

Generally speaking, Eastern bloc style strength training favours frequent lifting. Frequent lifting of *each* exercise. I'm talking major lifts here obviously, not bicep curls. That's our approach at TB. For those of you familiar with Bulgarian, German and Soviet lifting science, none of this is news. For some of you it's been ingrained in your heads that if you squat, deadlift or bench more than once a week your limbs will fall off and you'll be laid up in a stretcher suffering from debilitating nerve disease and paralysis. Your body is far more capable than you think. There's a trick to being successful with this frequent approach however. The key is backing off each session while you're still fresh. Think about it. What if you squatted 2 or 3 times a week, but you don't take your sessions to failure. You stop while you still have some juice in your legs and you're still relatively fresh. It wouldn't be out of the question for you to go for a run after your squats. That fresh.

Think back to that sledgehammer-breaking-rocks example I gave you earlier in the book. What's going to happen? Your body will adapt to the load far more quickly because of the frequency. In a way, it's like practicing a sport – the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Now think about hitting squats once, waiting a week, and squatting again. What's gonna be more effective for strength? Now if you squat until you can no longer walk 2-3 times a week – that's how NOT to do it. Not without drugs anyway. If there's one thing I want you to take away from this book, it's this:

### **Frequent heavy lifting while avoiding failure/overtraining**

That's the ticket to quicker, bigger strength gains. Once you understand and get a feel for that principle, you pretty much understand how to develop strength.

The reason Operator has been so successful is because it epitomizes this principle. See, generally speaking, eastern bloc programming favours 3 times a week per lift as being most optimal, and 1x per week as being least effective. For strength. That's how Operator works. Each lift is performed 3 times per week. However, we have to sacrifice something in order to maintain that frequency – and what we sacrifice is number of exercises. We have to keep it ultra-spartan. So what happens if an efficient program like Operator skyrockets your squats and bench relatively quickly, but you're neglecting deadlifts? Try it. Do a bench/squat/pull-up Operator protocol for 12 weeks. Don't do a single deadlift. After 12 weeks, try working up to a deadlift single – and then tell us what the result was. You probably already guessed it, but chances are, your deadlift is or has stayed at a respectable number. In fact, some of you may even have a *heavier* deadlift. Squatting and benching in an optimal, frequent manner has given you overall strength. That's the beauty of compound lifts – they tend to strengthen and activate more of your body. A lot of the muscles used to squat, are the same muscles used to deadlift.

Operator is NOT the best template for those that already have an advanced level of strength. It's also not a suitable template for those that want a wide variety of exercises. Operator works best when using only 2-3 exercises – for example bench/squat/weighted pull-ups or overhead press/deadlift/bodyweight pull-up. Let's say you want to include more lifts in your training, all the standard lifts; bench, squat, deadlift, OHP, and weighted pull-ups – then Operator is definitely not for you. You'd go with Zulu.

Now let's say you're a military special operations type that wants a minimalist approach that increases overall strength very quickly to a high degree – then Operator is for you. The niche clients Operator's aimed at are not competing in power lifting tournaments, and some

may not even *like* strength training. It's just another box they have to tick off along with the rest of the skills they have to maintain and develop. Then the aptly named Operator template is a good fit.

Operator is also great for beginners to increase strength quickly – until they hit more advanced levels. Then it's time to switch to Zulu. I'll be presenting an optional beginner to intermediate/advanced progression model later in the book. The model will incorporate both Operator and Zulu.

## **FIGHTER**

Fighter has become one of our most popular templates. Fighter is essentially our two-day-per week lifting program. It's designed for those that have to spend most of their time on skills training or some other attribute, but still require high levels of strength. It's become extremely popular with mixed martial artists, boxers, marathoners, and even kettlebell athletes. This template was originally designed with infantry and some special operations soldiers in mind. The type that has designated unit PT and needed supplemental strength work. If you're looking for a two day per week strength program, Fighter is for you.

## **GLADIATOR Template**

Gladiator is a specialist program not meant to be used continuously. It's a high volume, high frequency template to be used with only 2 major lifts. In that way, it's similar to Smolov and Russian Bear. Great for applying shock treatment to problem lifts or lagging strength. Common minimalist clusters used with Gladiator include deadlift / bench press, bench press/squat, muscle up/pistol squat, deadlift/OHP etc.

## **MASS**

Mass template is for those that want to develop some overall size without taking the full blown bodybuilder/ split routine approach. Size can be function in certain circumstances or roles. SWAT breachers and football linebackers come to mind. Increasing muscle mass is *one* way to improve strength to a degree. So if you're not interested in taking the bodybuilder route, but need to put on some beef, then this is for you.

That's a general overview of the templates that make up the TB strength system. You will get detailed examples on how to incorporate the rest of your training with each template further in the book.

## **ZULU TEMPLATE**

Zulu is the standard Tactical Barbell template. There are two versions of Zulu, **Standard** and **I/A**. It consists of four lifting sessions per week. You'll choose a cluster containing four or more major lifts. You'll be performing two or three of your chosen lifts per session. Zulu is the ultimate model for both tactical athletes, and recreational/serious lifters. Each session takes approximately 15-25 minutes to complete. This leaves you with a ton of time and energy to devote to skills training, conditioning, or recovery.



How it works is like this. First pick a cluster from the list provided at the end of the

chapter. Let's use one of the recommended Zulu clusters as an example:

**Bench press/ Squat/ Deadlift/ Overhead Press**

Then you divide your cluster into half, like this:

**Bench/ Squat**

**Deadlift/ Overhead Press**

We'll call the Bench/Squat session 'A' and the Deadlift/OHP session 'B'

Sessions 'A' and 'B' are then each performed twice a week. This is the recommended weekly scheduling:

Day 1: **A – Bench/ Squat**

Day 2: **B – Deadlift/OHP**

Day 3:

Day 4: **A – Bench/ Squat**

Day 5: **B- Deadlift/OHP**

Day 6:

Day 7: Rest

The above represents the weekly frequency. Below, I've laid out both Zulu templates, Standard and I/A. The templates provide you with the amount of sets x reps x load. Plug the above exercises into the template you've chosen:

**ZULU STANDARD**

DAY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
1	A 3 x 5 / 70%	A 3 x 5/ 80%	A 4 x 3/ 90%	A 3 x 5/ 70%	A 3 x 5/ 80%	A 4 x 3/ 90%
2	B 3 x 5/ 70%	B 3 x 5/80%	B 4 x 3/90%	B 3 x 5/ 70%	B 3 x 5/80%	B 4 x 3/ 90%
3						
4	A 3 x 5/ 75%	A 3 x 5/80%	A 4 x 3/90%	A 3 x 5/70%	A 3 x 5/80%	A 4 x 3/ 90%
5	B 3 x 5/ 75%	B 3 x 5/ 80%	B 4 x 3/90%	B 3 x 5/ 70%	B 3 x 5/ 85%	B 4 x 3/ 90%
6						
7	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF

The above is Sets x Reps x Percentage of your one repetition maximums.

Retest your one repetition maximums every 6 or 12 weeks.

Optional Modification: Weeks 3 and 6 call for 4 sets of 3 reps at 90% of your maximum.

It's rare, but if you find the volume too difficult you have the option to perform 3 sets of 3 reps instead. Or alternatively do 3 or 4 sets depending on how each lift is going. This only applies to weeks 3 and 6. You shouldn't have any issues with completing the full 4 sets, but the option is available to you should you need it. Perhaps you have a particularly gruelling conditioning session to follow, or whatnot.

The above is the optimal weekly schedule for the best results. It's not set in stone. As long as you adhere to the principles – one rest day. No back to back same sessions. Completed within 7 days. You can choose to have your rest day on Day 3, instead of Day 7 for example.

**ZULU I/A**



DAY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
1	A 3-5 x 5 70%	A 3-5 x 5 80%	A 3-5 x 3 90%	A 3-5 x 5 70%	A 3-5 x 5 80%	A 3-5 x 3 90%
2	B 3-5 x 5 70%	B 3-5 x 5 80%	B 3-5 x 3 90%	B 3-5 x 5 70%	B 3-5 x 5 80%	B 3-5 x 3 90%
3						
4	A 3-5 x 5 75%	A 3-5 x 5 85%	A 3-5 x 2 95%	A 3-5 x 5 75%	A 3-5 x 5 85%	A 3-5 x 2 95%
5	B 3-5 x 5/ 75%	B 3-5 x 5 85%	B 3-5 x 2 95%	B 3-5 x 5/ 75%	B 3-5 x 5 85%	B 3-5 x 2 95%
6						
7	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF

The above is Sets x Reps x Percentage of one repetition maximums.

Retest your one repetition maximums every 6 or 12 weeks.

This template is for intermediate/ advanced lifters that want more flexibility within their strength training. Notice that I/A allows you to choose 3 to 5 sets per exercise, and uses heavier loads than Standard.

There are several ways to use this flexibility in number of sets. If you're training strictly for strength, you might back off when you start approaching muscle failure. So you start with bench press, you're feeling great after 3 sets and have more in you. You perform a 4<sup>th</sup> set and start feeling slight fatigue around your last couple reps. You decide you'll back off while still fresh, and stop. So you end up completing 4 sets of bench press. You move on to squats. Your legs feel great and you go for the full-pull and complete 5 sets of 5. You've finished up your training for the day. Tomorrow, you're on to workout B – Deadlift and OHP. You're also planning on going for a hard 2 mile interval run after you finish up with the weights. Knowing this, you stick to 3 sets only for both Deadlift and OHP. Or you have an intense Muay Thai training session tomorrow, so today you use the minimal number of sets. Second session of the week you go back up to 5 sets because you have a rest day following. Get it?

Here's another consideration. Hypertrophy. Higher volume can contribute to more muscular hypertrophy. Let's say you want to put on a little beef. Nothing crazy, but you know you can do with a little muscular development. You'd probably go for 4 to 5 sets each session instead of 3.

#### **ZULU – SUGGESTED CLUSTERS**

Bench press/ Squat/ Overhead Press/ Deadlift

Bench press/ Squat / OHP/ Deadlift/ bodyweight pull-ups

Bench press/ Squat/ OHP/Deadlift/ Weighted pull-ups

Bench press/ Squat/ OHP/ Deadlift/ Power Clean

Pull-ups/ One-Arm Push-up/ Pistol Squats/Deadlift

Muscle-ups/Pistol Squats/ One-Arm Push-up/ Deadlift

Weighted pull-ups/ One-Arm Push-up/ Weighted Pistol Squat/ Deadlift

Bench press/Squat/ Deadlift/ Weighted pull-up/ Overhead Press

If you're not an experienced lifter, and you're interested in developing maximum strength in the most efficient way possible, I recommend you use one of the first three clusters on the list.

Advanced trainees can put together their own clusters, including Olympic lifts, hybrid/mixed bodyweight-barbell clusters etc.

If you pick a cluster containing five or more exercises, you still divide them into two 'A' and 'B' sessions. Let's take the third cluster for example. We could divide it like this:



Session A – Squat/ OHP/ Weighted Pull-up

Session B- Deadlift / Bench press

Too easy. 4 to 5 is the suggested ideal number of lifts in your cluster, but you are free to include more if you wish.

### **ZULU EXAMPLE – THE SWAT MEMBER**

DT is an operator on a busy municipal SWAT team. He has to train and maintain a variety of occupational skills and attributes, including strength, anaerobic conditioning, general endurance and work capacity. DT uses Zulu template year round for his strength development. He's using a cluster consisting of squat/bench/deadlift/OHP. A typical training week looks like this:

Day 1: Zulu - Squat/ Bench + 20-30 minutes of heavy bag work/skipping

Day 2: Zulu - Deadlift/ OHP + 20 minute high intensity conditioning (tabata / burpees etc)

Day 3: Long Steady State Run /other general endurance activity or optional rest day

Day 4: Zulu – Squat/Bench

Day 5: Zulu- Deadlift/OHP + light high volume kettlebell work x 15-20 minutes.

Day 6: Bodyweight work, or high intensity conditioning session (intervals, hill runs etc.)

Day 7: Rest

DT's Zulu strength sessions take roughly 15-20 minutes. As you can see, that leaves him plenty of time and energy to continue training other attributes and skills. DT uses Zulu Standard. This is a typical example of a tactical athlete incorporating Zulu template.

### **ZULU EXAMPLE – AESTHETICS**

Amir wants to get stronger but also has an interest in aesthetics and accessory lifts. He's not a tactical athlete, and doesn't specialize in a particular sport. He simply wants to be strong and look good. Amir uses a Zulu cluster consisting of bench/squat/Deadlift/Weighted pull-ups. This is roughly how he sets up his training:

Day 1: Zulu-Deadlift/Bench press + dips, incline dumbbell bench press

Day 2: Zulu-Squat/Weighted pull-up + Hamstring curls, barbell bicep curls

Day 3: Cardio

Day 4: Zulu-Deadlift/Bench press+ dumbbell shoulder press, hanging leg raise, Ab roller

Day 5: Zulu- Squat/Weighted pull-up + calf raises, forearm work, face-pulls

Day 6: Cardio

Day 7: Rest

Amir performs his Zulu work as per the rules outlined in Tactical Barbell. His strength work takes him approximately 20 minutes to complete. After he completes his main lifts, he starts up with the accessory work. He performs his accessory work in typical bodybuilder fashion, short rest intervals, higher repetitions, relatively lighter weights (50%-70%RM) and seeking muscle failure. All things conducive to hypertrophy. When it's time for his Zulu work, he switches gears so that strength development is the focus.

The above are general examples of how you can incorporate Zulu in your own routine. The bottom line is that your Zulu sessions are going to be very brief, which will leave you plenty of time and energy to pursue and work on any other training goals.

Zulu adheres to that simple but highly effective principle of successful strength training; frequent heavy lifting while avoiding unnecessary/excessive muscle failure/fatigue. It is a simple, elegant model for both the hardcore tactical athlete, and the recreational strength trainee.

### **OPERATOR TEMPLATE**

Operator is a good fit for two broad categories. Beginners or trainees that still have relatively low numbers in the main compound lifts, and tactical types looking for a very effective, but minimalist strength training framework. For beginners, few programs will ramp

up your strength as quickly as Operator. But once it gets you get into heavier territory, it may be time to switch to Zulu. If you're a tactical type, you may not care about constantly increasing your maximums beyond a certain point, and Operator will still be ideal for you.

Operator is most effective when used with a cluster containing only 2 or 3 major lifts. Any more than this becomes too much, each session becomes too long. The way Operator works is that all the lifts in your cluster are performed every session three times a week.

Here's an example using the **Squat/Bench/ Pull-up** cluster:

Day 1: Squat/ Bench/ bodyweight pull-ups

Day 2:

Day 3: Squat/ Bench / bodyweight pull-ups

Day 4:

Day 5: Squat/ Bench/ bodyweight pull-ups

Day 6:

Day 7: Off

As you can see, this is a very spartan approach to strength, but it works incredibly well. Operator sacrifices variety for frequency, which results in some very rapid increases in strength. Operator has a shelf life for some as mentioned above – at some point, a switch to Zulu will be necessary depending on your goals. It will get you strong fast, but then you'll have to modify how you manage your weekly loading/programming.

### OPERATOR TEMPLATE

DAY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
1	3 x 5/ 70%	3 x 5/ 80%	3 x 3/ 90%	3 x 5/ 75%	3 x 5/ 85%	3 x 2/ 95%
2						
3	3 x 5/ 70%	3 x 5/ 80%	3 x 3/ 90%	3 x 5/ 75%	3 x 5/ 85%	3 x 2/ 95%
4						
5	3 x 5/ 70%	3 x 5/ 80%	3 x 3/ 90%	3 x 5/ 75%	3 x 5/ 85%	3 x 2/ 95%
6						
7	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF

The above is Sets x Reps x percentage of your one repetition maximums.

Retest your maximums every 6 or 12 weeks.

I've listed the 'OFF' day as being Day 7. You can decide when you want the off day in the week depending on how it fits into the rest of your training. It doesn't have to be at the end of the week, it can be in the middle or whenever. I recommend a minimum of one day off a week. The days that are left blank are for you to organize the rest of your training. They can be used for conditioning, MMA training, swimming etc. As with the off day, the strength sessions do not have to fall on Days 1,3 and 5. Just remember the general rules in regards to the above template – train three times a week, with one day in between strength sessions (i.e. no back to back strength sessions), and one rest day a week. The rest of the week is for you to set up as you wish.

If you're running this template long term, I recommend you take a few weeks off every 3-6 months or so to allow your CNS some recovery time. Perfect if you've got vacation planned.

Another popular method of using Operator goes like this. Every block you switch clusters. A block is 6 or 12 weeks. So it could go something like this:

Block 1 – 6 Weeks: Bench/ Squat/ Weighted pull-ups

Block 2 – 6 Weeks: Deadlift/ Overhead press/ Bodyweight pull-ups

You will get very strong, relatively quickly using Operator. Most who choose Operator

on a permanent or long term basis are not working toward one repetition maximums or peaking. They approach strength as an attribute to be brought to a certain level and maintained. It's usually balanced with other skills that are developed and maintained simultaneously. That's why Operator trainees don't panic if they know they're not going to be doing certain lifts for weeks at a time. Their overall strength is increasing dramatically, and they're not preparing for a powerlifting meet. They don't care that while they were using a squat/bench/pull-up cluster for 6 weeks, their neglected deadlifts dropped from a 300lb max to a 290 max\*. Overall they are getting the strength they need for their goals. If this mindset or approach fits your situation, then Operator is for you.

\*I touched on this earlier, but it's worth emphasizing. I once ran Operator for a year and a half with a bench/squat/weighted pull-up cluster. I didn't do a single deadlift in that time. I re-tested deadlifts and hit 340lbs for 2-3 reps. The frequency and progression with Operator just makes you strong overall, plain and simple. Now I was conducting an experiment, but I don't recommend you do what I did. I suggest switching up clusters every 9-12 weeks for best effect and balance.

### **OPERATOR – SUGGESTED CLUSTERS**

Bench/Squat/Bodyweight Pull-up

Bench/ Squat/ Weighted pull-up

Bench/ Squat/ Deadlift

Bench/ Squat

Bench/ Deadlift

Squat/Overhead Press/Deadlift

Squat/Overhead Press

Deadlift/ One arm push-up/ Weighted Pull-ups

Pistol Squat/One arm push-up/ Bodyweight Pull-ups

Muscle-ups/Squats

When putting together a cluster for Operator, always keep in mind you'll be lifting each exercise in your cluster three times a week. If you're worried about balance, remember you can switch up clusters every block or two. So your first block could consist of Bench/Squat/pull-ups, and your second Overhead press/deadlift/ Power cleans for example. If you're still panicking, use Zulu instead.

### **OPERATOR EXAMPLE – SOLDIER X**

Soldier X as we'll call him is a Canadian Military Special Operations soldier. He uses Operator template three days a week. X finds training two major movements three times a week ideal for his lifestyle. It allows for frequent short strength training sessions without sidelining him from his hardcore conditioning work. He's chosen a cluster containing Bench/ Deadlift. Every 6 weeks he switches to Overhead Press/Squat. X considered adding pull-ups to his cluster, but he gets a lot of pull-up work in during his conditioning days and group military workouts. So he kept it simple. Two major lifts, three times a week. A simple sure-fire way to increase strength dramatically.

X wants to generally minimize muscular hypertrophy, so he rests a full 3 to 5 minutes between heavier sets, instead of the recommended 2.

Between the longer rest intervals and high endurance/cardio load, X stays lean, mean and muscular.

With his remaining three non-strength days he works on his conditioning. X goes for long 'fun runs' which last anywhere from 5 to 15 kilometers, and may involve calisthenics or wearing a heavy weighted pack. He may also spend his conditioning days going on long ruck marches involving hills and timed uphill 'hikes' or hill runs. His maximum strength levels have shot up dramatically and his bodyweight exercises and ruck sack work have benefited tremendously. X finds the training strength three times a week gives him quicker and more

consistent strength gains. Soldier X's programming looks something like this when in garrison:

Day 1: Operator – Deadlift/ Bench + high intensity conditioning (burpees/mountain climbers etc)

Day 2: General Endurance – 10km-15km runs, ruck marches or hill running

Day 3: Operator – Deadlift/ Bench + AM military unit PT (running, push-ups, pull-ups etc.)

Day 4: General Endurance – ruck march/weighted fun-runs

Day 5: Operator – Deadlift/ Bench +AM military unit PT / or no extra work if PT cancelled

Day 6: General Endurance – swimming/10km-15km run/ ruck

Day 7: Off

The above schedule isn't set in stone. It's roughly what a typical week looks like. X is frequently deployed overseas, which can interrupt his training cycle. Upon his return to a stable situation, he simply retests his one rep maximums and starts a new block. Although X's lifestyle is not conducive to steady uninterrupted strength gains, this program has given him an incredible strength base, along with a dramatic overall increase in physical ability over time. If X were a civilian not subject to being pulled away every few months to places without gyms, X's gains would improve even more quickly. For his lifestyle, X finds this template the most beneficial.



#### **OPERATOR EXAMPLE – THE NOVICE**

Jenn is a civilian employee at a federal law enforcement agency. Her daily work is sedentary and she has relatively few physical demands throughout the week. Jenn has recently taken an interest in strength and conditioning. She's a novice and her starting weights are relatively light. Operator is the fastest way for her to increase her strength. She goes with a bench/ squat/ deadlift cluster. The big three. This wouldn't be an ideal choice for a tactical athlete, but for Jenn's situation it's perfect. She has the time, energy and optimal conditions for recovery. Jenn's schedule looks like this:

Day 1: Operator – Squat/Bench/ Deadlift

Day 2: Conditioning – 20-30 minute run

Day 3: Operator – Squat/ Bench/ Deadlift

Day 4: Conditioning – 'bootcamp' style conditioning class or optional rest day

Day 5: Operator – Squat / Bench/ Deadlift

Day 6: Conditioning- Sprints/400s at the track

Day 7: Off

Jenn is making rapid strength gains. It's hard not to get stronger lifting 3 major compound exercises 3 times a week. Because of Operator's built in waved intensity and sub-maximal loads, Jenn rarely feels over-trained or unusually fatigued. Frequent heavy lifting while remaining fresh/avoiding muscle failure is a guaranteed recipe for strength gains. Jenn can continue on this path for a lengthy period of time if her situation remains constant. She'll have to re-evaluate if she picks up a very physically demanding hobby/sport, or when her lifts start reaching intermediate/advanced numbers.

## **FIGHTER TEMPLATE**

This is Tactical Barbell's two day template. You will strength train only two days per week with Fighter. It's become one of our most popular templates to date, because of its flexibility and compatibility with serious athletic training. This template is recommended if you need greater levels of strength, but it's slightly lower on your list of training priorities. Not all athletes need the same levels of strength. Some need less than others, and some can only devote a minimal amount of training time to it. Precious training time and energy has to go to abilities higher on the list. For example it's nice to be very strong as a marathon runner, but you're not going to sacrifice excessive time or energy to developing maximum strength vs logging your miles. It would be foolish to devote three days a week to a heavy lifting program, when your goal is to excel at marathon. That time has to be put into your roadwork. It's the same way with many sports in different degrees. Some athletes may need more strength than marathon runners but less than football linebackers for example.

**If you're an athlete first, and a lifter second – Fighter template is definitely for you.** Some examples of trainees that are a good fit with this template are; endurance athletes such as triathletes, adventure racers, martial artists, boxers, MMA, and Brazilian ju-jitsu practitioners. Fighter template frees up significant time for the athlete to focus and train other skills or attributes which are higher priority.

What makes Fighter more effective than many twice/week lifting templates is that you are maximizing the frequency of several major lifts in that limited period of time. It's a simple concept that works very well. Whereas many two day templates have you perform each major lift only once per week, Fighter has you perform them twice a week. You'll sacrifice being weaker in a larger number of lifts to getting stronger with fewer exercises. Think about it. If you're using Fighter template, you are most likely training for something more than being good at doing a variety of barbell lifts. You simply want increased levels of overall strength while still having the time to put most of your time and energy where it belongs – training your sport specific skills or priority attributes.

This is how it works. You select a cluster. Since you're only lifting twice a week, you can use a larger number of exercises than Operator. Just don't go overboard. Here's a sample schedule, using Bench/ Squat/ Deadlift/ Pull-ups:

Day 1: Fighter – Bench/ Squat/ Deadlift/Pull-ups

Day 2:

Day 3:

Day 4: Fighter – Bench/ Squat/ Deadlift/ Pull-ups

Day 5:

Day 6:

Day 7: Off

As you can see, there are a lot of blank spaces during your week. Lots of room to fill up with heavy conditioning, skills training or bodyweight work etc.

Remember, progression = increased strength. You can do fewer exercises twice a week and thus progress faster (= become stronger faster) or you can do the variety show with a dozen exercises split over two workouts that you hit only once per week...and progress at a slower pace. But hey, at least you won't get bored.

We've had tremendous positive feedback on Fighter from a wide variety of users, so we're not tinkering with it too much – just streamlining it slightly.

**FIGHTER TEMPLATE**

DAY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
1	3-4 x 5 75%	3-4 x 5 80%	3-4 x 3 90%	3-4 x 5 75%	3-4 x 5 80%	3-4 x 3 90%
2						
3						
4	3-4 x 5 75%	3-4 x 5 80%	3-4 x 3 90%	3-4 x 5 75%	3-4 x 5 80%	3-4 x 3 90%
5						
6						
7	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF

The above is Sets x Reps x Percentage of one repetition maximum.

Retest maximums every 6 or 12 weeks.

Notice the option to do 3 to 4 sets per exercise. This hinges on a few things. If you're using a cluster with a greater number of exercises, four or more, then you probably want to stick to 3 sets per lift. If you're going with a smaller cluster, you might feel like doing a full four sets. Or you can perform 3 sets for some lifts and 4 for others. As long as you are doing the prescribed minimums, doing the extra set is entirely up to you. If you're having a slow training week and you have time and energy to kill – do 4 sets. Alternatively, if you're in training hell and you're having a gruelling week – stick to 3. If you're satisfied with 3 sets all around, that is perfectly acceptable as well. The 4<sup>th</sup> set is just a little extra for those that want it.

Remember, you're only lifting twice a week. In the overall scheme of things that is relatively easy to manage even with a larger cluster. Let's say you go overboard and pick a cluster with 5 major exercises. 2 minute rest intervals. 3 sets each. That's about 30 minutes of rest time, and May be 20 minutes of time spent under the barbell. So still under an hour. Is it unreasonable to lift for an hour or less twice a week for major strength gains? That's an extreme example of course. Most stick to 3 or 4 main lifts with average sessions that run for 30-45 minutes.

Fighter strength sessions don't have to be set up on Day 1 and 4. The idea is to spread them out as evenly as possible within your training week. I probably don't need to say this, but just don't schedule them back to back.

#### **FIGHTER – SUGGESTED CLUSTERS**

Bench/ Deadlift/ Squat

Bench/ Deadlift/ Squat/ Pull-ups

Bench/Squat/ Weighted pull-ups/ Barbell rows

Bench/ Squat / Weighted pull-ups

Bench/ Squat/ Barbell row

Overhead Press / Deadlift / Squat/ Chins

Power cleans/ Squats/ Bench

One-Arm Push-ups/ Pistol Squats/ Deadlift/ Weighted pull-ups

Squat/ Muscle-ups

Squat/ Bench

Deadlift/ Bench

OHP/ Squats

Deadlift/OHP

As always, experienced or knowledgeable lifters feel free to create your own cluster more suited to your situation. And keep in mind there's no rule saying you have to stick to one cluster forever. You can switch clusters at the end of each block if desired.

#### **FIGHTER EXAMPLE-THE MIXED MARTIAL ARTIST**

Michael was a Narcotics officer. In addition to his duties as a drug cop, he was heavily involved in mixed martial arts and dedicated three to four days a week to it. Michael wanted to increase his strength, as he felt it would benefit both his MMA and his day to day duties. Michael was satisfied with his anaerobic conditioning for the most part, but strength was a bit

of a struggle for him. Michael found 3x a week strength programs too much, they'd leave him fatigued and sore for his MMA classes, and ate up a lot of his time and energy. It felt unbalanced for his needs, with too much barbell time in relation to his MMA goals.

Michael decided Fighter template fit his goals perfectly. He'd tried other two day templates, but they rarely did more than maintain his existing strength levels, if that.

Fighter template allowed him to strength train twice a week which freed him up to dedicate the remainder of his time to his MMA sessions. MMA also provided him with the bulk of his conditioning. His strength increased considerably, and his fighting benefited. He wasn't fatigued during MMA sessions, and he had an extra day or two every week for additional aerobic/anaerobic conditioning if desired. His weekly schedule looked something like this:

- Day 1: Muay Thai
- Day 2: Fighter – OHP/ Squat/ Deadlift
- Day 3: Muay Thai
- Day 4: Conditioning or optional extra rest day
- Day 5: Fighter – OHP/ Squat / Deadlift
- Day 6: MMA
- Day 7: Rest

Michael had previously used a two day template which had him perform bench/squat/Chins on one day and OHP/Deadlift/Power Clean on the other. His experience was that hitting each lift only once a week did very little to progress his strength. Doing fewer exercises more frequently with Fighter template made him stronger faster. Some weeks, Michael would occasionally tack on a brief conditioning session after his strength work.

#### **FIGHTER EXAMPLE – THE INFANTEER**

Tom is active duty, regular force infantry. In garrison, Tom has mandatory unit PT approximately 4-5 days a week. This consists of long runs, push-ups, pull-ups and ruck marches. PT was taking care of Tom's general endurance and work capacity, but his maximum strength was lacking. He wanted a template that would increase his strength, without leaving him too fatigued or weak for his duties and daily PT. Tom selected Fighter template, with a cluster consisting of Squat/ Bench/ Weighted Pull-ups

- Day 1: AM PT + Fighter – Squat/ Bench/ Weighted Pull-ups (PM)
- Day 2: AM PT
- Day 3: AM PT
- Day 4: AM PT + Fighter – Squat/ Bench/ Weighted Pull-ups (PM)
- Day 5: AM PT or OFF
- Day 6: Accessory – optional deadlift or kettlebell work
- Day 7: OFF

The above was the ultimate in flexibility and effectiveness for Tom. On days extra work came up, he could easily skip the accessory work or move his Fighter sessions up a day without getting off schedule.

#### **FIGHTER EXAMPLE – THE MARATHONER**

This example came about after the release of the original edition. It came to us from a competitive marathon runner named Jody. Jody knew she'd benefit from strength training, but couldn't seem to find a program with the right fit. She started out by using bodybuilder style training, which left her sore and didn't contribute to her running ability. She eventually got on the right track and started using a 5x5 program – problem is it became too much. Three days a week of heavy lifting was cutting into her recovery and roadwork. She was better off sacrificing the strength for more road time. Remember, Jody was a competitor, not someone just trying to stay in good overall shape. Her sport was all about shaving minutes and seconds off her run times. She wasn't concerned with her ability to squat two times her



body weight. She was eventually exposed to Tactical Barbell through a previous coach. Fighter template was the perfect fit, and she used it in a very minimalist yet effective fashion. She chose a cluster with only two exercises, the bench press and deadlift. Two exercises, twice a week is about as minimalist as it gets. Perfect for a marathoner like Jody:

- Day 1: Running session
- Day 2: Fighter-Bench/ Deadlift + speed work
- Day 3: Running session
- Day 4: Running session
- Day 5: Fighter-Bench/Deadlift + speed work
- Day 6: Running session
- Day 7: Off

Jody was pleasantly surprised with the big increases in strength from a relatively low time and energy investment. Jody utilized longer rest intervals to avoid hypertrophy 3-5 minutes between sets. She feels stronger, sturdier on her runs and overall in far better shape. More importantly her race times continue to improve.

### **GLADIATOR TEMPLATE**

Gladiator is a specialist template. It's a high volume, high frequency, high intensity program for temporary use. It's something you sprinkle in your training for a block or two to shake things up, or to boost lagging areas of strength. In that sense, it's similar to a Smolov or Bulgarian specialist protocol. It's shock treatment. Do not use for more than a couple blocks at a time depending on your stamina, recovery management and other commitments. Anywhere from 6 to 9 weeks is about right, *maybe* 12 weeks for the extra motivated. Assess as you progress.

Gladiator calls for two lifts only. Usually a push/pull combo, but really it's up to you. Maybe your bench is lagging on your regular template, and you want to give it a little extra attention and bring it up to speed. Or Maybe you just want to get really strong or proficient with a couple particular lifts. That's where Gladiator comes in.

Common clusters include bench/squat, deadlift/ overhead press, or even muscle-ups/pistol squats. Here's an example using Bench/ Squat:

- Day 1: Gladiator – Bench/Squat
- Day 2:
- Day 3: Gladiator – Bench/ Squat
- Day 4:
- Day 5: Gladiator – Bench/ Squat
- Day 6:
- Day 7: Off

### **GLADIATOR TEMPLATE**

DAY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
1	5x 5/70%	5 x 5/80%	5 x 3/90%	5 x 5/75%	5 x 5/85%	5 x 3/90%
2						
3	5 x 5/70%	5 x 5/80%	5 x 3/90%	5 x 5/75%	5 x 5/85%	5 x 2/95%
4						
5	5 x 5/70%	5 x 5/80%	5 x 3/90%	5 x 5/75%	5 x 5/85%	5 x 1/95%
6						
7	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF

The above is Sets x Reps x Percentage of one rep maximums.

Retest your maximums every 6, 9, or 12 weeks.

Don't use Gladiator continuously for more than 6-12 weeks depending on your recovery ability, and other physical commitments and goals.

Assess yourself as far as doing any extra work. My only advice is that you avoid any extra heavy barbell lifting outside of what you'll be doing with Gladiator. But if you want to throw in supplementary push-ups, pull-ups, ab work etc. go for it. Same with conditioning.



Work capacity and recovery can vary greatly between lifters, so you'll have to use your judgement. If your accessory work is interfering with your recovery to the point it's affecting your main lifts, then you're not doing it right. Cut back or eliminate it. Leave the main lifts unaffected.

Remember to keep your nutrition in check. Big mistake a lot of trainees make is not eating enough consistently.

### **GLADIATOR – SUGGESTED CLUSTERS**

Bench/ Squat

Deadlift/OHP

Deadlift/ Bench

Squat/ OHP

Squat/ Weighted Pull-ups

Muscle-ups/ Squats

Weighted muscle-ups/Squats

Muscle-ups/ Pistol Squats

One Arm Push-ups/ Deadlifts

One-Arm Push-ups/ Squats

Weighted Dips/ Squat

Ring Dips/ Deadlift

Ring Dips/ Front Squat

The above recommendations are designed to get you thinking. You can of course create your own cluster, with lifts or combos not listed above. If you're a beginner/novice, I suggest starting with one of the first four clusters on the list. If you're a little more advanced, I highly recommend giving the muscle-up/barbell squat cluster a try. If you pick your own exercises, just make sure they are major/multi-joint compound style lifts. No bicep curls.

### **GLADIATOR EXAMPLE – THE BREACHER**

The Breacher was one of my first clients. He was a member of a Canadian Emergency Response Team, Canada's SWAT equivalent. He was farm boy strong, and was selected as a breacher, or 'Method of Entry' specialist. Prior to Tactical Barbell, he could never break 300lbs on his bench press, which was odd considering his size and overall fitness. He would get close but never quite make it. His other lifts were also subpar relative to his size. He had trained in a typical bodybuilder fashion for most of his life. He decided to go with Gladiator template and went with a simple bench press/ squat cluster. At the end of his first 9 week block, he easily cleared 300lbs on his bench, and then some.

On duty, his tasks included busting down barricaded doors, behind which were drug dealers, kidnappers and generally not nice people. His tactics included using hand held battering rams, shotguns, and chains attached to heavy duty pickup trucks. He had the need for lots of raw functional strength, but he also placed a lot of focus on improving his anaerobic/aerobic conditioning. He currently trains using Operator. He uses the same bench/ squat cluster and switches it up every block or two with deadlift/OHP. Once a week or so he works on pull-ups. A very simple approach, but he is currently one of the strongest members on his ERT. Instead of dissipating his energy and focus on half a dozen exercises, he concentrates on doing fewer lifts well. He's able to put that much more intensity into what he's doing with the minimalist approach.



This is what his weekly schedule looked like when he implemented a 9 week Gladiator phase:

Day 1: AM Run – PM Bench/Squat

Day 2: OFF

Day 3: AM Bench/Squat – PM heavy kettlebell swings

Day 4: AM Run

Day 5: AM Bench/Squat

Day 6: AM Run – PM light high volume kettlebell swings

Day 7: OFF

During his Gladiator phase he took a relatively conservative approach to running. His runs consisted of mostly steady state work for 20-30 minutes tops. He avoided hardcore hill sprints or sled work during his Gladiator stint, to optimize results and recovery. Also, the kettlebells took care of any posterior chain work. Every couple weeks, in place of kettlebells on Day 6, he'd perform a few low rep deadlift sets. Nothing too taxing, 2-4 sets of 2-3 reps.

### **MASS TEMPLATE**

Initially I wasn't going to include this template in the book, as it isn't really geared toward the tactical athlete. It doesn't fit in with the rest of the material. However as we all know, some people love being big, and in some instances may actually have a functional requirement for it.

This template favors mass gain, but the sessions are still strength oriented in nature. So if you're interested in putting on a little beef, but not ready to go full-bore into the world of bro-splits or bodybuilding just yet, this will be a good fit for you.

It's designed for those that want to work on strength and mass *without* the need to spend any significant amount of time on other physical attributes. NOT recommended for tactical operators or athletes, unless your particular role requires size. You may gain unneeded weight and it will expend a lot of weekly training energy. This template requires smart recovery management. Great for those that love spending time in the gym, and don't have a need to devote much of their energy elsewhere. Also a good choice for bodybuilders looking to incorporate a strength phase or two in their annual training. Can also be used in an off-season/ in-season fashion.

Size can be function in certain situations, so it can't be ruled out. Here's what a training week could look like using one of our more popular Mass clusters:

Day 1: MASS – Squat/ Bench / Deadlift

- Day 2: 20-30 minutes steady state cardio
- Day 3: MASS- Squat/ Bench/ Deadlift
- Day 4: 20-30 minutes steady state cardio
- Day 5: Mass – Squat/ Bench/ Deadlift
- Day 6: Accessory work – pull-ups/dips/arm work etc.
- Day 7: Off

Mass will provide you with significant changes in body composition and musculature. Remember to keep your nutrition in check. Keep your calories at a surplus, err on the side of eating more.

When used properly, this template will not only give you tremendous muscle gain, it'll also increase your strength dramatically. You might be pleasantly surprised when you re-test your lifts after a 9-12 week block.

### **MASS TEMPLATE**

DAY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
1	4 x 6/75%	4 x 5/80%	4 x 3/90%	4 x 6/75%	4 x 4/85%	4 x 3/90%
2						
3	4 x 6/75%	4 x 5/80%	4 x 3/90%	4 x 6/75%	4 x 4/85%	4 x 3/90%
4						
5	4 x 6/75%	4 x 5/80%	4 x 3/90%	4 x 6/75%	4 x 4/85%	4 x 3/90%
6						
7	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF

Retest your maximums every 6 or 12 weeks.

### **REST INTERVALS**

This template is the exception to the rule. You do not have to rest for a minimum of 2 minutes. Rest until you feel like you can complete the next set without failing badly on the last rep or two. So for some weeks/lifts you might be resting for longer than 2 minutes, for some, less. Overall you still want to keep muscle failure to a minimum – your goal is to complete every set and rep while avoiding failure. However if you start to falter a little on the final rep of the final sets, that's okay with this template. However, if you start failing halfway into your set – that's a sign for you to rest longer. Just keep it simple, and perform your next set when you feel ready to go. A little muscle failure around the edges is acceptable with this template. But keep it to a minimum.

A good way to keep your sessions briefer is to set up two lifts at a time and go back and forth between them. Set up bench and squat. Do a set of squats, rest for 2 minutes or slightly less, then perform a set of bench. Then back to squat. That'll help you keep the rest intervals slightly shorter and offset muscle failure.

Mass template was developed for those that can afford to specialize and spend the bulk of their training time in the weight room. You will probably have very little left over for other demanding activities. It's recommended that you take a recovery week or two every 12-15 weeks if you're planning on using this template year-round or long term. It can be demanding on the CNS, whether you initially 'feel' anything or not.

Recommended for seasonal athletes with more of a mass requirement such as football or hockey players, that can devote a block of time primarily to strength training. Also for trainees that prioritize strength and mass and don't have a need to simultaneously train other attributes to a high degree. For those that don't fit in the above categories but want to try it out, a short 6 to 9 week block can be plugged in to your regular annual training with the proper planning.

### **MASS TEMPLATE – SUGGESTED CLUSTERS**

- Squat/ Bench/ Deadlift
- Squat/ Bench/ Barbell row
- Squat/ Bench/ Weighted pull-ups
- Squat/ Deadlift/ Overhead press

Squat/ Barbell row/ Overhead press  
Deadlift/ OHP/ Weighted pull-ups/Pistol Squats

\*Squat/ Bench/ Deadlift/ Pull-ups

\*This particular cluster is for those that really want a challenge. It won't be easy. If you want even more torture, go with weighted pull-ups. You will be a beast if you can run this for 9-12 weeks. I strongly recommend you start with one of the first 3 clusters if you're new to this type of frequency/load with compound lifts.

### **MASS EXAMPLE – THE APPLICANT**

Karl was close to finishing up his last year at college and was planning a career in law enforcement. He gave himself 2 years to prepare before putting in his application. Karl was approximately 5ft10 and 155lbs. He had a fairly slim build and felt it would be beneficial for him to put on some muscle mass and weight. Karl believed it would be a psychological boost, and perhaps of some help on the street in establishing presence as a police officer. He understood size and mass weren't an indication of ability, but his reasoning was sound. Karl was a smart guy and planned his approach in a methodical fashion. He decided to give himself one year to gain some weight while. After that, he planned on spending the second year with a greater focus on athletic ability and 'functional' strength in preparation for police academy.

Karl didn't want to take the full-on bodybuilding approach, with split routines and excessive accessory work. And most of the 'strength-only' templates weren't as optimal for hypertrophy. Mass template was a perfect fit. It was a strength oriented template, with increased size and musculature as a residual effect. Karl rotated between two clusters for close to a year: Bench/ Squat/ Pull-ups and Bench/Squat/ Barbell rows. As his strength increased he made the transition to weighted pull-ups:

Day 1: Mass – bench/squat/ pull-ups

Day 2: 20-30 minutes steady state running

Day 3: Mass – bench/ squat/ pull-ups

Day 4: 20-30 minutes steady state running

Day 5: Mass – bench/squat/ pull-ups

Day 6: Speed work at the track – 400s, 200s, 100s

Day 7: OFF

Every 12 weeks Karl would take a week or two off, switch clusters, and continue. Near the end of the year, he hit 180lbs. Karl stopped running Mass and switched to the programming in **Tactical Barbell: Physical Preparation for Law Enforcement** (shameless plug). Mass template had served its purpose, but Karl had to transition to a more specific/athletic program designed for his goals. On a side note, Karl was one of our first clients to trial PPLE with excellent results.

### **PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY**

Hopefully now it's starting to dawn on you how much flexibility is built into this program. As you can see, there are many different ways to plan your training. Templates can be used year round, or for several months in a row. Alternatively, you can throw in a block of strength training here and there throughout the year as your needs dictate.

If you're interested in using one of the specialist templates in place of Zulu, here are some variations I'd like to bring to your attention:

You can use a minimalist cluster with Operator. So you're strength training three times a week but your sessions will be very brief. This might be good if you want to work out after your strength session, cardio, bag work, etc.

You can use a heavy cluster with Fighter template. So you're going all out with four major exercises, but only twice a week. You get a lot of strength training bang for your buck, but you're only spending two sessions in the gym for strength. The trade-off is that your

sessions might be slightly longer than a typical Zulu session. Great if you have other commitments throughout the week.

For the absolute bare minimum, you could use a minimalist cluster with Fighter template.

There are many combinations. You could divide your training into various blocks by manipulating the clusters and templates. You could plan a 12 week Mass cycle with a standard cluster, followed up by a 12 week block using Operator paired with a minimalist cluster. You can adapt the program to your changing lifestyle, seasonal sport, or travel in a yearly fashion if desired.



## MAXIMUMS AND TEST DAY

*'However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results'*

Winston Churchill

In this chapter I'm going to cover off testing your one rep maximums, how to do it and when to do it. One rep maximums, or rather the idea of one rep maximums are mandatory for your success in this program. A one rep maximum, is simply the heaviest load you can lift once. We are not focussed on competitive powerlifting in this program, so we are not going to be as exacting.

So no need to panic, you won't need to find two of your buddies to take to the gym on test day to spot you, while you perform death defying lifts that pop the blood vessels in your eyeballs. You don't actually have to test a ONE rep maximum for success with this program. What I recommend and what has served me well is testing a three to five rep maximum, and then calculating your one rep maximum using one of the many free programs on the internet that allow you to plug in your numbers and calculate. If you would rather test an actual one rep maximum, that is perfectly fine as well. I have done both and tested them against each other. In my experience I have found a 3-5 rep maximum is very accurate at calculating a one rep maximum. If I am off by a pound or two, I don't care, because I am interested in seeing obvious overall gains in strength between test days. If my gain in the bench press after a 6 week phase was actually 10.5lbs and not the 9lbs I calculated, it makes no difference to me in the big picture. Remember, we're not training to peak for competition. We're training for year-round big, noticeable, increases in strength.

### TEST DAY

So this is how it works. You have chosen your template, your exercise cluster and the length of your strength phase. You have it all written down in your workout notebook. Now you're going to rest for two to three days, meaning no weights, no heavy duty cardio, or sparring etc. When you're all rested up, you're going to go into the gym and warm up. Let's say ten minutes of skipping. Then you're going to hit the first exercise in your cluster. Let's say the bench press. You're going to put on a light weight and do a warm up set of five to ten reps. Rest for two to five minutes. Then you'll put on a little more weight (still relatively light) and perform another set of five to ten reps. Rest for another two to five minutes. Now you'll add on some more weight, something you can lift for roughly six to eight reps and do a set of four to five reps. Now you're going to move in to your test zone. So you're going to add weight to give you a load you think you can lift for about three to five repetitions max. You're going to rest for five full minutes, and then lift for as many reps as you can. If you easily hit ten, you need far more weight on the bar - just rest for five minutes, and repeat with a heavier load. If you manage to get five or less reps before your form falters or you fail, that's just about right. When you can't raise the bar for another rep with good form, you're done. Write down the number. Do the same for the rest of your exercise cluster.

When you get home, or gain access to the internet, go to one of the many sites that calculate your one rep maximum for you. I like to use [www.exrx.net](http://www.exrx.net), however you can just plug 'one rep max testing' into google and you'll get numerous options. It'll ask you to put in the weight you lifted and how many times you lifted it. Then it'll not only give you your one rep maximum for each exercise, it'll give you all the major lifting percentages we use in our templates. Done. Treat test day like test day, not a workout. Go into the gym, take your time with each exercise, relax and get your numbers. This isn't your workout. You're just collecting data so you can start your program.

When you have your numbers, plug them into your chosen template. Take a day or two off, then begin your training.

### WHEN TO TEST



For best results re-testing every 6 or 12 weeks is recommended. These are suggestions. You can go longer than 12 weeks, but it's not recommended you test any sooner than 6. 6 is the minimum.

Over time as my strength increased, it took longer to adapt to the heavier loads. If I had been impatient and pushed fast and sloppy and retested in 3 week blocks I would've hit plateau territory relatively quickly and gotten nowhere. Keep that in mind. As you begin to lift substantially heavier and heavier loads, naturally your gains will slow. By this time you will have gained sufficient experience to manipulate your recovery, training plan, and retest dates, to optimize your results. In my experience, the longer I've stayed with the same load, the more of a new personal baseline type of strength they become, and it's easier to set new maximums.

As mentioned above, you can wait longer than 12 weeks to re-test. For example, you finish up your first 12 weeks with Zulu, but you still feel like you're struggling with the loads. You haven't 'grown into them' as much as you like. Although you are allowed to retest at the 12 week point, you decide you're going to stick with the same numbers for another 6 weeks and NOT retest until you feel a little more solid on your lifts. That's fine and that's a very smart thing to do. You will gain a far more durable strength base over time by exercising patience.

On the flip side, you may finish the first 12 weeks and feel like the weights were too light all the way through, perfect. For you, retesting at 12 weeks is ideal for that particular block.

Bottom line, as you progress through your strength blocks, you don't have to retest at the given times – those represent the *suggested* amount of time you have to put in before retesting. As you gain familiarity with the program, you can decide to retest every 6, 9, 12 weeks or longer. If you're unsure, err on the side of waiting longer between testing.

## **TESTING BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES AND WEIGHTED BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES**

Testing the barbell lifts given in this program are straightforward. You'll notice that a few of the exercise Clusters contain bodyweight exercises, such as pull-ups and weighted pull-ups. These will be tested and incorporated differently.

### **WEIGHTED BODY EXERCISES**

When testing a weighted body exercise such as weighted pull-ups, there are two methods.

The first is, I use my own bodyweight to figure into the calculation. Let's say I weigh 150lbs for the purpose of this example. On test day, I work up to doing pull-ups with an additional 50lbs in my backpack. I max out at 5 pull-ups with 50lbs. I calculate it like this, I add the 50lbs to my hypothetical bodyweight of 150lbs, which gives me a total of 200lbs. So 200lbs x 5 reps is what I enter into my One Rep Max calculator online. **That gives me a one rep max of 225lbs.**

I start Day 1 Week 1 of my chosen template which calls for 3 sets of 5 reps of 70% of my one rep max. 70% of 225 is 158lbs. So I simply add 8lbs to my pack and complete the required reps and sets. Round up or down if you don't have precise plates. Now what if your numbers called for you to do less than your actual bodyweight on certain days? Simple, just use your bodyweight.

The second option which is much simpler, is to just calculate your maximums using the extra weight you're carrying. So to use the above example, I complete five pull-ups with 50lbs in my backpack. I simply enter 5 x 50lbs in my one rep mx calculator, which gives me a one repetition maximum of 56lbs. Now, keep in mind, calculating this way will give you heavier loads. So if you're pretty good at bodyweight exercises and hitting high numbers, you may want to use this method. If you're still struggling to do five pull-ups, the first method will build you up slowly with lighter weights.

So to recap, if you struggle with bodyweight exercises such as pull-ups, use the first method. It will give you lighter loads and more of a gradual buildup. If you're already putting up impressive numbers – use the second method of testing.

## **BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES**

With bodyweight-only exercises we focus on increasing repetitions vs increasing load. So there's no one repetition maximum here. We test for maximum number of repetitions.

Let's use push-ups as an example. On test day I warm up with a few sets of 10 push-ups, and then I'm ready for a maximum effort. I rest for the required five minute interval, then I perform as many push-ups as I can until failure. I hit 80 push-ups. 80 is my 'one rep max', or rather my 'max' for push-ups. When my template calls for 3 sets of 5 repetitions using 70% of my 1RM, I will perform 3 sets of 56 push-ups, as 56 is 70% of 80. In the case of bodyweight only exercises, ignore the listed repetitions. All too easy.

For both bodyweight and bodyweight+ exercises, everything else such as rest intervals, sets, and progression remain the same.



## **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: AN EXAMPLE**

Now I'm going to take you step by step through the process from beginning to end. You probably already have a good grasp of how this program works, but if not this will put all the pieces together for you and clear up any unknowns.

Kane is a high functioning member of a police Emergency Task Force. He is in his mid-thirties, has trained for most of his life, and has a reasonably healthy diet. His duties include hostage rescue, gaining entry into barricaded drug houses, high risk arrests, and even rural patrol. Body armor, and gear have him carrying loads of 30lbs – 60lbs, sometimes more, depending on the duty. Kane may have to sprint for short distances, go hands on with criminals, or run through the woods on a dog track for several kilometers. After a burst of exertion Kane may have to recover enough to fire his weapon accurately.

Strength, aerobic, and anaerobic conditioning are all equally important for him.

**Kane is going to design a training program that includes strength, anaerobic conditioning, and some endurance/aerobic conditioning. He decides with his current lifestyle, Zulu Standard is the perfect choice.**

**Zulu Standard calls for four strength sessions a week lasting roughly 25 minutes each. This allows Kane plenty of time and energy to integrate conditioning work throughout the week. Kane plans his overall training schedule to look like this:**

**Day 1 – Strength session + Conditioning**

**Day 2 – Strength session + Conditioning**

**Day 3 – Off**

**Day 4 – Strength session + Conditioning**

**Day 5 – Strength session + Conditioning**

**Day 6 – General Endurance**

**Day 7 – Off**

**Kane picks a Zulu cluster consisting of bench/squat/deadlift/overhead press. Kane stays out of the gym for a couple days and rests up. On Test Day he's got his notebook and he's ready to test his maximums on his chosen lifts.**

**Kane jogs slowly on the treadmill for about ten minutes to warm up. Then he starts his testing with the squat. After a few warm up sets, and his five minute rest interval, he squats 375lbs for 5 reps before his form starts faltering. He notes in his notebook '375 x 5'. Kane moves on to the bench press. After his warm up sets he puts up 230lbs for 3 reps. He documents '230 x 3' in his notebook. He pulls a deadlift single at 300lbs. He notes '300lbs x 1' in his book. Finally, OHP. Kane lifts 120lbs x 3.**

**Kane's all done for the day. He heads home, gets online, googles 'one rep max calculator' and puts in his numbers. His squats at 375lbs for 5 reps give him a one rep max of 422lbs. His 230 x 3 bench press gives him a max bench of 244lbs. Deadlift he already knows is at 300lbs. His OHP of 120lbs x 3 gives him a max of 127lbs. So this is what he's got in his notebook:**

### **MAXIMUMS**

**Squats – 422lbs**

**Bench – 244lbs**

**Deadlift – 300lbs**

**Overhead Press – 127lbs**

**Kane's ready to start Zulu Standard. Week 1 of Zulu calls for 3 sets of 5 with 70% - 75% of his maximums. He goes back online and plugs in his numbers. Here now is a more detailed look at week 1:**

### **Day 1 Strength + Conditioning**

**Bench press 3 x 5 – 170lbs (70% of 244lbs – his Maximum)**

**Squat 3 x 5 – 295lbs (70% of 422lbs)**

He rounds down on the weights if necessary. He completes the above strength portion in under 25 minutes. Rests for a few minutes and moves on to some conditioning work:

20 minute interval run – 2 minutes slow/1 minute fast

He's finished for the day in roughly 45 minutes. Now let's say he had to go for a team run in the morning with his unit. His conditioning for the day is taken care of, and he'd skip that 20 minute interval run after his barbell work. Too easy.

Day 2 Strength + Conditioning

Deadlift 3 x 5 – 210lbs (70% of 300lbs)

Overhead Press 3 x 5 – 90lbs (70% of 127lbs)

100 Burpees

Day 3 – OFF

Rest and recovery.

Day 4 Strength + Conditioning

Squat 3 x 5 – 315lbs (75%)

Bench 3 x 5 – 180lbs (75%)

Notice Zulu Standard calls for 75% of RMs on days 4 and 5 instead of 70%. Kane rounds *down* on uneven numbers with the weights. For conditioning today, he does a little kettlebell work.

10 burpees + 10 kettlebell swings (light) x 5 Rounds

Day 5 Strength + Conditioning

Deadlift 3 x 5 – 225lbs (75%)

Overhead Press 3 x 5 – 95lbs (75%)

Kane was supposed to do a short conditioning session, but he's had a long day. The job was especially physical today, and he was up late the night prior. So he skips the conditioning for today. He's in and out of the gym in less than half an hour.

Day 6 General Endurance

Kane's feeling rested and energetic. He skipped his conditioning session the day before, so he's ready to push hard today. He decides on a 6 mile run on a route which will take him up some steep hills. It's his general endurance day, time he devotes to developing long steady state aerobic capacity. He likes to work for 45-60 minutes continuously during these sessions.

Day 7 OFF

Rest/Recovery

So as you can see, Kane gets a full two days off every week if he desires. His sessions are short, flexible, and above all effective. Kane uses his extra training time for occupational/tactical fitness. If he wasn't an ETF operator, he could put that time to use doing anything he wanted. Aesthetic accessory lifting, sport specific skills training, or nothing at all.

After 6 weeks (one block) Kane has the option to retest his maximums. Kane doesn't want to retest yet, and decides to complete another block using the same numbers. He repeats the block using the same loading pattern from his first. After 12 weeks on Zulu, Kane feels he's adapted strongly to all his lifts. He's handling the weights relatively easily now, even the heavier 90% loads. He feels 'solid' on them.

After his 12<sup>th</sup> week, he takes two to three days off in preparation for testing. He goes into the gym, feeling rested, and retests all the exercises in his chosen cluster. Kane's gained 20lbs on his bench press, 50lbs on his squat, 55lbs on deadlift, 25lbs on OHP. The bench is a new personal best for him. Excellent results considering his already high numbers/intermediate level, and his relatively heavy conditioning load. Newer lifters tend to have greater increases than intermediate/advanced trainees.

**Kane calculates his new numbers using his new maximums...and plans another 12 week Zulu phase with the new numbers. Throughout his 12 week strength phase, he's had no issues incorporating or completing his conditioning work, and has had plenty of time left over for other pursuits.**

### **OPTIONS**

**If you're using Operator, Gladiator or Mass, you have the option to use a training max. In fact, this is a good idea if your lifts are approaching intermediate/or advanced numbers and you don't want to make the switch to Zulu. The training max was made popular by Jim Wendler. It's a solid, ingenious approach for long term success. A training max is simply 90% of your calculated one rep maximum. So using the example above, Kane calculated a one repetition maximum of 422lbs for his squat. Instead of using 422lbs to calculate all the number for his block, he'd use 90% of that number. 90% of 422lbs. So his new number would be 380lbs. He would calculate his weekly load based on 380lbs instead of 422lbs for squats. Same for bench, deadlift, etc. This is recommended for Operator, Gladiator, and Mass if you're an intermediate/advanced. Follow Wendler's advice, and take your ego out of it. You will be pleasantly surprised if you have the discipline to do this.**

## **PROGRESSION FOR BEGINNERS**

The following is a simple, effective progression model designed to take you from novice or average to very strong in an optimal fashion. It's optional. You can jump right into whatever template you need immediately instead.

This model will benefit you if you're a beginner. What's a beginner? For our purposes, if you currently bench less than 200lbs and squat less than 300lbs. Those are the general perimeters. You could also be a very experienced athlete or lifter, coming off a long term lay-off and looking to get back to 'normal' quickly. You might also be very athletic when it comes to conditioning, or sport specific skills, but weaker when it comes to maximal strength.

Here's how it works. You'll start with Operator Template. Choose a cluster containing bench, squat, and one other lift. Deadlifts, barbell rows, or weighted pull-ups are acceptable.

You'll use Operator in 9 week blocks before re-testing. You'll continue to use Operator until the following happens;

Your bench hits 260lbs+ and your squat hits 300lbs+

Your Operator sessions start taking longer than an hour

Once one of the above happens, make the switch to Zulu Standard. Continue with Zulu as your baseline program. If you want to stick with Operator for a while longer and feel you can sustain the weekly load, then do so.

Operator is very good at getting people very strong fast. The reason being you are performing each lift very frequently, 3 x a week. But once you start becoming very strong, it's a little more challenging for some to continue with that kind of frequency and volume. Hence the switch to Zulu Standard.

## NUTRITION

This is a big topic with a ton of variables. I am not a scientist or nutrition expert. There are numerous styles of eating which suit different people in different ways. I will discuss some of my experience with various diets and what I currently do, in a very general sense. I have experimented with the Zone, Paleo, Anabolic and intermittent fasting diets amongst others.

When you choose a diet or rather an eating style, you have to consider a few things.

Are you eating and training for aesthetics? Are you looking to lose weight? Are you an athlete that uses food to fuel performance? Are you eating for general health so that you can live to be one hundred years old?

Performance. Health. Aesthetics.

Eating for performance may not always be conducive to health. Eating for aesthetics may not always be conducive for performance. The exact same principle applies to your training by the way.

I'll give you a few examples. Anytime I've been on a carb restricted diet, my performance suffered. I didn't have staying power in the gym. I gassed out fairly quickly during MMA training or high intensity conditioning workouts. In addition to low energy, my libido took a nose dive. Carbohydrates hold water in the body, so initially it seemed like I lost a few pounds fairly quickly and I could see even more muscle definition. For a newcomer this may seem like quick weight loss, but keep in mind you can fluctuate a few pounds everyday depending on water intake and other factors. That's not true fat loss. I would May be eat in this fashion if I was sedentary, or training in a moderate fashion for health and aesthetic reasons. Not as a competitor, and not if I needed to summon any degree of intensity. That being said, I know a few people who tell me they thrive on a carb restricted diet. Your mileage may vary.

The other part of the equation are your hormones. There are recent studies suggesting that low carbohydrate and low fat diets may not support testosterone levels very well. Sounds pretty counter intuitive doesn't it?

Hormones have a huge impact on your training and body composition. Contrary to popular belief, if you lift heavy weights your testosterone levels drop in the short term. It's only over the long term that they may become higher. Testosterone contributes to muscle gain, fat loss, libido, mood, and it antagonizes cortisol. A very important player in the strength world. Consider how much harder it is for the average woman to put on muscle mass and lose fat compared to the average man. Testosterone is a big part of that. So if you're very active, lifting heavy weights, and whatever else, it may be a good idea to think about supporting your testosterone levels through diet. That goes for men and women.

One of the best ways to support healthy hormone levels, is to ensure you get enough FAT and CHOLESTEROL in your diet. Fats that are found in salmon, red meat, nuts and eggs. Cholesterol is the building block for various hormones. If you don't get a sufficient amount, as an active male (or female) your testosterone levels will pay the price.

It's almost becoming a stereotype. The endurance athlete or marathon runner, who eats low fat, trains like crazy, and is riddled with health problems. Low libido, depression, heart problems, joint problems and a 'skinny fat' build. Thankfully, more and more people are getting educated on what's actually healthy these days.

That being said, if you're a marathon runner and that's your thing, your training and diet should be geared to what helps you win or whatever your end goal is. Again, performance vs health vs aesthetics. Sometimes you have to sacrifice one to excel in the other.

As a tactical athlete, jack-of-all-trades, I found my best results with a diet consisting of 30% protein, 35% carbohydrate, and 35% fat. My performance, health and aesthetics seemed to benefit the most with that ratio for my lifestyle.

There are a couple eating styles that work relatively well for me which I'll outline below.



## **FREQUENT FEEDING**

When my schedule was stable for long periods of time, this worked for me. I'd eat roughly five or six times a day. I didn't obsess about or count calories. I based my meals around a protein source, ate sufficient carbohydrates and fat. I would eat roughly 30 to 40gms of protein per meal, in the form of tuna, chicken breast, steak, and fish. I'd eat a moderate amount of carbohydrate at each meal, including quinoa, wholegrain bread, brown rice, vegetables and fruit. I'd get fats from nuts, meat, eggs, etc. A typical meal for me would've been chicken breast, with a serving of quinoa, carrots, and salsa. Almonds and berries for dessert. I'd eat at least three of my daily meals as whole foods. The remaining meals consisted of protein powders/shakes or protein bars. I believe whole foods are vastly superior to powdered shakes and bars, but my lifestyle wasn't always conducive to spending hours preparing food and then carrying around six meals with me every day at work. If you're in an environment or lifestyle that allows you the time for that type of food preparation then stick with it—in your case there is no need for protein supplements. They were a necessary evil for me at times. I tried not to overdo the bars, as I found most of them to be of poor quality.

Once a week I had a cheat day. I ate whatever I wanted, in whatever quantity I wanted. This meant pizza, trips to McDonalds, chocolate bars, whatever. I suggest you don't overdo cheat days until you reach a body fat level or look you are satisfied with. Establish that first. In the meantime May be have a big cheat meal and a few forbidden snacks on cheat day instead of gorging yourself.

I kept my diet pretty simple and generally ate the same things over and over again. My cheat days made it very easy for me to eat clean during the week.

I also fasted for a day, once every couple of weeks, or once every couple months. Fasting was very effective for me in terms of body composition, and energy levels. It was like hitting a big reset button.

When I ate this way, I had a body fat of approximately 7% to 10% without trying very hard. I was consistent over time with training and food. I trained roughly five or six days every week using Tactical Barbell for strength, and various conditioning workouts for the remainder of the week. Every once in a while I'd have a drink or sweet on non-cheat days. It's what you do consistently that'll give you your results. Again, aesthetics were not my primary goal at this point in my life, it was performance.

## **INTERMITTENT FASTING**

What I do now is something like this. I do a form of intermittent fasting. I eat from about 1pm to 9pm, and then stop eating until 1pm the next day. During my 8 hour 'feeding window' I aim for the same macronutrients as always. One gram of protein per pound of bodyweight, 35% of my calories from fat, and 35% of my calories from carbohydrate. I end up eating three to four meals during my 8 hours. Sometimes they're big meals. In the mornings while in a fasted state I have more energy, focus, and it's almost effortless keeping

the fat off. I'm not suggesting this eating style for everybody, it is what works for me now with my current lifestyle and schedule. I simply got tired of eating six times a day. My life seemed to revolve around my meals. Also, I noticed as soon as I ate anything substantial for breakfast, I'd lose some mental sharpness and get sluggish. Not a good way to start the day. Not what I wanted. If you want further information on this particular style of fasting just google 'intermittent fasting'. It is too early to tell and I have still not come to any conclusions regarding intermittent fasting as a long term eating plan. I do believe periodic fasting in general is healthy however.

## **OTHER EXPERIENCES**

For a couple years toward the end of my military career prior to law enforcement, there was a period of time I *was* focused on aesthetics. I brought myself down to a body fat level of sub 4%. I did this using a modified Zone diet. I changed it so I was getting one gram of protein per pound of bodyweight. This ended up increasing my fat and carb intake as well, because the Zone concept had to do with eating correct ratios or 'blocks' of macronutrients. I used Tactical Barbell Operator template, high intensity intervals 2-3 times a week, and I would also be doing unit PT in the mornings with the military. So keep in mind I was training twice a day and had a highly regimented schedule at this particular point in time. Couple things. I became extremely OCD to pull this off. I was measuring meals/macronutrients and eating the exact same portions every day. Cheat day was a cheat meal once a week. I curtailed all my social activities. I was afraid to miss a workout or go out in the evenings for fear of jeopardizing my diet and training. I was having no fun at all. However, it was at this time I hit about 150lbs, with sub 4% bodyfat, and a bench press of well over 300lbs. And competitive running times. Looking back I'm glad I experienced this kind of discipline once, but it was not really worth it for me. My lifestyle is far far better now with a slightly higher body fat level and far less OCD. I'm much stronger now, at almost twice the age.

Although diets and eating styles can be highly personal, there are a few universal factors if you're aiming for performance and a muscular physique. Keep the following in mind if you're struggling with either.

I've noticed that the **BIGGEST** mistake the general trainee makes when trying to develop a muscular physique is **LACK** of food, specifically protein. Countless times I've been approached by trainees stating that they do this program or that program but they can't seem to put on any muscle no matter what they do. Or they feel fatigued and don't recover quickly. When I ask them about their food and protein intake, nine times out of ten they are eating less than half the amount of protein they should be. It has nothing to do with the program they're on. I am a believer in the idea that you need roughly one gram of protein per pound of bodyweight daily. I've found my best improvements in body composition, energy, recovery and strength when I adhere to this guideline.

There are people that will say you need far less, and others that'll say you need to double that. When I ate lesser amounts of protein for a length of time my musculature, energy levels, and recovery diminished. I didn't notice anything drastically different when eating more than 1gm per pound daily. These are my own anecdotal observations, and science seems to have a different opinion every year, so take from it what you will. I am of the opinion that bodybuilders can teach us a thing or two about muscle mass and recovery based on their time in the trenches, so I choose to err on the side of higher protein intake.

Regardless of what eating style you choose, i.e. the Zone, Paleo, Weston Price, intermittent fasting etc. I suggest you make adjustments so you get one gram of protein per pound of bodyweight daily. And by that I mean the muscular bodyweight that you are aiming for. So if you want to weigh an athletic, ripped, muscular 185lbs, you should aim to eat 185 grams of protein daily, divided between five to six meals/shakes etc. I'm going to state the obvious which is that you're doing this while on a training plan, not on vacation or hiatus for

several months. And eat your FAT. If you're noticing drops in libido and energy, one reason could be a lack of sufficient dietary fat and cholesterol.

I believe consistency trumps any special supplement or diet. If you are consistently training your program, eating generally healthy foods, eating *enough* food, and staying active you will be strong, lean and muscular. It'll be more effortless than you think. What I've noticed is that people get excited about a new diet or exercise program, do it for a week, get bored and miss workouts. Then they start up again for a few days, start and stop, start and stop etc. They're surprised why a year later they look the same. The same people will start to argue about minutiae like whether carrots are good or bad for you, or the merits of whey protein vs egg protein, meanwhile they're drinking two or three beers a night and don't follow the program they've chosen for one week straight without interruption. The carrots ain't making you fat. We've all been there. Stop it. Again – **CONSISTENCY WINS**

To recap:

Calculate your daily protein needs. Aim for one gram per pound of *desired* muscular bodyweight.

Divide your daily protein intake into 4 to 6 meals per day.

Your post workout protein shake counts as a meal.

Protein bars count as a meal.

Depending on your eating style (Paleo, Zone, etc.) add carbohydrate as necessary.

Add a small amount of healthy fats with several of your meals throughout the day. You don't have to have fats at each and every meal, but you can spread them throughout various meals throughout the day.

One day a week have a cheat day.

Consider fasting once a week, or once every few weeks (optional)



## SUPPLEMENTS

I'm going to outline the supplements I've used that I've found helpful in my training. I've used many different supplements over the past 15 years or so. Some have made significant differences for me, others have had no effect, and some negative. Supplements affect everyone differently, so keep that in mind when reading my recommendations. Another thing. Supplement companies vary in quality. Some are total garbage run by the scum of the earth and do not contain what's stated on the label. Make sure you buy from a reputable company, or you'll be left shaking your head wondering why supplements 'don't work'. **You DO NOT NEED supplements** to be successful with this program. They can be helpful, that is all.



### **CREATINE – Highly Recommended**

I've found creatine monohydrate to be extremely useful for muscle size, and muscular endurance. I use five grams a day. I buy a brand that contains micronized creatine monohydrate from 'Creapure'. Several brands contain this form. On days I work out or train, I put five grams of creatine in my post workout shake. My shake consists of 30-40gms whey protein, 30gms of simple carb, either frozen fruit or dextrose, and five grams of creatine monohydrate. On non-workout days I use the creatine by itself (no dextrose) with water or blended frozen fruit. I notice increased muscle size, increased strength and work capacity. Personally, creatine makes a significant difference for me in my strength training. If you want more details, along with studies, read this:

<http://www.tacticalbarbell.com/supplements/supplement-review-creatine-magic-bullet/>

### **PROTEIN POWDER**

I use protein powder for the convenience, as it makes it easier for me to get my daily required intake of protein. I usually stick to simple whey or egg protein powders. I believe whole foods/meats are the best source of protein, but with my lifestyle I can't make six solid meals a day work consistently. I do not have the time or inclination to spend hours in the kitchen creating six meals a day that I then have to carry around with me at work etc. So two or three of my meals will include protein powder or a protein bar simply to meet my daily protein requirement.

One thing. I've noticed that the biggest mistake the general trainee makes when trying to put on mass, or develop a muscular body is lack of food, specifically protein. Countless times I've been approached by trainees stating that they do this program or that program but they can't seem to put on any muscle no matter what they do. When I ask them about their food and protein intake, ten times out of ten they are eating less than half the amount of protein they should be. I am a believer in the idea that you need roughly one gram of protein per pound of bodyweight daily. I've found my best improvements in body composition, energy, recovery and strength when I adhere to this guideline. So if you're finding it hard to get your daily protein intake, powder can help make up the deficit. Recommended for convenience if

necessary.

## PROTEIN BARS

Protein bars come in handy for me when I'm at work. They are portable and convenient. I treat each bar as a meal. Aim for a quality bar that contains little or no sugar. Many of the bars out there, especially the tasty ones, contain enormous amounts of sugar, and are little better than candy bars.

Protein bars are very poor quality when compared to real food. My rule of thumb is that I never exceed two bars a day, and I only eat protein bars on days that I am at work. I eat no protein bars on my days off. I do take protein bars with me when I travel. Recommended if you frequently miss meals or when travelling.

## CAFFEINE

I sometimes use caffeine tablets pre-workout. I use roughly 100-200mg half an hour before training. I don't know whether caffeine gives me any tangible real world increases in strength or performance, but it definitely effects my mood and perceived energy levels. Caffeine has come in handy when trying to head into the gym after a long hard shift when motivation levels are not optimum. You can buy several months' worth of caffeine tablets for about ten bucks. I've tried expensive pre-workout powders, and most of them simply contain these major ingredients:

Approximately 300mg caffeine/caffeine derivative per serving (sometimes given a fancy name such as methylxanthine or guarana).

Creatine

Arginine

It's the massive dose of caffeine giving you that perceived energy boost. You've probably noticed the energy effects tend to taper off with continued use...that's you developing tolerance to high dose caffeine. Pre-workouts are very expensive compared to buying the individual supplements by themselves. Ten bucks for a two month supply of caffeine tablets? Or fifty to sixty on an expensive pre-workout? You decide. Recommended for occasional pre-workout use.

## ZINC/ZMA

There is some controversy over this one. ZMA is marketed as a testosterone booster. It contains zinc, magnesium and vitamin b6, in specific quantities in specific forms. What it boils down to is this. A zinc deficiency causes lower testosterone levels. Athletes or persons that train regularly may easily become zinc and magnesium deficient. It won't boost your testosterone levels beyond normal, but it may address training induced deficiencies, thus 'boosting your testosterone'.

I myself have found a **definite** difference in my mood, libido and energy levels when I supplement ZMA vs when I don't. I sometimes alternate between ZMA and zinc by itself, usually in the picolinate or Optizinc form. Overall the ZMA seems to be the most effective but they're both fairly similar. I train noticeably harder when taking ZMA, and occasionally it puts me in the mood to do twice a day workouts. Your experience may vary, mine was very positive. Magnesium plays a huge role in physical wellbeing and recovery for athletes, so that may contribute to ZMA's effectiveness.

One caveat. In my experience I find it can be very easy to overdo the zinc, contrary to popular marketing. Stick to 30mg or lower a day, and even with these amounts be aware of how your body's reacting to it. I found with slightly higher amounts I would start getting the symptoms of lethargy, physical weakness, and malaise typical of zinc's effect on copper levels. Zinc depletes copper, and copper in small amounts is vital to energy production, dopamine and other important functions. A safe bet would be to take zinc every other day if you notice any symptoms of copper depletion setting in. Zinc also has antagonist effects with

iron in certain situations, so be cognizant of overdoing the zinc and inducing an iron deficiency, especially if you are an endurance athlete. Many multivitamins contain zinc as well, so keep that in mind when using. Recommended in moderation.

## **MAGNESIUM/POTASSIUM**

This is a big one, and highly recommended for the active. Magnesium is responsible for many functions, including ATP generation/support (the energy molecules of your body), effects on your heart muscle, and involvement in the detoxification process. It may help prevent cardiovascular disease, and also regulates high blood pressure. That's just one small example of the many benefits it has. I recommend magnesium glycinate, or a combined magnesium/potassium supplement. Magnesium/potassium deficiencies are not uncommon, due to widespread pre-workout stimulant/ energy drink use amongst the active. Also, most eat a very high sodium diet, and sodium and potassium have an antagonistic relationship. You might be surprised at how drastically a marginal potassium or magnesium deficiency can affect you. Recommended.

## **MULTIVITAMIN**

I am on the fence with this one. I am just not sure that is worth it. Every couple days I do take a multi as 'insurance'. Consider this if you're diet's not as nutrient dense as it should be.

### **B COMPLEX**

I notice a difference in energy levels occasionally when I supplement with a quality B complex. Don't overdo this, it's perfectly acceptable to use it once every two or three days or after a hard training session to 'top up'.

## **GREENS/VEGETABLE SHAKES**

I am guilty of having a lacklustre vegetable intake. I started looking into various 'Greens' shakes/powders. I didn't like them. The main reason being they tended to include lots of extra herbs and ingredients I wasn't sold on or didn't want in my diet. A prime example was licorice. I looked at a top of the line greens product and noticed it contained licorice/licorice extracts amongst other ingredients. Licorice raises cortisol levels and is commonly supplemented for those with adrenal insufficiencies or low cortisol levels. Cortisol antagonizes testosterone and can contribute to belly fat. As cortisol rises, testosterone drops. Not what I want. Don't get me wrong, cortisol isn't as evil as it's made out to be and is extremely important for many functions. But I didn't have a requirement to raise it for my purposes. Some greens products contained phytoestrogens. Again, not what I wanted. I couldn't find a simple greens product that just contained what I wanted, standard healthy, boring vegetables, and nothing else.

I invested in a juicer. For tons of work and a huge mess to clean up afterward, I made a glass of watery looking pale green vegetable juice. And all the fiber and other good stuff looked like it was getting strained out. I sold the juicer online the next day. Back to the drawing board. A colleague recommended a particular brand of blender. He was a fitness freak and I trusted his advice. I ended up spending a substantial amount of money but it was money well spent. The blender allowed me to put whole vegetables in and get a pitcher of blended greens. It took me a minute to clean up, and it was extremely sturdy and simple to use, even for a kitchen outcast like myself. I now buy carrots, broccoli and celery in large amounts and make a pitcher of real blended vegetables. I have observed a noticeable and obvious increase in energy levels, mental clarity, and libido since incorporating my 'greens' shakes. Of course if you already get a solid amount of vegetables in your diet every day, this is unnecessary. **Not necessary if your diet provides you with an adequate amount of vegetables. Eat your vegetables.**

## **BCAAS**

I personally don't use BCAAS and don't think they're necessary. This really seems like a

supplement company money grab to me. You can cover off all your amino acid needs with a decent protein powder and good nutrition. Another thing to keep in mind if you do use them, they can compete with tryptophan. Tryptophan is a building block of serotonin. In a nutshell, BCAAs can deplete serotonin levels and put you in a depressed state of mind. When I played around with them they consistently put me in a foul mood. There's research indicating that BCAAs deplete not only serotonin, but *also suppress tyrosine/catecholamines*. Catecholamines are the body's natural stimulants. If you suppress catecholamines *your physical performance may suffer*. The study suggests taking tyrosine with BCAAs prior to exercise to enhance effectiveness and negate the catecholamine suppression. To me, it's simply not worth it. Take the tyrosine by itself. There *is* one situation in which BCAAs could be useful. That is if you're training in a fasted state. I won't go into detail on this here as that's beyond the scope of this book, and I haven't looked into the fasted/bcaa angle enough to provide proper information. If you want more details on the studies, Google is your friend. Your mileage may vary. Make your own decision.

### **VITAMIN D**

I am skeptical that Vitamin D is the cure all that it's being made out to be. Some of the studies coming out are indicating the same. Having said that, the majority of research seems to indicate that it's a smart idea to get your levels tested and supplement until you reach a reasonable level. I personally avoid mega dosing D, and take about 1000-2000mg every other day. If it's having any impact on my physical performance, I'm not aware of it.

### **FISH OIL/EFAS**

Avoid mega-dosing. Use as directed. I prefer eating fish a couple times a week. Again, I am a little skeptical that fish oil is the magic it's made out to be.

To recap, supplements are not necessary. Personally, I can say that creatine, caffeine, and getting sufficient quality food on a daily basis have made the most difference in my training. Scientific studies are helpful when making your decisions, but keep in mind time has shown that new studies are released frequently contradicting or shedding new light on other studies, so don't put all your faith in them. Not to mention various studies may be funded by parties with vested financial interest, others aren't conducted to a high standard, etc. Collect all the information and opinions, but make the final decision yourself.

## FAQ'S

*What if I'm in the middle of a strength block and I have to travel on short notice, and can't continue my program for a few weeks?*

For those of us that live in the real world this is actually a fairly common problem. Fortunately there is a relatively easy fix. When you return, and you have access to weights, and the gym, you have a couple options. You can retest your numbers and do a short three week block to bring back the muscle memory. Then you can retest again in week 4 and continue with your new numbers.

Or if you weren't too far into your strength block before having it interrupted, you can restart the block at Day 1 /Week 1, or try the weights you used one week prior.

So for example, I'm in week 3 of my program, starting to lift 90% of my maximums. I am feeling good, and putting up the weight, progressing well. Then I'm called away to travel for a conference or short deployment. I'll be gone for less than a week, but I won't have access to a serious weight room.

I'm fairly confident I haven't lost a lot of strength during the four days I was away, but it's not a good idea to dive right back into week 3 at 90% where I left off. Instead, I will back up a week, and start at Week 2/Day 1, which will have me lifting 80% of my maximums, and I will continue my template from there.

Now in that same situation if I'm gone for longer, let's say about ten days to two weeks, I would personally either restart at Week 1/Day 1 with my last tested maximums. Or I would retest and do a short three week 'catch up' block, and then retest in week 4, and start a new phase from there.

*What about bicep curls??!*

Bicep curls and other isolation exercises originally didn't have a place in this program. You'll be surprised at how much your overall musculature (including biceps) will grow by lifting heavy with major compound movements. You can grow your biceps, triceps, calves etc dramatically and indirectly through heavy compound work and your complimentary conditioning program.

However, curls, abs, and any other accessory work can easily be incorporated within Zulu template. Simply perform your accessory exercises after you finish with your strength session. Zulu sessions take approximately 20-25 minutes, plenty of time for more work after. So if accessory work is an important part of your training, ensure you stick to Zulu and avoid the specialist templates.

*This One Rep maximum stuff's a headache, can I just guess or estimate my maximums instead of having test days?*

No. You will not succeed with this program if you skip or guesstimate your one rep maximums. And it's not a headache, it's actually very easy after you've gone through it once.

*I feel pretty fresh after my workouts, and feel like I can do a lot more or go heavier. Should I do more or lift heavier?*

NO! NO! This is one of the BIGGEST mistakes new trainees make on this program. They are generally used to a bodybuilding type of workout which encourages muscle failure, feeling the burn, and getting 'skin splitting pumps'. This is almost the absolute opposite of what we want because we are developing strength, not hypertrophy.

If you feel relatively fresh after your strength session – you are doing it RIGHT. Do not do a single extra rep. Do not do a single extra set. Do not do a single extra exercise. DO NOT ADD MORE WEIGHT.

All that extra energy you have? Use it after you finish your main lifts and do some conditioning, cardio, accessory work, or kettlebells. Or punch the heavy bag or go run up a hill.

*I don't really like the exercise cluster I chose, I want to do the cluster that has weighted pull-ups in it, but I 'm in the middle of a strength block. Can I just drop the deadlifts and add in the weighted pull-ups?*

No. If you feel very strongly about your exercise selection, finish up the block, and then retest with your new cluster of choice. Have a little discipline and see the cluster through your entire block, and then switch. We're in the game for the long haul. Do not switch exercises mid-block. You will lose consistency and progression. If you're like me, probably you will benefit from doing the exercises you don't like.

*Should I do my cardio/conditioning before or after my strength session?*

Do your cardio/conditioning sessions *after* your weights. Being fatigued prior to your strength session may be detrimental to your lifts, but being pre-fatigued for your cardio is almost a bonus.

*What if I can't complete the higher repetition demand of the bodyweight exercises included in my chosen cluster? My harder workouts sometimes call for three sets of 20 reps which I can't always complete.*

No problem here. The bodyweight exercises (NOT the weighted body exercises) are treated differently from the rest in this program. So while you might finish up benching 250lbs for 3 sets of 5 with no major issues completing the repetitions, this may not be the case for doing any bodyweight exercises. For example if your workout calls for 3 sets of 20 pull-ups as in the question above, you may bump off the first set no problem, rest two to three minutes, but find you can only complete 18 in set 2. No problem, just rest a few seconds and complete the last two reps. And so on. Some of you may develop enough that after a standard rest of 2 to 5 minutes you are able to complete each high repetition set with no problems – if that's the case – great, stick with that. If not, simply rest a few seconds get back on the bar and keep squeezing out low rep sets until you hit your numbers. The bodyweight exercises are a bit of an anomaly in this program, they provide a bit of a strength-endurance element if you choose those particular clusters. They don't really fit in with the regular strength exercises provided, but they provide a useful addition to the Minimalist clusters, and are a great example of how you can begin to incorporate a little strength-endurance in your work. Other than that, strength-endurance, power and the other aspects of strength won't be covered in this particular program.

Keep in mind, the *weighted* body exercises such as weighted pull-ups, are treated exactly like the standard exercises, bench press, squat etc.

*As a tactical athlete, I recently discovered kettlebells and want to incorporate them in my program. Can I do this?*

Yes! Kettlebells are top of the line training tools when used correctly. In my experience they are especially good for strength-endurance and conditioning, but overall are very versatile. I'll admit I was skeptical at first, until I began using them. Now I am a believer, and the proud owner of a 48kg 'Beast'. There are many different ways you can incorporate kettlebells. You can use them after a strength session as a finisher. For example, finish up your strength session, rest a few minutes, and then end your workout with 100 swings per arm. You can also use them on separate conditioning days, using a higher repetition program.

Another way to incorporate kettlebells, is to do a few strength blocks, followed by a few weeks of kettlebell training and alternate between the two as needed. Great combo for the military or law enforcement tactical member concerned about overall performance vs maintaining PRs.

My opinion is you stick with the methods taught by Mr. Pavel Tsatsouline's body of work, and lineage. Avoid the new hybrid 'American' kettlebell movements being taught

in some corners of the web.

*What kind of conditioning do you recommend? What do you think of long distance running?*

The answer here is, it depends. Performance. Aesthetics. Health. Are you in a unit or sport that requires elements of endurance? Think infantry, special operations, boxing, and triathlons. Or are you training to stay in shape for personal reasons and want to remain healthy overall? Long distance running has gained a bad reputation lately, with the craze over high intensity interval work. But I believe it has its place. Long steady state cardio develops a base level of endurance that assists even during your short high intensity conditioning sessions. If you're an athlete or serve in a unit that has that endurance component, you should be worried about performance, so you have no choice, do it. I guarantee you won't pass SAS selection doing just burpees and sprints.

If you do not have those concerns, and you're primarily training for health, fat loss, and muscle gain, you'll gain more overall benefit with the majority of your conditioning being of the shorter duration high intensity type. Stick with sprinting and short high intensity conditioning sessions. May be throw in a long distance fun run once in a month.

Kettlebells are also a great tool to add to your conditioning sessions that bridge the gap between strength and conditioning remarkably well. An effective 'fun run' I incorporate goes like this. I put a lighter kettlebell in a backpack, surrounded by a pillow. I mark out a 5km or 10km route, and go for a light jog. Every once in a while I stop, take out the kettlebell and do swings, put it back in the pack and continue jogging. Then I stop again after a few minutes and do weighted pushups. Onward, stop – kettlebell snatches, and May be even weighted pull-ups if my run took me past a playground. A very simple effective way to train for various selection courses. The pillow provides a cushion to protect your back and stabilize the kettlebell. Otherwise it'll bounce around and cause you a lot of unnecessary pain which you should be saving for your run.

*What about Olympic lifts?*

Couple reasons I haven't included O lifts. One, they should be learned properly with instruction, and two they may not be the best fit for a maximum strength program for the average tactical operator. I don't believe they are inherently dangerous or anything like that, but they do require far more technical skill than the standard lifts, and when you try to throw them up with heavy loads you may injure yourself a little more easily. That's something a tactical operator or professional can't afford to do, when regular lifts can do the job. They definitely have more of a place in a power phase, and can be of benefit to some athletes.

That being said if you are an advanced trainee, and are well versed with the mechanics, and believe you'd benefit from incorporating them in your cluster, I won't stop you. Manipulate the repetitions and loads as you see fit.

*I'm not military or SWAT, can I still use this program?*

Yes, absolutely. This program ends up being highly customized due to the nature of using your one repetition maximums. Whether you're squatting the bar or 600lbs, you will be progressing based on your own numbers and percentages so it doesn't matter.

*I'm training to be a police officer, Hostage Rescue Team member, Green Beret etc. What template should I use?*

If you are training to be a police officer, read and implement Tactical Barbell: Physical Preparation for Law Enforcement. If you're looking to get into a higher end tactical unit or special operations group, there is no one answer for this. Individual units have a wide variety of physical requirements. For example many military selection

courses contain a heavy endurance component, and devoting too much time to strength may be counterproductive (after you're on the team is a different story). Other teams may have specialized requirements, like being a proficient swimmer, or focus on heavy ruck marches that last for days up and down the mountains. My advice is to research the exact physical entry requirements and plan accordingly. Think of it this way. 'What do I have to do/ how do I have to train to pass selection?' As many of you already in the field can attest to, in some cases, what's required on selection may be drastically different from what's required to perform well during your actual duties. Train and prepare for what you're facing accordingly.

*I'm a woman. Is this program going to give me bulky muscles?*

No. First, it is relatively difficult for a female to put on heavy muscle mass unless you're manipulating your hormones, taking steroids or testosterone. Secondly, male or female, this program is not aimed at hypertrophy or size, it's geared toward functional strength gain. Men will most likely gain residual hypertrophy on this program unless they manipulate the rest intervals within the given parameters or have a heavy weekly cardio/conditioning workload. Your muscles will get hard and have more of a toned look.

*Do I need a spotter? I've never lifted 90% of my max before.*

You don't need a spotter. The beauty of this program is it ramps you up closer to your max in a slow progressive manner, so that when you do reach the heavier loads, you won't be overwhelmed. Also, if you've never trained for strength before with the unique longer rest intervals/load manipulation, you may be pleasantly surprised at how much you can lift in a given session. Keep in mind all the loads are based on your own one repetition maximums. If the 2 to 10 minute rest interval before a heavy lift doesn't give you peace of mind, then by all means employ a spotter. Personally, using this program exactly as laid out, I've never needed one.

That being said, never do anything that feels unsafe. There is nothing wrong with using a spotter on a couple sets if you want a little insurance.

*I'm consistently failing on my last couple reps, what should I do?*

This is not a common problem if the program is followed correctly. However, if it does occur, first try this. Extend your rest period by a minute or even two. Rest a full 3 to 5 minutes if you have to. That should do the trick. This should allow you to finish your sets consistently and develop your strength properly for future sessions. If that doesn't work, and you have a hunch that May be the load for whatever reason is beyond your capabilities, knock off 10lbs-30lbs off that particular exercise's one rep maximum and recalculate your numbers for the rest of the block. One step back, two steps forward. On the other hand, if you're having this happen during a bodyweight exercise, such as pull-ups – that is common. When you fail on a pull-up, just rest for a couple seconds and squeeze out the rest, one at a time if necessary, until the set is complete.

*Can I perform my exercise cluster in a circuit fashion? If so can I shorten my rest intervals?*

You can perform your exercises in a circuit fashion, or in any order you like. For example, if you're using the cluster containing bench, deadlifts and squats, you can set it up so that you're doing a set on the bench, followed by a set of squats, followed by a set of deadlifts, until you complete all required sets for each exercise. You can also stack a couple exercises back to back. So you'd set up the bench and squat, and then go back and forth between the two until your sets are completed. Then you'd hit the pull-up bar and finish up your workout with your remaining required pull-ups.

The Golden Rule still applies. You cannot shorten your rest intervals. You must rest a minimum of two minutes between your exercises, even if conducting your workout in



a circuit fashion. After you finish a set on the bench, wait *at least* two minutes, before moving on to the squat rack.

*Is Tactical Barbell better than program x or program y?*

Yes. Seriously, it all depends. The best program for you depends on your goals and lifestyle. Most importantly the best program for you is one that gives you RESULTS. There are many paths to the same outcome, so choose the one that gives you what you want in a way that fits your lifestyle. There is no one 'Holy Grail' of training programs for everyone. There are lots of great strength programs out there. There are plenty of bad ones too. Some may work for certain people better than others. Some are designed with a very specific or narrow population in mind, and others are designed for 'everybody'. Depending on where you are in your training career you might benefit more from one style than the other. Pick a legitimate proven strength program and stick with it for a substantial amount of time before making any decisions. I am going to suggest, that when choosing a strength program you look for some sort of progression model. Most effective strength programs are all based on the same principles, with slight variations to adapt to their specific goals. Those variations can make all the difference to your own particular goals. The devil is in the details. I've tried many, many, strength programs throughout the years, and for my goals, Tactical Barbell is the program I would've wanted without a doubt from the very beginning. It's not for everyone. If you're looking to compete in your first power lifting meet, there are far better options out there that deal with specialization, and peaking protocols. If you want to take up the discipline of bodybuilding and step up on stage, there are more suitable programs for you.

## DEBRIEF

*'A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week.'*

Patton



I set out to write the book I would've wanted 20 years ago when I was getting into the tactical fitness game. If I could sum it up in one sentence it would be 'a simple strength system for extreme results'. A program with no frills, no unnecessary complexity, pared down, and brutally effective. A real program that would deliver, from the professional in the field to the new trainee picking up a barbell for the first time, and everyone in between.

Stick with the program. No deviation, no distraction. Schedule the rest of your training around Tactical Barbell as required. Stay consistent. After you experience the measurable results on this program, it'll be almost impossible to go back to training by feel, 'instinctively' or whatever. Don't confuse flexibility with not having a plan.

There are two principles in this book which are responsible for 90% of the results you will see with this program.

The first is frequent heavy, sub-maximal lifting while avoiding muscle failure.

The second supports the first, which is the longer, 2 minute minimum rest interval.

With the first principle, you're lifting the submaximal loads with the same exercises several times throughout the week before adding more weight. Program X may have you add ten pounds to your bench every time you bench. This program will have you benching two to three times a week with the exact same weight every time, before adding more. Your body is given a longer amount of time to adapt to the new stimulus. You are growing into a higher base level of strength through repetition. What started out feeling heavy eventually feels light.

We love hearing about your training progress and ways you've combined the program with your conditioning, sport or profession. Send us feedback anytime at [www.tacticalbarbell.com](http://www.tacticalbarbell.com). If you have any questions at all, send us an email. We look forward to hearing about your success.

Amat Victoria Curam

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