

St. Paul Rugby Offseason Training Program

This is the new offseason training program for the St Paul Pigs. It is guaranteed to be unique to our needs as a team and guaranteed to be highly effective IF YOU FOLLOW IT. Many of you know playing rugby is fun, but to be fitter and stronger than your opponent makes playing the game a lot more enjoyable. Not only have I included the full program at the end of this document, I've included basic principles, exercise tutorials, and explanations of why you're doing what you're going to be doing. While not necessary, I highly suggest you read the text before skipping straight to the program. It will answer a lot of questions you may have and give purpose to the exercises you are doing.

GOAL: The goal of this program is to address and correct the weaknesses that have proven to be common amongst the team. By correcting these weaknesses, we can expect to overcome our obvious size disadvantage to better control the contact point and breakdowns and dominate the oversized opposition in the set pieces.

The areas of weakness this program is intended to address are:

- 1. Core Strength:** All real strength stems from the core, which is defined as the muscles that stabilize the hips and spine during movement. These include, but are not limited to the muscles in the low back (erector spinae), the hips (flexors, extensors, piriformis, psoas), and the abdominals (intercostals, rectus and transverse abdominis, and obliques). Considering that these muscles are primarily used to stabilize us during movement, it only makes sense that we train core exercises through movement on our feet.
- 2. Posterior Chain:** The posterior chain is comprised of the muscles of the low back, the glutes, and the hamstrings. It was glaringly evident this past season that this was a huge weakness. Not only does weakness in the PC limit your ability to drive in rucks, mauls, and scrums, it also limits your open field speed.
- 3. Lateral Imbalance:** The imbalance of strength between the right side of the body and the left side of the body was also a big weakness among the team this year. It is one of the major causes of back pain, core instability, and is the biggest factor limiting agility. Unaddressed, it commonly leads to injury and a shortened career.
- 4. Explosive Strength:** Quite simply, the fact that this is a weakness is because of the three preceding weaknesses. Only when they have been addressed will explosive strength will be possible.

Program Design

This program is based on the principle of *periodization*, which breaks training into different phases with a different focus for each phase. With such a limited off season, this method will maximize gains.

Tips and Hints

The following are some basic tips and principles that should be followed when performing any athletic strength based routine

1. You are not a bodybuilder. Don't train like one. High rep routines and single-joint exercises will help you get bigger, but they won't help you become a better athlete. Quite the contrary, actually. Performing single-joint isolation exercises like bicep curls and leg extensions put a much greater stress on the joints

and lead to premature deterioration of the cartilage. Stick to the exercises in this routine and you'll be just fine.

2. **FORM IS ESSENTIAL.** This is the most important rule in all of training. Not only does poor form guarantee injury, it changes the intended purpose of the lift. For example, if you are doing stiff legged deadlifts incorrectly, you will take the stress off the hamstrings (the intended target area of the lift) and put it somewhere else. Considering that the hamstrings are a very common weakness in individuals, performing the exercise incorrectly will shift the focus away from your weakness will impede your progress rather than improve it.

3. **Leave your ego at the door.** This relates heavily to #2. Sloppy form is the number one cause of injuries in the gym. If you can't perform the lift properly and safely, take some weight off the bar until you can do the exercise flawlessly. There is no shame in doing exercises with just the bar. When I was learning to do olympic lifts, I used a broomstick until I could fully master the motion. You're not going to impress anyone by failing a lift or by ending up on the floor like a pretzel because you couldn't handle the weight. The weight doesn't care who you are or how tough you think you are.

4. **When performing a lift, the eccentric (a.k.a. "the negative") portion of the lift should be a controlled descent. The concentric (the actual lift) portion of the lift should be explosive yet under control. Remember, control it on the way down, explode on the way up.**

5. **Rest times between sets is one of the keys to progress. When all else fails, monkeying with the amount of rest you're taking between sets can be the catalyst to big gains. For our purposes, rest times should be held to no more than 90 seconds for most exercises. Any rest time adjustments will be noted within the program itself.**

6. **Keep a journal.** You can't track your progress if you don't know where you've been. Personally, I keep a workout journal and a diet journal. I can tell you every rep of every set of every exercise I've done for the last 5+ years! This is something every serious lifter does. A lot of people also keep an online training/diet journal. Doing this allows others to see what you're doing and make suggestions if they see something not quite right. My new website has a great forum with 50 other peoples' training journals. Feel free to browse them and put up your own at <http://www.instrength.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=5>

Diet

Another one of the key to achieving your athletic potential is having a clean diet. Whether you're trying to gain weight or lose weight, you should try to eat as clean of a diet as possible. What does "a clean diet" mean? Quite simply, it means that if you buy it in the store and it has an ingredient label on it full of things you can't pronounce, don't eat it. Ideally, none of your food should have any artificial ingredients, but that's not really feasible. For the most part, eat good non-processed meats, complex carbohydrates like rice or potatoes, and plenty of fresh (not canned or frozen) vegetables. As the saying goes, "Shit in, Shit out". If you put crap into your body, your body will respond by giving you a crappy workout, performance, life, etc.

I've never been a big proponent of saying you need to have X percentage of protein, X percentage of carbs, etc because every person is different. What helps me gain muscle might cause someone else to gain fat. Therefore, it is essential that you keep a journal of what you eat and how your body responds to it.

Some of us need to gain some weight while some could stand to shed a few. Simply eating more or less isn't necessarily the best way to go about it, though. Taking in too many calories too fast will promote fat gain while

cutting too many calories can actually signal your body to go into survival mode and turn catabolic, causing your body to burn muscle for energy rather than fat. The best way to do this is to go to a website like www.nutritiondata.com or www.fitday.com and find out exactly how many calories you're taking in each day. Monitor your intake for a week. When you have an average daily caloric intake, simply increase or decrease it by 20-25%.

To lose one pound, you either need to cut 3500 calories from your diet or burn 3500 calories in the gym. It's much easier to cut 500 calories a day and lose one pound a week than it is to try to run on the treadmill for 4 hours and burn 3500 calories. Make your caloric adjustments with "3500" in mind.

Supplements

Most supplements are junk. Trust me. Even something like protein powders are mostly empty calories that *might* help you increase your muscle mass by 1-2% over the course of a year. Most of the time, they just help you gain fat. Creatine is another supplement that's been fooling people into opening their wallets for years. Unless you're a vegetarian, your body gets all of the creatine it can handle from the red meat you eat. In fact, the only thing powdered creatine has been shown to do is to increase intracellular water weight. In short, it makes you bloat. Your best bet is to stay away from everything at GNC. There are a few supplements that actually do what they claim and they can be found at any Wal Mart.

Fish Oil: If you're only going to take one supplement, this is it. Not only does taking fish oil promote general overall health, it helps to lubricate your joints. In case you were wondering, it does not taste like fish.

Glucosamine: Studies have shown that glucosamine helps prevent cartilage deterioration in joints. While there are no immediate benefits, this one helps keep you going in the long run.

Vitamin B6: Promotes red blood cell production. Those of you who paid attention in biology class know that red blood cells carry oxygen throughout the body. More red blood cells mean more oxygen can reach your muscles, which means a greater work capacity and less fatigue. It also helps to boost your immune system.

Vitamin B12: Also essential for red blood cell production. I've personally found that when used in conjunction with B6 I experience a sustained energy level throughout the day with no afternoon crashes and increased cardiovascular stamina.

Rest and Recovery

There is a common phrase amongst the weightlifting crowd; "Train hard, rest harder." Of all the catchy phrases in the gym, this one is the most useful. Your muscles don't grow or get stronger while you're training. They grow and get stronger while you rest. Get plenty of rest and eat enough good, clean foods and you'll see your progress skyrocket.

The Program

This program is intended to be manageable for everyone on the team. I is set up for 3 days of lifting with a 4th day built in for some fitness and agility work. You should be able to be in and out of the gym in about an hour. There is no set "Monday, Wednesday, Friday" that you have to stick to for each workout because you have to determine what your body needs for rest. Somedays you'll do a Monday, Wed, Thurs, Friday, while others might be a Monday, Tuesday, Friday, Saturday. Just make sure you get each workout in every week and progress steadily. If, for some unimaginable reason, happen to miss a day, DO NOT SKIP THE WORKOUT. Simply move the missed workout to the beginning of the next week. For example, if you have Saturday as your squat day, but have

to miss it because your dog got arrested, simply move the workout to Sunday or Monday and start over the next week's workout then next day. Do not skip it and go to the next workout. Because this program is set up for you to gradually progress, it is imperative that you complete each lifting workout.

The weights you choose for each exercise will be determined by your ability. The first two weeks of the program are meant to build your foundation. In the first week, you are meant to get a feel for the exercise and learn how much weight your body can handle. If the weight you choose in the first week is too little or too much, simply adjust it for the second week. Ideally, you should be able to complete all of the sets and reps, but the last one or two reps of each set should be challenging. If you fail to complete the given number of reps before the last set, simply reduce the weight for the remaining sets. It is more important to get every rep in than it is to pile on more weight. You should take as many warmup sets as you need to feel comfortable performing the work sets at the working weight. For some people, it will be only one set, for others, it could be four sets.

The program is set up to address a specific area on each day through one main lift and several accessory lifts. You should be able to do all of the main lifts at any gym on the planet. **DO NOT USE MACHINES FOR THE MAIN LIFTS. IF YOU CAN NOT DO A SQUAT OR DEADLIFT WITH A PLAIN OLD BAR AND FREEWEIGHTS, TALK TO ME AND I'LL FIND A WAY TO ACCOMMODATE YOU.** Also, **DO NOT USE A SMITH MACHINE FOR ANY LIFT, EVER.** They are worthless and extremely dangerous.

There is no separate backs and forwards workouts. We all have the same weaknesses right now and will benefit from the same program. Additionally, speed is a product of foot speed (agility) and ground force production (power). We already do the agility exercises (ladders) to help increase foot speed and improve neuromuscular coordination. The missing piece of the puzzle is power. The more power you have, the more force your feet exert while running. More power=more speed. This program is designed to increase the onfield speed in players of all positions.

The Workout

Phase I-Building A Foundation - 2 weeks

Day 1

Main Lift: Deadlift (3 sets of 8 reps at working weight)

Accessory lifts:

A: Back Extension (3 sets of 10 with dumbbell in your arms)

B: Glute-Ham Raise (3 sets of 10)

C: Bar Hang (2 sets to failure)

Core Exercise:

Turkish Getups: 3 sets of 15 with a small dumbbell (10-20 lbs) if you can handle it

Day 2

Main Lift A: Hang Clean (3 sets of 5. Use light weight and concentrate on form)

Main Lift B: Overhead Push Press (3 sets of 8 reps at working weight)

Accessory lifts:

Pullups (3 sets to failure)

Wrist Touch Pushups (3 sets of 10)

Core Exercise:

Supermans (3 sets of 8)

Fitness:

Jump rope 10 minutes

Day 3

Main Lift: Front Squat (3 sets of 8 reps at working weight)

Accessory lifts:

Romanian/Stiff Legged Deadlift (3 sets of 8)

Step Ups (3 sets of 10/leg)

Core Exercise:

Turkish Getups: 3 sets of 15 with a small dumbbell (10-20 lbs) if you can handle it

Day 4: Fitness day

A: Agility ladder, corner jumps, or dot drill, which ever is available.

B: 15 minute run. Speed and distance not important. Just run 15 minutes.

C: Steppers (200 reps)

Core Exercise:

Pillars (3 sets of 30 seconds for front, right, and left sides, e.g. 3 sets right, 3 sets left, 3 sets front pillar)

Phase II-Building Usable Strength – 3 weeks

Day 1

Main Lift: Deadlift (5 sets of 5 reps at working weight)

Accessory lifts:

Good Morning (3 sets of 12 reps)

Shrugs (3 sets of 12 reps)

Bar Hangs (2 sets to failure)

Core Exercise:

Twisters (3 sets of 10 reps)

Day 2

Main lift A: Power Clean (5 sets of 3 reps)

Main lift B: Push Press (5 sets x 5 reps)

Accessory lifts:

Pullups (3 sets to failure)

Incline Dumbbell Press (3 sets of 8 reps)

Plate Front Raise (3 sets of 8 with a hold at the end)

Core Exercise:

Turkish Getups (3 sets of 15)

Fitness:

Jump rope 10 minutes

Day 3

Main lift: Back Squat (5 sets x 5 reps)

Accessory lifts:

Hex Bar/Dumbbell Deadlift (3 sets of 12 reps)

Bulgarian Squat (3 sets of 8 reps per leg)

Glute-Ham Raise (3 sets of 10 reps)
Core Exercise:
Ball Situps (2 sets of 20)

Day 4: Fitness day

A: Agility ladder, corner jumps, or dot drill, which ever is available.
B: 20 minute run. Speed and distance not important. Just run 20 minutes.
C: Steppers (200 reps)
Core Exercise:
Pillars (3 sets of 30 seconds for front, right, and left sides, e.g. 3 sets right, 3 sets left, 3 sets front pillar)

1 Week Active Rest

Day 1

20 min jog
Deadlift (2 sets of 10 with 50-60% of weight as used in last deadlift workout)
Pillars (2 sets of 30 sec/position)

Day 2

20 min jog
Overhead Push Press (2 sets of 10 with 50-60% of weight as used in last press workout)
Dumbbell Snatch (2 sets of 12)
Turkish getups (2 sets of 10)

Day 3

20 min jog
Front Squat (2 sets of 10 with 50-60% of weight as used in last front squat workout)
Twisters (2 sets of 10)

Phase III-Developing Power – 3 weeks

Day 1

Main lift: Deadlift (8 sets of 3 reps)
Accessory lifts:
Good Mornings (3 sets of 8 reps)
Snatch Grip Deadlift (3 sets of 6 reps)
Compass Lunges
Core Exercise:
Ball Situps (2 sets of 20)
Fitness:
Jump rope 10 min

Day 2

Main Lift A: Hang Snatch (5 sets of 3)

Main Lift B: Push Press (8 sets of 3 reps)

Accessory lifts:

Pullups (3 sets to failure)

Incline DB Press (3 sets of 8)

Core Exercise:

Turkish Getups (2 sets of 15)

Fitness:

Steppers x 200

Day 3

Main Lift: Front Squat (8 sets of 3)

Accessory lifts:

Romanian/Stiff-Legged Deadlifts (3 sets of 8 reps)

Bulgarian Split Squat (3 sets of 10/leg)

Farmers Walk

Core Exercise:

Twisters (3 sets of 10)

Day 4: Fitness day

A: Agility ladder, corner jumps, or dot drill, which ever is available.

B: 20 minute run. Speed and distance not important. Just run 20 minutes.

Core Exercise:

Pillars (3 sets of 30 seconds for front, right, and left sides, e.g. 3 sets right, 3 sets left, 3 sets front pillar)

Phase IV-Turning Power Into Usable Speed

2 weeks, preseason practice should be starting

All lifts should be done as fast as possible, yet still under control. During this phase, you should concentrate on being as explosive as possible, which means that the weight you use may decrease slightly, but your power output will be much greater.

*If indoor practice has started, there is no "Day 4" or fitness day necessary.

Day 1

Main Lift A: Power Clean (5 sets of 3)

Main Lift B: Deadlift (3 sets of 5)

Accessory lifts:

Shrugs (3 sets of 12)

Compass Lunges (3 times around the compass)

Core Exercise:

Turkish Getups (2 sets of 15)

Day 2

Main Lift: Split Jerks (5 sets of 3)

Accessory lifts:

Dumbbell Snatch (3 sets of 8)

Pullups (3 sets to failure)

Core Exercise:

Twisters (3 sets of 10)

Fitness:

Steppers x 200

Day 3

Main Exercise A: Power Clean (5 sets of 3 reps)

Main Exercise B: Front Squat (3 sets of 5 reps)

Accessory lifts:

Bulgarian Split Squat (3 sets of 10)

Farmers Walk

Core Exercise:

Supermans (3 sets of 8)

Day 4: Fitness day*

A: Agility ladder, corner jumps, or dot drill, whichever is available.

B: 20 minute run. Speed and distance not important. Just run 20 minutes.

Core Exercise:

Pillars (3 sets of 30 seconds for front, right, and left sides, e.g. 3 sets right, 3 sets left, 3 sets front pillar)