

# Armor Building

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There are many reasons why most people don't achieve their physical goals. I've come to the conclusion that the number one reason is simply trying to do everything all the time. I'll get a question about mass building, and I'll recommend lots of squats, lots of food, and lots of rest. The follow up question from the same person will usually include something about "six pack abs," agility work, and dunking a basketball. This is too much! As noted in my much of the confusion stems from the fact that I basically use one tool – the barbell – and its close cousins like kettlebells, dumbbells, and the like to help folks accomplish their goals, from fat loss and muscle gain to mobility and flexibility.

Most people need to find periods in the year, usually from three to six weeks, perhaps as long as eight weeks, to work hard on specific qualities. For example, the Velocity Diet is amazing for fat loss, but it would be hard to do while also in an NFL training camp. It doesn't mean that the Velocity Diet is good or bad, nor does it mean that training camp is right or wrong. This isn't moral theology. Yet this is precisely the kind of thought process that destroys most people.

## **Trying To Do (Or Be) Everything All The Time.**

There are times to burn fat, build muscle, get more explosive, and prep for a sport, but it's nearly impossible to do this all the time. And there are some qualities that you should *only* work for a little while and *only* when you need it. I work with a lot of people in the collision sports and collision occupations. One of the hardest things to do while preparing for these endeavors is what I call "*Armor Building*," a term that one of my football players coined a few years ago. At first I didn't understand what he meant. Basically, he felt that some of the exercises we were doing, in his case the thick barbell curl and the double kettlebell front squat, were helping him be a better running back. It gave him a feeling "like armor." A few years ago, I worked with a high school running back, Tony N., who had a coach that didn't believe in weightlifting. (Yes, I said that. The coach probably also didn't like these "new fangled automobiles," either.) After a few sessions of working with him, he found that doing what he called "The Exercise" – a combination of power snatches and overhead squats – gave him some tools no one else on the field had. In his last five football games his senior year, Tony ran for over 200 yards each game.

## **Callusing**

The great fighter Frank Shamrock calls it *callusing* – a focused attempt to prepare the athlete for contact. When I wrestled in high school, I would spend the first week or so stuffing wet toilet paper up my nose as it bled every session. Magically, around week two, that very same forearm to the face wouldn't cause a drop of blood to come out.

While there will definitely be some callusing, the armor-building training will also include specific movements to gear up for collisions. Strangely, most of the athletes I have do this program note that they also look better in the mirror. In a sense, armor building is a kind of bodybuilding for sport. The most basic moves might also be the most exhausting. Every football player should have some intense loathing for "Grass Drills" which are also known as "Up-

Downs." The coach has a whistle and your job is to run in place driving your knees high. When coach blows the whistle, you throw yourself to the ground and leap right back up to running in place. The running in place, as you soon discover, is the easy part.

Grass drills alone can prepare you for many things. Late in my high school football career, I realized that of all the things we did for conditioning, most had no carryover to the games. But as much as I hated them, grass drills seemed to be the most "game like."

Football, rugby, and war are much about getting on the ground as fast as you can and then getting back up. I can remember one of my teammates complaining about practice and especially "Up-Downs." He was a star in middle school and was learning that getting to puberty first was great, but you had to keep working afterwards. I noticed that all the guys who never played felt that the hard work was a waste of time.

### **I'll Tumble For Ya**

If you don't have access to a high school football coach with a whistle, try just rolling. I'm a firm believer that tumbling and rolling is the missing link in most people's training.

My good friend, Tim Anderson, has been writing a lot lately on how simple rolling "resets" the body. I know one of the great fears of adulthood is to say, and here comes the advertisement, "I've fallen and I can't get up." I'm proactive about almost everything and would rather practice falling and getting up. My standard "Do this" tumbling training is this:

5 Somersaults (forward rolls)

5 Right shoulder rolls

5 Left shoulder rolls

4 "Ninja" rolls (right shoulder roll, left shoulder roll, right, left)

Bear crawl

3 Cartwheels facing one direction

3 Cartwheels facing the other

And finally, as I always joke, run to the bucket.

For whatever reason, tumbling seems to affect the tummy at first. You can think of it as a lousy but effective diet program, too.

For many, grass drills and tumbling tossed into some training weeks once or twice a year is a fun jump start to a fat loss program, or even just a nice way to keep the motor running towards the end of a serious ripping program.

One reason I like the Turkish get-up so much is that it's a kind of Tai Chi grass drill or tumbling session. Conversely, I rarely see the typical fitness enthusiast touch the ground save for planks and that exercise seems to waver in popularity.

Remember the axiom, *"If no one in a typical gym is doing something, it's probably pretty hard to do."* Rolling around on the floor doing get-ups is an insightful, thoughtful way to get reacquainted with getting off the ground. And as you age, learning to catch a fall, recover, and get up might be the secret to a more vigorous old age. Trust me: you will get older nearly every year.

### **Barbell Armor**

With the barbell, there are several great armor building moves. As noted, the thick barbell curl has been one of my odder "go to" movements for a few years. I'm not sure what it does to the forearms, elbows, and guns, but try them. I use both actual fat bars and those new grips that mimic the metal. I think your budget will decide which way you go on this decision.

Thick bars are expensive, but the curl and deadlift movements are stunning to do with them.

The thick bar curl can be done for reps up to ten, but I notice I simply fail when the reps go up.

For whatever reason, this exercise seems to get the body ready to take a hit. The snatch grip deadlift and the duck foot (heels together, toes out) deadlift also seem to help the collision athlete. I've been thinking that this compromised position tends to wake up more of the system, especially the connective tissue. I've gone heavy with snatch grip deadlifts in my career and I always seemed to be able to take a whack or two.

Correlation or causation is never too important to me because these two movements will quickly tax you out and we won't need a deep philosophy discussion after doing them.

For squatting, I hate the Zercher squat. Hate it. It kills me, but I've always noticed that my human inner tube seems much powerful after doing these squats. This is that odd internal pressure – talk to a martial arts person for more details.

Also, holding the bar in the crook of the elbow is callusing for the ages. I've also experienced, as many other brighter people than me have, like Pavel, that the Zercher squat demands a kind of moving mobility that has to be experienced to understand. If you hate Zerchers, you're probably doing them right.

You may ask where your beloved bench press is on this program, or whatever your heart desires that's missing. Well, add it in! Or as I usually suggest, leave it out. It's only three weeks and we're trying to use our valuable time to literally toughen the skin and body for contact.

Even if you're not a collision athlete, there's still a lot of value in trying some of these lifts and moves. From a fat burning perspective, you're going to have a hard time finding movements more compelling than grass drills and tumbling. With the odd barbell moves, you're going to discover the beautiful simplicity of the basic deadlift and squat when you return to them.

So here's the lesson: when it's time to kick it up a notch, you need to take a few weeks aside and really attack it. If you need to get some calluses and build some armor, take some time to do it before you need it.