

Draper's Secret 14-Day Muscularizing Routine

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Did you read last week's newsletter? Say yes; humor me. I went on for quite awhile about nothing and felt guilty because I offered no earth-shaking information on how to reach your goal, whatever it might be, in a few short weeks. I mean, that is the point of it all. So I claimed I would reveal my Secret 14-Day Muscularizing Routine and Eating Plan in this newsletter.

I lied. There is no secret routine. The truth is there is no secret to muscularizing.

You eat lots of protein and train like crazy till the job is done. Not much more to it than that. What there is, you figure out along the way. Try it. Worse thing you can do, besides quitting, is thinking too much: researching, reading, studying, referring to the muscle mags and asking everyone else for advice. You are "it," bomber. You and your self are the whole, the question and the answer, the problem and the solution, the challenge and the victor, the raw material and the finished product. Intellectualizing is exhausting and suffocating. You need oxygen and action. Got it? Get it.

Super. Now, that doesn't mean you can't talk things over with a friend, a tree stump or your pet. Mugsy, my cat, and I don't get into great detail, but we sort out the basics and encourage each other regularly. Review and encouragement, reflection and hope, observation and humor, assessment and adjustment, these are the essential tools of construction, the implements of development seldom at hand. Let's make them ever-ready.

A word of support can carry you over broken glass and burning embers. The other day a guy stood behind me and said, "You're looking good, man. Stay tight, two more reps, you can do it." I got four and a pump and burn like I was 21 and loaded with jungle carbs. Turns out the guy at my back was 13 and talking to his schoolmate on the next bench. I would have been embarrassed if I didn't feel so darn good.

When perplexed I remind myself that someone had to think this stuff up. Many hazy years ago some brute, probably, or a less-than-delicate woman with hairy legs, stood in silence and contemplated muscle and strength. How can I be more powerful and physically impressive, lift heavier barrels, anvils and logs and bend bigger spikes? Practice, train, perform and repeat. Start small and add weight and size to the objects of attention. Improvise stuff, devise and contrive weighted things to assist the muscle-building and strength-building process: stones of different sizes, logs of various thickness, length and weight, graduating barrels filled with material of increasing density, assorted steel rails and axels with wheels on the ends.

The latter is a most interesting concept, worth developing.

Pulling things is unlike pushing things and broadens the treatment of muscle and might. A rope over the back or around the waist or formed into a harness is attached to a wagon, empty at first and later loaded with men and women of like interest. The passionate one-man beast-of-burden pulls with all his might till the wagon creaks forward and his body screams in glorious pain and the whole affair reaches its mark across a stretch of rutted dirt road. The occupants go for the

ride of their lives and spectators line up to award the rope-bearing, sinewy marvel with cheers and laughter. What a grand feat.

How about this? Sitting on the ground with his feet braced facing the wagon and the rope in his grasp, Big Mac pulls the staggering load to him hand over hand. Or, a platform is constructed, a rope is dropped through a hole in its center and attached to a weighted object and lifted from above. Here's a simple one: the strongman hangs from an overhead beam and pulls himself upward till his chin touches the beam and fully lowers himself as many consecutive times as possible -- call them a set of repetitions.

What I'm saying is this, sky-buddies: It's not rocket science with mathematical formulas and equations requiring genius. It's not masterful techniques and intimidating processes. Nor is it inherent talents or accomplished skills. It's lifting weights -- and eating good food -- for Pete's sake. It's not voodoo and a witch's brew, black magic, smoke and mirrors. It's logic, good old common sense, and persistence. It's resourcefulness and guts. It's glorious hard work.

Relax and be confident. Don't stiff-arm your training or place it coldly outside your life as if it were a bad-tempered junkyard dog or simple-minded relative. Get comfortable with exercise, cozy with your training. Know it as you know a friend. We can love good friends and find them maddening at times, but they are entirely too important to be without. So it is with the vigorous activity of exercise, the vital undertaking of fitness. A little of both sentiments with an accent on appreciation and respect is quite an acceptable mix.

This promising venture takes more time and work than most people think, much to their surprise and disappointment. After a month most aspirants feel beat up and cheated, toppling off the wagon and onto the rutted road below. The wagon bounces along with a hardy bunch still clinging to its sideboards, the journey a wild one and destination a seductive unknown. God bless them and mercy on those who toppled and settled with yesterday's dust.

Among the selection of goals sought by the lifter, muscularity is possibly the classiest. Muscle mass is impressive, shape is envied and strength is everyone's prize. Yet, fine muscle definition carried with ease is hot like fire. Sinew visible through thin skin and crowned with faint veins conveys instant quickness, sudden power and boundless energy. Raw human life itself is seen in vivid action: rippling, separating, stretching and contracting; functioning, living and breathing. In man or woman, it's fascinating, captivating and alluring. I want some.

When the urge to muscularize is overpowering, the first thing I do is reference my 101-book library and stacks of muscle magazines and start my thumb-through study. I run a search on my computer with any word that suggests raw, ripped muscles. After weeks of collecting material from 10,000 sources, I narrow the field of approach to 49, my favorite number. Of course, now I'm exhausted and could care less about... what was it again, rips, tears, cuts, shreds?

When that fails I perform the same routine that provides muscle mass, only I lighten the load by 10 to 20 percent and increase the pace by 10 to 20 percent. This is an estimation that is calculated through my sensory perception and never reaches hard copy. The exercises are the basics, and supersetting -- one exercise followed by another that complements the first -- is a key technique. Be prepared for volume in your routine, that is, lots of sets and reps, pumping and burning, as well as an exciting pace... and panting, till you're conditioned by the enthusiastic method of operation and readied for its benefits.

Modern or new age lifters might say, “The basics, supersetting and volume? You’ll never build muscle that way. I read it somewhere. That’s overtraining.”

Yeah, well get over it. Unless you’re one in 20 million (my own approximation) or you’re looking for cute little teeny weeny, itsy bitsy muscles, you’re going to require hard work and lots of it. I withdraw the second condition of the former statement; itsy bitsy muscle requires hard work and lots of it, too. And if you’re new at this stuff, maybe muscularity isn’t in your immediate future. Good old-fashioned muscle of any description might be most acceptable... and agreeable. You’re reading a chapter for another day in the life of your pursuits. Be of good cheer; the information is still useful.

Here’s where learning to love your training comes in handy.

An early disclaimer: Beware of excessive aerobic exercise in your eagerness to achieve muscle hardness and separation. You might very well lose valuable muscle at the cost of losing bodyfat. I find nothing more frightening except maybe the boogiemán. Consider HIIT sessions of 12 to 15 minutes four days a week, on your off-days when possible.

You want to train each muscle group, directly or indirectly, two times a week over a four-day workout week. Don’t be random in your routine, but allow yourself legitimate margin for exercise alterations where and when necessary.

Explanation: Without being a wimp, if a series of tough workouts fatigue you, let a day go by so you can blast it the next day. If the insertions are tender in the biceps, change your standing barbell curl to thumbs-up curls or reverse curls or wrist curls; if the bench is killing your shoulders, go to dumbbells to avoid damage and allow relief and repair. When your legs are noodles, work the shoulders and arms and catch up with the legs the following day or so. Fit it all together with feel, instinct, logic and finesse -- and responsibility.

Hit the abs and torso and lower back as a region three or four times a week with full-bore vigor, high reps, tight contractions and multi-set combinations one workout to the next. Vary the combinations of exercises to make the job interesting and certain, as the healthy condition of the region of muscles is vital and its toned appearance most appealing. Allow 15 to 20 minutes for the tough, worthwhile action, remembering the activity is aerobic and prepares the body for action. You’ll beat the back pain and disability of midlife and old age. You’ll stay strong.

Since exercise doesn’t change from moment to moment or year to year, as does medicine, high tech and finances, let me review once again my own workout fundamentals to give you a design you might want to adopt for yourself.

Well, put down my landing gear, I’ve come to the end of the runway. Let’s go over the scattered details of my approach to gaining hard muscle next time we gather in the field. Take advantage of the summer’s amazing days and the fine life we share.

Special note: Laree will send you to a short download for you to view by the end of the week. It’s a preview of a comedy routine -- not very funny -- I recently did to demonstrate the formidable Top Squat, the apparatus I invented to make squatting a more positive experience and better muscle builder. I am absolutely thrilled with its advantages and applications. I’ll post

reviews as I receive them now that it's reaching consumers, those brave souls with vision, trust and a keen desire to develop great legs and protect their backs, knees and shoulders.

If we see promise in the screening we'll do a series of rough MTV-like training routines for individual muscle groups and slumbusters that can be offered in DVD or VCR format. You'll grow and I'll become overnight a rich action hero, run for president and put an end to terrorism.

I'm thinkin', I'm thinkin'. You should see me. My face is all blotchy and crumpled from the strain. I twitch periodically when a thought is close, otherwise my shoulders are drawn tight by my traps and I'm as rigid as a fire plug. Muscularity for bombers, be they ready or not, that is the subject.

Today's muscle-building generality: Where you are going and how you get there depend upon who you are and where you are now.

- Where you are going is a place of desirable and attainable muscularity.
- Who you are is defined by your past, your genetics and your temperament.
- Where you are now is that place in your journey determined by your acquired lifestyle and habits.
- How you go from place to place is up to us, you and me, with the emphasis on you.

Let's take a look at the most common scenario among you explosive disciples-of-the-skies, consider a course of action and see if we strike a chord or a nerve or my big swollen thumb.

May I impose upon you to use your imagination?

You're a guy of 40-something, worked with weights on and off in a garage with your buddies during high school and got in pretty good shape. Job with the city (the firm, school, institute, restaurant, mortuary, maternity ward) and married with two kids had you looking over a gut, 30 extra pounds and diminishing strength and energy. You haven't missed a workout since the grim revelation and joining IOL three years ago. You've lost 20 pounds of fat, gained muscle size, shape and density and you're semi-intentionally holding 5 to 10 pounds of extra mass for strength, workout drive and good luck. It's time to get trim, hard and see what's there...lurking.

You are not alone; a boomer, a product of the golden years of bodybuilding, a Zane, Scott, Howorth, Draper and Arnold knockoff of sorts, having grown up watching us flex in the muscle magazines. You did it, you fell and you're back; and once back, you're back for good. YES, and high-fives all 'round. Now to get ripped.

Be prepared for a few head adjustments. You are required to drop up to 10 pounds over the next months to achieve the desired leanness. This is fine on paper and in your imagination, but the actual loss of size in the shoulders and arms is devastating. I revolt; we all revolt. Furthermore, strength diminishes, muscle endurance is compromised and the pump of promise and hope takes

a nosedive. Wait. There's more. You get to eat less scrumptious food and there's no cheating. Swell.

Bulking up is more fun. Can I go home now?

No, you can't. Commitment rules. Reaching for hardess can only make you a better person, smarter by experience, tougher by restraint, harder by application and sharper by intensity.

You must keep your eye on the goal. Visualize strong, well-muscled hips and the thickness of the waist replaced by a trim taper, the large torso minus the layer of thick padding, clear separation of muscle groups and thin skin that reveals veins and the ripple of underlying muscle – the lean body, active and alive. This is the authentic stuff. Anyone can get big; getting muscular is the real deal. Chumps get fat; champs get muscular. Besides, you can gain your precious monster size practically overnight (eat) if you find yourself sweating, quivering and going through withdrawals. Your choice. Be strong.

If you hear cliché in my presentation, it's in your ear and not in my voice. Listen to what's said; add your heart and soul and desire. The truth shall set you free.

You'll need four days in the gym; they will be direct, hard-hitting and concise, yet neither short nor rushed. Each muscle group needs to be hit twice a week, either directly or indirectly. Supersetting will be used generously because it is a most generous training method. It builds muscle strength, density, tenacity, shape, separation, endurance and energy; it stimulates training focus, involvement and excitement; it creates pace, rhythm and momentum. Supersetting contributes to muscularity like fire contributes to hot. Supersets work.

Yeah, so I heard.

The heavy weights will be replaced by moderate weights and each exercise executed with meticulous form and intensity. Set, rep and muscle concentration will be taken to new levels of demand and responsibility. With lighter, more controllable weight in your grasp, you will demand of the weight, rather than the weight, oversized and unwieldy, demand of you. A swifter training pace should be sought as accept your workout modifications and quickly condition yourself to the muscle defining regimen. I say "quickly" because a new intensity needs to be adopted if you are truly seeking rock-hard muscle and lower bodyfat. The goals before you come at the cost of enthusiastic and exhilarating blasting. Passionate blasting. Blasting and more blasting.

Do not fret. To satisfy your craving for the heavy weights, reserve two workouts a month for your low-rep power onslaught – great addition and complement to muscularity training. Be smart, be kind and be healthy.

You know my favorite muscle combinations and workout scheme: day 1, chest, back and shoulders; 2, biceps and triceps; 3, legs; 4, day off; 5, mix of push 'n pull according to need and desire; 2 days off. Sometimes I flip-flop these around according to my overtraining barometer or injury scale. Flexible is good.

Short pause for contemplation: Don't you find it interesting – or do you find it boring and dumb - - with all the information available and all the variety at hand, I choose the same old groupings

and format. But, they say, change is important. I agree. But change can be subtle, according to “need and desire” and not according to rule, responding to instinct and feel and not because it’s the first of the month or the end of a six week cycle, says so in my training log. New and different doesn’t always mean progressive and growing edge. Just thought I’d mention it aloud should you feel the basics and the tried-and-true are stale or old-fashioned and you’re missing out on the latest whatever. The sharp edge is at your fingertips and in your mind.

Nutrition, the foods you eat, the proteins, fats and carbohydrates, the supplements and the extras: Now I get out the yard stick, and not to measure the ingredients, but to bap the butt of the irreverent over-eater and ill-fated consumer of junk. Stand up, step forward and bend over. Smack. How did that feel? Yeah! Not so good, huh? You may return to your seat and sit, gently. I’ll probably hear from some internet activist committee about abuse or politically-correct exercise management group policing the web pages. I’ll be grounded. No more blitzing on weekends and blasting confined to aerobic classes only. Require the wicked Captain to eat junk food for 30 days. No Bomber Blend.

Here’s the general layout. You’ve heard it before and why should it change? Eat more protein, less carbohydrate, ample essential fats and lower overall consumption; that is, fewer calories here and there in the six meals you’ll be consuming throughout the day. You’re a bomber, we’re all bombers and there’ll be no hand holding, counting your calories or balancing your food groups with a calculator. Wing it.

What a dandy group, I might note. Pull up a bench for a sec. We are reasonably seasoned muscle builders and things of the mind need not concern us. We are not bubbleheads. Disciplines have been established, perseverance exhibited, commitment expressed and evaluations considered. The requirements for each of us seeking rock hard sinew will be basically the same. All that is necessary are fingers on the dial, hands on the eating, arms around the training and full-body submission to time; finesse, hard work, compromise and patience. It’s all under control.

From breakfast to bedtime you’ll be eating to serve the body, not your sensory persuasions. There’s plenty of delight in the menu of the hard-working weight-trainer seeking tight muscles. The food groups are broad, the vital needs are sizeable and we have choices. So ice cream and donuts are not on the list. Smile, there is tuna and water.

Allow me to ramble: Eat less fat than Atkins suggests. Egg white breakfasts if you fear the yolk (too bad, it’s a good fat), but trimming the excess fat from meats is not a bad idea. No fried foods or chicken skin and I cringe when I witness lightly cooked bacon entering the human construction zone. Go easy on the carbohydrates (less than the zone, more than Atkins) and no carbs from dead foods like pasta and potatoes or sugar on the rocks (candy and cakes and booze); limited whole grains like a hardy wheat bread, light on the legumes and beans for now, and a few nuts in the palm of your hand is okay. Cut the low-fat milk products (cottage cheese, milk, cheese, yogurt) in half and in half again over time, as it is not uncommon to hear a bodybuilder preparing for a contest say they account for baby fat and thick skin.

Protein builds muscle and supplies energy when in excess. Unless you have a sick liver or kidneys, a large consumption of protein and the variety of amino acids only benefit the body. Think one gram per pound as a minimum and one and a half to two grams per pound as good and greedy. Red meat builds best, fish and poultry trim best and eggs and dairy are like busy workers scurrying around the construction site picking up stuff, moving and carrying things and keeping

order. Now you know my limited vision of nutrition; aminos with hard hats, hormones in boots operating bulldozers, enzymes with their sleeves rolled up reading blueprints spread on the hood of a muddy Dodge Ram.

I repeat. If you are a calorie counter and carefully balance percentages of this and that to achieve physical improvement, stop it, for gosh sakes. Details are good for detectives and researchers and professors, but they distract from the instinctive trusts with which the dynamic musclebuilder forms the mold, or is it, molds the form. See? That's what calorie counting and other such intellectual preoccupations do. They engross, they mislead, they confuse in the act of perfecting and accurately achieving. They're tiresome and muddle the mind of the aspiring athlete. They bind and they dilute. Now, as I was saying... er... what was I saying? Who are you?

Living foods are a great source of cellular health and vitality. Eat them regularly; fruits sparingly (high sugar content) and at logical times of the day to serve energy needs and provide ever-loving vitamins, minerals, enzymes and phytonutrients. Yum, taste good too. The body smiles at their ingestion (more Draper depth). Fresh vegetables lightly cooked and in salads should be eaten in abundance for their carbohydrate, roughage and nutrient value.

We all are different with our own chemistry, hormones, enzymes, muscle mass, bodyfat and metabolism in tow. I leave it to you to kick around the yams and other carb sources, if you think you need them, and to alter your overall and time specific "quantity" intake, as you steer your way through the learning and leaning curve. For example, I require less food intake on off-training days, though eating the same amount provides a mini-growth spurt. I eat protein and additional carbs prior to a workout to assure plentiful fuel and nutrient resources. I always feed the beast some carbs and additional protein immediately after the beating is thoughtfully applied; time to replenish, repair and reward the bruised and starving mess. I always eat breakfast, never eat too much at any one serving and each meal is an appropriate combination protein, fat and carbohydrate. When defining I forego the late-night meal and consume a tablespoon of free-form amino acids to satisfy the pre-bedtime protein hit.

A good protein powder and free-form amino acids play an important role in building hard muscle. You knew that, but you wanted to hear me say it again. Backing off the food-intake requires fortification at the proper times, conveniently and in concentration. I don't disapprove of running the body on low food volume (occasional mini-fast) for cleansing and purging and system relief periodically, especially when leaning down, providing the limited ingested resources are power-packed. Keep those supplementary vitamins and minerals and antioxidants coming, roughage from Metamucil and lots of water for smooth flying.

This is turning into a book. I must stop now or The Web Master, The IOL Moderator and The Editor-in-Chief will take my mouse away.

God's speed, Bombers. And remember, no flying under bridges, no stalling over the White House, stay out of tunnels and no landing on football fields, golf courses, beaches or interstates. You're giving Laree ulcers.

The last of the tuna was wedged in the curve sweeping the bottom of the pop-top can. I scraped around with a wooden stick used for stirring coffee (somebody stole my fork) and wondered why

it was so important I get every last morsel of the smelly, less-than-delectable fish before retiring the container. I'm cheap, I thought. No, that's not it. I'm frugal and can't stand waste. That's true, but nope, that's not it. I realized with little more thought it was the protein that each fragment represented and the muscle growth that would be lost if I ignored the nugget, or gained if I retrieved and ingested it. I dug deeper and chewed on the stick before tossing the tin in the trash and opening another. I'm rich.

"Draper, does this stuff ever get easier, the weights, I mean?" Oh, no. Not again. It's the same old line I hear from the I'm-here-instead-of-home-with-the-family malingerer, suffering-but-courageous martyr and misery-loves-company stiff. I look up and there's Fred with his loopy white cap from a yard sale perched crookedly on his forehead. What the devil is under that thing, I wonder. "Freddy," I tell him, "you're rich. You're here. You've got the world in your mighty grip. Pull up a chair, pour yourself some water." I'm sitting on the deck in front of the gym under a giant redwood which grows perceptibly by the day, its roots slowly lifting the recently constructed area skyward. "Hold onto your hat, Fred." He's staring at the tuna, but he's not getting any.

I go on to expand upon my commentary of his being, past, present and future. "It's Friday afternoon in the land of the free, my friend, and you're about to elevate your body with exciting muscle- and power-building exercise. An original musclehead, you've been caring for yourself for 50 years and now you're letting out moans that only come from little old wash-women. The mind is loose and drifting, Fred. Go in there and concentrate on your workout; execute each exercise with precision and intensity, one rep, one set at a time. Allow your thoughts to wander no further than the vision of your goal and the fulfillment that comes with the completion of a high-powered bombing session. Turn your passions toward..."

Amid my raving Fred placed his meaty hands on the round espresso table, leaned forward and said, "You are so boring." He got up dragging his gym bag toward the front door as I reminded him he was an "elite master athlete" who, due to his perspicacity, discipline and sacrifice, was not of the ordinary cut, suffering from obesity, diabetes, cardio-respiratory ailments and shingles. "Thank God, Freddy. Blast it." Yeah, we're rich.

Remarkable how generous I am after a two-hour training session, two cans of tuna and a bottle of spring water. Had he approached me three hours ago I'd have nodded sullenly and warned him I was using that bench, that bar, the platform and not to bother me. What a dope I can be.

That reminds me...

I have a long-overdue stack of email requests from folks, male and female, of differing ages and various levels of experience with a broad range of training problems. However, upon reading and re-reading them, the underlying dilemma is the same: training frustration because improvements have stopped dead in their tracks; no sign of life, not even a twitch. They are convinced it's their workout or their diet or a combination of the two and they can't untangle the mystery.

One guy wants to gain weight, muscle, of course and another wants to lose weight, fat, of course. A third wants to get stronger and harder at her current body weight. Can you see the predicament? I ask you, what do I suggest? I don't know the parties involved beyond their letter of request; I don't stand before them to determine their structure, sturdiness and skin tone. While

asking questions I can't look in their eyes, the windows of perception, to discern their muscle-building conviction, depth of understanding and willingness to train hard, real hard.

I have only hollow specifics: age, gender, height and weight and an outline of their current eating and training scheme. This is fodder sufficient to make a perfunctory assessment for the average Jane and Joe, but does nothing for the bomber who is about to take a nosedive.

I can make the usual menu recommendations: increase the protein, drop the junk foods and sugars, frequent feedings, supps... been there, done that, thank you. Training insights? Increase the volume, more basics, more supersets, pyramid... yeah, yeah, yeah. The bases are covered, but nobody's up at bat. Maybe that's it. I'm confusing the sports... take a wider stance, stay loose in the hips, choke up on the bat and keep your eye on the ball. The answer is not in the training program or eating habits. It's in the heart. It's not in the black and white of principles. It's in the red-hot fire of passion.

The fact is we could make one single nutritional and exercise program to fit all three that would serve them exceedingly well and position them on-track toward their urgent destination. The requirement -- the unquestionable necessity -- the absolute responsibility -- is moving on that track with confidence, high hopes and controlled acceleration. This means up the long grades, along precarious ledges, across deep ravines, through tempest and storm and barren desert heat, all the time pressing on with unwavering zeal, merciless power and pace. Now I'm a frontiersman, Davy Crockett, entreating the traveler to heroism and high spirits as they conquer unknown territories.

Expect much, but no more than you have to give.

This is not a stretch. We are influenced by the abundance of information, choices of exercise (and food) and therefore believe we must need them all and make use of them all... if not at once, then very soon. Further, the desire for entertainment, the threat of apathy and the submission to monotony has us looking for change frequently, convinced easily by the thin theory that exercise variation promotes growth and prevents muscle staleness. Why not? Is it possible that trainees fail to maximize an exercise or a routine fully and thus do not achieve the margins of muscle-building overload it offers, the finer margins that demand muscle adaptation and growth, where none might be found in any manner less intense, less painful and less sacrificial?

Retain a good exercise until it evaporates and you absorb it.

Unless we're currently flogged and short of breath, we're quick to agree life is wonderful. Daily it draws us in every direction for responsible service, pursuit and achievement. We endure exhausting, yet fascinating trials and occasionally plunge into mysterious adventures. Consider: For those devoting themselves to four hardy 60-minute workouts a week and correct eating, it is sufficient, quite rewarding, in fact, to gain health and well-being while seeking trimness and conditioning. We are bombers, yet we cannot expect the exotic bodybuilding extras (barndoor lats, ripped pecs, six-pack abs, spider veins, cannonball bis, horseshoe tris) without the devotion of the professional, the genetics of gifted or the freedom and youth of the ever-ready, pre-career, pre-family n' credit card 20-year-old.

Do not give up. Trust your iron and steel investment. Crank up the volume and throw out the calculator. Built within and ever-developing are the feelers that, given half a chance, will direct us toward our potential.

Below is an outline of the “same old” with a twist of lemon.

Bike or jog for 15 to 20 minutes four days a week with variations of intensity to suit your mood and needs. In all your training you must be the governor. You’re in charge of your workout regularity, levels of intensity and focus of performance. Wherever there is decision to be made within your routine, you make it; for example, adding weight on strong day or going light on a blue day; when to do your aerobic activity, before your workout, on an off day or on the same day, but at a separate time. It’s the live-and-learn principle, which is no different than the-learn-as-you-go precept. Try it. Takes common sense, builds confidence and makes life easier.

None of this training stuff is all that critical at any particular stage. Big in, big out vs. little in, little out theory. See, I did my homework. Seek counsel, yet grant yourself credit for thoughtfulness, logic and creativity. You’re on the sky-pages, which suggests you have the basics down or they’re at your fingertips. We live and die by the basics. What we do with them determines how well we live, how big and lean, strong and quick, long and healthy and how happy and fulfilled.

“You know, Bomber, for a living legend you sure talk in circles. I’m falling asleep here and you are yet to make any sense or tell me something I need to know. I want a smoothie.”

Where’s everybody going? I think I’ll continue the lemon-twist workout next week. It’s been a long day for all of us.

Remember: When you discover a treasure, consider its worth, delight in its touch and hold it close. It sparkles and glows only when we keep our eyes on it.

Do not remove your hand from the throttle or your eye from the sky.

It was early, the town asleep and I was alone. I sat on the wooden bench, leaned against the loaded bar upheld by uncertain supports and clasped my chalk-caked hands as if in prayer. My breathing leveled, the pain subsided and the calm of endorphins trickled through my body. I was a dozen sets into my workout, curiously alive and my eyes beheld the riches of the setting around me.

Busted-out plaster, exposed wiring and pipes highlighted by rust-red water stains and muted shadows of deserted spider webs composed primitive art of time-gone-by; these unframed murals of truth, pain, loveliness, brokenness, toil and joy hung everywhere on the walls of the subterranean Muscle Beach Gym. The place was falling apart, disintegrating, yet the sublime essence of the random display of old classics by Father Time spoke to the spirit of the visitor, the muscleman clad in shredded sweatshirt and pants to match. “You want it bad enough, you pay the price,” it echoed in the vast space. “Bulging biceps and a strong back and the look of a mountain are yours, if you endure the test of time, don’t collapse or abandon the good fight.”

The silence in the early morning, interrupted by deep breathing, lone scuffling and thuds, and the speech of grunting men's voices and the mad clang of metal by night, told the black n' white story of faith, hope and desire: Push and pull with all your might, this way and that, and, hey, have you tried it seated, standing or with the weight tied 'round your waist? What a stretch, what a pump, what a burn! Unspoken, the priceless information was passed from one guy to another.

We shared what we experienced, not as secrets of training wisdom, but as bits of molded clay and chiseled stone fragments at a sunken archeological site, piecing them together to discover the unknown, the whole. Build a body of splendor and power with the semi-precious elements at hand.

Some things never change, thank heaven. Look into your past and recall our ancient conversation of last week about muscle-making, where we spoke of the "same old" training with a twist of lemon. The beginnings of an exercise routine were charted and I suggested simplicity in course, yet intensity in pursuit: less brain and more back, order and focus. Let's get back to work.

From your stage-setting aerobic routine, move to an efficient and emphatic, yet unhurried 10-minute midsection workout, which could include variations of hyperextensions, crunches, hanging and incline leg raises and rope tucks. Tightly combine the exercises according to your level of condition by eliminating pauses between sets, supersetting and performing high reps with intense contractions. The incentive for these exercises, which most lifters consider a nuisance, is realized in their value for extending the aerobic affect, loosening and warming up the body and building attractive muscle.

If that's not enough to impress you, there's much, much more: The big benefit of midsection training is the strengthening of that slouchy region upon which our health, independence and longevity depend. Our abdominal and lower back muscles hold us together, protect our vital organs and maintain our balance. They keep us erect and moving forward with the ability to lift heavier weights for more years and with less limitation and less pain, spelled PAIN.

Gyms are full of 40-something folks who can't bend over to pick up a nickel, a dime or a quarter. For a dollar they'll fall on top of the thing, stash it in their shirt and wait for someone to pick them up. Then there are those who exercise regularly, but shy away from lifts that put a load on the lower back. "Hurt it once. Don't want to hurt it again." Listen. Be aware, be cautious, but don't be foolish. Think twice; work the abdominals and the hip and lower back areas. I encourage you to consider light and thoughtful deadlifts and squats as a regular part of your workout to strengthen your core structure. These, like water and air, are necessary, safe and delicious when used correctly and not tampered with or overdone. If the region is weak, it needs therapy and repair and continual building, slow and sure, as only weight training can provide.

The solid ground work has been established, the site is clear and now you're ready for the timber and I-beams. No doubt you'll choose several pressing movements in your heavy construction, the building of your body's muscle mass and power. What about pressing? Some lifters have better pressing and pushing strength than others, while some shine when it comes to curling and pulling. Generally speaking, pressing involves shoulder, triceps and minor pectoral muscles and pulling requires biceps and back engagement. The potential abilities and limitations in each area depend on genes and muscle mass, of course, but largely on the mechanics of the muscles, tendon insertions and bone lengths. You go with what you have and strive to achieve your maximum potential. Done.

The bench press is the best known, most popular and, thus, most performed exercise in the weightlifting repertoire, and as an exercise it's not half bad. It builds muscle in the anterior deltoid, across the chest and in the triceps. The bench press commonly presents a problem to the bodybuilder and powerlifter, especially when they seek to achieve extreme power and mass through its engagement. The shoulder's rotator cuff was not designed for repeated heavy overload and soon the mechanism submits to the pain of damage, inflammation and eventual deterioration. Something to consider, big guy. Warm up, don't go foolishly heavy (you da judge), no less than six reps a set and keep the form perfect -- no radical arching, thrusting, bouncing and no left arm followed by right arm, as the body contorts like an electrically-charged lizard.

You want to benefit from the bench, treat it as an exercise for four sets of 15, 12, 10, 8 focused reps and improve your strength and muscle mass by utilizing a simple rep or poundage increment plan, workout to workout, over the next month. Go for a one-rep max when you feel good and get the urge once every three to four weeks. Warm up, stay cool and you'll be hot.

The most excellent presses by men and women are performed with dumbbells and on an incline: big shoulders, powerful chest and triceps built like steel jacks, healthy and pain-free. The carrying of the metal from rack to bench and bench to rack accounts for some heavy work, my hard-hitting, high-flying friends. Cleaning the dumbbells into position and returning them to your upright sides is no worthless requirement of muscle and motion. (I hate it when personal trainers hand their clients the weights and retrieve them from them like they were the trainer's private property or nasty devices not to be handled excessively.) Grasp the dumbbells with intimacy and affection. Get to know the steely knurl, the hardness and the heft, and consider the affect they have on your structure. They're for your benefit, for you to control and for your pleasure. They're in your hands by your choice and for your touch. Go up the rack, 4 x 12, 10, 8, 6.

The incline dumbbell press can be low, a bench on a 4x4 or a crate, with just enough rise to make it entirely different from a flat press, a minor modification, but very effective. The steeper the incline, the more you will notice that the front deltoid and, eventually, the lateral deltoid comes into action, and the demand on the pectoral muscles moves upward similarly. The resistance within the muscle increases as less muscle volume is bearing the load. Steep dumbbell inclines are the shoulder's best friends. Coconut makers.

The Smith Press is a popular exercise unit on every commercial gym floor. It's the piece that has the bar gliding up and down on a pair of vertical rods fitted with manual stops every 6 to 8 inches, floor to average head level. Put an adjustable bench under the bar and you're in business. The unit is perfect for the trainee who prefers a guided action for safety as a beginner or assistance when limited by injury. It serves the needs of those who are working within a limited range of motion or customizing exercises to suit specific needs. I count on the Smith Press for incline presses and the press-behind-neck exercise (PBN) to maintain stability lost to the malfunction of several rotator cuff supportive muscles. Paradoxically, the bar's strictness -- for up and down action only -- allows versatility in exercise creation in that the user can apply force against the bar, forward or backward, for unique muscle recruitment or damage and pain protection. Will the real Mr. Smith please stand up and take a bow?

Before going onto pulling and curls, may I remind you that freehand dips with weight are possibly the next best upper body muscle builder next to gorilla style tire-stretching? Machine dips have great versatility in that you can control the position of your body to isolate specific muscles: lean back with a close grip to hit the triceps, lean forward to pump the chest and round your back to engage the upper back. And for the tough and adventurous type, cleans and presses work the whole system from head to toe. Bar from floor to shoulders, pause and press overhead and return to floor and repeat. Oh, boy. Takes technique, practice and energy and produces muscle mass, power and coordination.

Pulling exercises, as in curling or rowing or overhead lat pulldowns, are predominately initiated by the biceps and upper back muscles. I always say, if you want big biceps, do standing bent-bar curls and, once conditioned, don't be afraid to add the weight and use some healthy body thrust with biting contractions and screaming extensions. Four or five sets of six to eight reps are not bad for starters.

Seated dumbbell alternate curls are my next choice, again clean, yet fighting reps for big biceps-building and interior muscle-building evident in a full torso. I'm not an advocate of isolated muscle-making -- one-arm concentration curls, stiff-body triceps pushdowns, rigid knee-up-on-bench bent-over dumbbell rows. I prefer to work the body like an animal in the wild, a racehorse crossing the finish line or an ox at the front of a plow. Full range of motion, stretching and tugging and total muscle action is more involving and fulfilling, and more logical for growth and health.

Curls: There are incline curls, from almost flat for lower biceps and biceps peak action; there are inclines of any degree for other points of development, comfort and advantage and there are reverse curls, thumbs-up curls, Zottmans and wrist curls, all for forearm focus and grip.

Don't forget supersetting bis with tris when you get the urge to exceed. And if you want to set your pants on fire, start curling at the top of the rack for eight reps (your max) and work your way down -- six to eight sets -- till you can no longer open your hands. We have ways to make you talk.

Seeking lat width? Go with wide-grip pulldowns, both before and behind the neck. Wide-grip chins can't be beat, if you're able to do them, but they can be a beast. Seated lat rows give length to the lats and thickness to the back and begin a welcome conditioning of the lower back, especially when performed with full range of motion, an arch of contraction at the peak of the movement and working your way up to some meaningful poundage, one of the best exercises on the shelf. Remember, biceps are always enjoying some extra duty when you're working the back.

Bombers, you've been most attentive and I'm recommending you for the Iron and Steel Cross of Concentration. The runway must be cleared for incoming craft and it's time for us to apply today's fundamentals. It's in the work, not in the study, not in the notes, not in the planning and discussing.

We'll pick up where we left off, next week. Till then don't let her idle... push her to the max.

It all started four weeks ago when I addressed the subject of muscularity. It was my intention to outline a simple exercise routine and nutritional format to achieve the goal, while underlining the toughness, the passion, hard work and devotion required. This is the fifth dissertation on the subject and wanting to wrap it up I had to go back to the beginning (late August) to recall my simple, easy-to-follow, no-frills approach.

Crazy. Since I forgot I figured you had as well. I called it the “Secret 14-Day Muscularizing Routine and Eating Plan.” Ring a bell? I went on to say in my pushy, hot-shot manner, “You eat lots of protein and train like crazy till the job is done. It's logic, good old common sense, and persistence. It's resourcefulness and guts. It's glorious hard work.”

That does wrap it up, but it doesn't make for good reading and it does lack detail. So I went on and on for four weeks to summarize a two-week plan. The shortest distance between two points is not always a straight line, evidently, and I went in arcs, circles and loops as proof.

Sure you don't want to go back to your old Atlas Dynamic Tension course and fast food diet? Doesn't work, but at least you'd know where you were goin' and what you were doin'.

I might be wrong (impossible), but I think we've covered the upper body and we're heading for legs. It's not necessary to correct me. What good would it do?

Legs, of course, include calves. Now, I'm a big fan of the muscle group, though there is personally little substantiation of my appreciation. The poor saplings look half-starved and tortured. How many of you have found yourself walking across a crowded mall or airport terminal and there, out of nowhere, is the perfect set of diamond-shaped calf muscles, striated and flexing beneath a pair of plaid Bermuda shorts filled to the max by an ordinary fellow with limp shoulders and a bouncing belly? He's just bopping along, right? And how many of you want to tweak his nose, cast curses upon him, stomp and scream and in other ways make a fool of yourself? Yeah, me too. Relieves the frustration, but does nothing to solve calf-dystrophy.

So, what to do? The best single exercise for mass, shape and fullness is the donkey calf raise. You know the one -- you situate your feet on a stable block, lean forward with your elbows and forearms resting on a waist-high platform and execute your up-and-down calf movement. To make the exercise most effective, increase the resistance upon the muscles by having your training partner sit upon your lower back and hip region. He or she can clutch a 25- or 45-pound plate in hand to augment load. The position is comfortable, the action is pure, the burn serious and the results are forthcoming. With a hard-working partner go back and forth until you've completed 10 sets of 15 to 25 reps, three days a week. If you're both nuts, you can engage in 25-set challenges occasionally to make a real difference.

I must admit I don't see many donkeys around these days, and certainly not in Club Fit or 24 Hour. Not the trend, I guess.

Apart from the mule-team, it's the standing and seated calf machines for mixed reps, high (25) and low (8-10), with lots full extensions -- stretching -- and tight contractions followed by a handful of burning half movements. Supersetting the two can be entertaining and effective as well. 8, 10, or 12 sets, three days a week for the bound and determined, less for the wus. A tearful experience. Do your calves when you feel like doing them; before or after your thigh workout, at another time or on another day. Just do them.

Did I mention squats, yet? I'll get to them in a few minutes... remind me.

I like to do a little ab work before I hit the thighs to ready the torso for the workload ahead. You want to do five minutes on the bike to warm yourself up, knock yourself out, but no more were I you. Don't want tired quads or loose knees before strong leg work. Save your aerobics for another day. Rest, replenish and rebuild after your leg work, or else.

I suggest you prepare your thighs for your squatting or leg pressing by doing three moderate sets of 12 reps of leg extensions and leg curls. Get the knees and various muscles and leg mechanics warmed up, elastic and bound with supportive blood. Complete your extension and curl training after your heavy leg work, or do as I do, all of it with intensity up front. Doesn't seem to fatigue the quads or hams or interfere with a good heavy session. Got me.

That done and your pain level appropriately stimulated, it's time for either squats or leg presses, whichever you're willing to do, or, as in my case, squats followed by leg presses.

They are both terrific movements and both should be done throughout your training schemes. How you do that is your choice. Squats outshine leg presses, but the leg press recruits the variety of leg muscles somewhat differently 'cuz of the torso-thigh relative positioning, the no-fear slowness and depth attainable with the controlled movement and the heavier weights being attempted with the back essentially out of play. The leg press serves as a nice replacement for squats when the back and knees are sore or fatigued from redundant bar-on-back full squats.

Being realistic and having worked in a variety of gyms for a bunch of years and recalling my own early training days, I know squats are not everyone's choice of leg developers. The exercise looks dangerous; it looks an awful lot like hard work, it looks troublesome, precarious, tricky, stupid, frightening, crushing, painful, death-defying, old-fashioned and bloodcurdling. You got it, except they are not dangerous. Wrong and wrong. They are good for you, they are fun and they are user-friendly. Trust me. You've just got to get to know them is all. They're like gorillas. Be nice to them and they'll be nice to you.

My point made (feebly), let's start with leg presses. Some thoughts: The effectiveness of the leg press as an exercise depends on the leg press machine, its mechanics, slope, load-to-resistance translation, platform size and angle, seating arrangement and comfort, and on the character seated beneath the loaded platform. Proper foot placement needs to be individually sought to assure maximum thigh engagement without excessive burden on the knees. Trial and error, execution and attention... you're in the driver's seat. Usually, the knees are under unhealthy stress when feet are positioned too low on the platform or toed out or in (knees out of natural tracking) to effect specific muscle isolation. Don't do anything fancy, just press.

I recommend at least three sets of any exercise performed to achieve a worthwhile muscle- and strength-building overload. Four's better and, personally, I'm hooked on five. With the leg press, it's pure pushing and your ability to push with the legs is extraordinary. There's no balancing the bar on the back comfortably and correctly, stepping backwards into position while regarding the force on the shoulders and lower back, lowering yourself into a full squat -- plus returning, again and again -- as the cumbersome weight is subject to 360 degrees of gravitational pull and finally you have to replace the bar (after a short stumble) with certain accuracy.

The legs can handle the reps with great mass, strength and muscularity benefits. Three to five sets of 25, 20, 15, 12 and 10 with increasing weight as the reps decrease is not a bad scheme, And just when you think you can't do another rep, hold the platform in place, take three deep breaths and push out another two to three reps, and again, and again. Go as deep as you can without rounding the lower back (just past 90 degrees or a right angle, thigh bone to calf bone) to attain a complete range of motion and some serious thigh biceps and buttock action. Brave and focused repetitions with no bouncing. Get up and add weight; no loitering.

Real bodybuilders squat. Some folks cannot 'cuz they have a real injury. My heart goes out to them. Others don't because they are prudent. I understand. Too many fail to squat because they think they have an injury or pretend they have an injury. Who's to say? A lot of lifters don't and should and plan to but never do. They lose. Re-read my notes. They lose -- and I'll tell you why. First of all, squats practiced properly are very safe. They're the best single exercise for building the body from head to toe, and that includes the heart and lungs and venal system and all the muscles in between, as they are interconnected and interacting. Squats beat bouncing aerobics for lung capacity and leg function and fat loss and muscularity and energy under labor, to say nothing of challenge and interest. They stimulate the production of growth hormone for health and longevity and muscle growth. They keep the lower back strong and that alone should be enough... to an ailing, complaining people protecting their back rather than using and building it. Hello.

I like five to seven sets of the bloodthirsty exercise, the first two sets to get the rhythm and groove in good working order. My scheme goes something like this: 5-7 x 15, 12, 10, 10, 8, 6 and 4, each set increasing with the appropriate weight. Singles and doubles come once a month. I'll finish off with four or five sets of 15 repetitions of close-foot leg presses of a moderate weight for a special quad effect.

I'm done and I crawl home. That is, after polishing the mirrors and mopping the floors to cool down and display my ingenious Functional Aerobic Technique or FAT.

Final truth: My squatting power has improved considerably and with no back or knee pain and with more comfort and control and fun since using the Top Squat. Without the TS I would not be able to squat at all, my shoulders no longer having the range of motion to support an Olympic bar.

The sky's the limit, bombers. Let's get our tails in the air.

Draper out.

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