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CrossFit Westside?

Tom Seryak has been using Westside Barbell methods and CrossFit for over a year and offers strategies for trainers looking for ways to integrate the two programs.

By **Tom Seryak** High Octane CrossFit

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For CrossFitters who are intrigued by the methods used at Westside Barbell, the pertinent question to ask is, "How do I incorporate them into my CrossFit training?"

While there is no solution that will fit everyone's needs, I offer one approach for consideration. I have been experimenting with incorporating Westside principles into my CrossFit training for the past 18 months or so, and after many trials and errors, I have settled into a protocol that works very well for me.

Discovering Westside and CrossFit

I started wrestling when I was eight years old, and I was a one-sport athlete throughout high school and college. Wrestling was my passion, but I spent countless hours in the weight room in constant pursuit of improved strength and conditioning. Strength training became a passion in and of itself, and when my competitive wrestling days ended, I continued to seek strength and overall fitness.

Our approach was to utilize the underlying principles of the Westside method to improve strength under the barbell for subsequent application toward our sport: strongman.

I was first introduced to the conjugate system and the Westside method while training to compete in my one and only strongman competition in 2004. I will hereafter use the term "Westside method" rather than "conjugate method" to avoid any confusion with the similarly named conjugate sequence system (CSS), which is a different program based heavily on the work of Dr. Yuri Verkhoshansky. Our approach was to utilize the underlying principles of the Westside method to improve strength under the barbell for subsequent application toward our sport: strongman. In other words, the Westside method was our training.



MONDAY:
① SPEED BENCH
8 x 3 @ 50% 1RM
② 8 ROUNDS 250M ROW
- 2 MINUTE SEND-OFF

TUESDAY:
WIDE STANCE
BOX SQUAT - 14"
- FIND 1RM

WEDNESDAY: "NATE"
2 MUSCLE-UP
4 HSPU
8 SWING
AMRAP IN 20 MIN

THURS: REST

FRIDAY: WEIGHTED PULL-UP
- FIND 3 REP MAX

SATURDAY:
3 ROUNDS FOR TIME:
10 HANG POWER CLEAN 135/95
50 DOUBLE UNDERS

SUNDAY:
SPEED SQUAT
8-10 SETS x 2 REPS
@ 50% 1RM

The whiteboard at High Octane CrossFit shows how you can integrate standard CrossFit WODs with the dynamic-effort and maximum-effort work that characterizes training at Westside Barbell.

Here is an example of what a week of training looked like:

Sunday: dynamic-effort bench

Monday: max-effort squat or deadlift

Tuesday: strongman training

Wednesday: max-effort bench or overhead press

Thursday: strongman training

Friday: dynamic-effort squat or deadlift

Saturday: off

Keep in mind that most strongman events mirror the structure of the CrossFit met-con. Some events have a task priority (e.g., 12 700-lb. tire flips for time), while others have a time priority (e.g., complete as many 300-lb. deadlift reps as possible in 1 minute). However, strongman events are always very heavy and relatively short in time to completion.

For speed days, we chose one lift variation for bench press and squat or deadlift, and we used that variation for three consecutive weeks before changing the variation. For max-effort days, we rotated lift variations for bench press, overhead press, squat, deadlift and good morning on a weekly basis, incorporating bands, chains and board presses.

If you head over to the [Westside Barbell website](#) you will see the phrase “often imitated but never duplicated.” We had no delusions that we were duplicating the Westside system, but incorporating the underlying principles of the Westside method into our training was a huge success. In nine months, my bench press, squat and deadlift improved from 255 to 335, 345 to 435 and 345 to 475, respectively.

Between my strongman days and the time I discovered CrossFit (January 2008), I had resorted to bodybuilding-style training, and I’m quite embarrassed to admit it. Unsurprisingly, I was quick to find out that my max-effort strength levels had deteriorated back to where they were prior to my first exposure to the Westside method. I was hooked on CrossFit from Day 1 and, like everyone else, realized improvements across broad time and modal domains, including increases in max-effort strength levels.

About six months into CrossFit, I started to experiment with incorporating Westside methods into my training. My objective was and still is to become as strong as possible by utilizing the underlying principles of the Westside method for strength development while at the same time improving my work capacity across broad time and modal domains via the CrossFit met-con.



By “accommodating resistance” with the bands and chains used at Westside Barbell, you can change the demands of an exercise, producing the constant variation CrossFit encourages.

I have experimented with several approaches for implementing the Westside method within the CrossFit system, and optimal recovery and balance of disciplines have been the biggest programming obstacles I have faced. I'll share several approaches I've tried, as well as the benefits and programming obstacles of each approach. Keep in mind that none of these approaches is attempting to duplicate what is being done at Westside. Instead, each incorporates the strength-training methods and "laws of training" that have influenced Louie Simmons' system.

Methods of Strength Training

There are three strength-training methods for achieving maximal muscular tension:

1. Max-effort method
Lifting a maximal load, as in a 1-rep max.
2. Dynamic-effort method
Lifting a non-maximal load with the highest attainable speed.
3. Repetition method (to failure)
Lifting a non-maximal load to failure. During the final repetitions, the muscles develop the maximum force possible in a fatigued state.

There is a fourth method that does not achieve maximal muscular tension: the sub-maximal-effort method. The sub-maximal method involves lifting a non-maximal load an intermediate number of times but not to failure. For more information on this method, turn to the work of Dr. Vladimir Zatsiorsky in *The Science and Practice of Strength Training*.

The Westside method follows training laws, and that is why it works so well.

The Westside method utilizes all four strength-training methods concurrently in one microcycle (in this case, one week), with the emphasis on the first three methods. Each week has four designated training days: two max-effort days and two dynamic-effort days. Repetition and

sub-maximal-effort methods are utilized for supplemental and accessory movements after max-effort or dynamic-effort training.

Training Principles

The objective of our training is to improve physical fitness. If we want to realize continuous, long-term improvements in fitness, we must follow certain laws. The main law of training is adaptation. Adaptation occurs when an organism adjusts to its environment. If the environment changes, the organism changes to better survive under the new conditions. Optimal adaptation (i.e., improvements in fitness level) will occur when the following principles are met:

1. Overload principle—Training load must be above habitual levels to bring about positive changes in fitness levels. This should be done slowly and progressively over time by either increasing the training load (through intensity or volume) while continuing the same drill or by changing the drill. The adage "routine is the enemy" applies well here.
2. Law of accommodation—Accommodation is the decrease in response of a biological object to a stimulus. In other words, if we train the same movements under similar training loads over a long period of time, performance gains will decrease. It is our objective, then, to avoid accommodation. We avoid accommodation by modifying training programs either quantitatively or qualitatively:
 - Quantitative: changing training loads (total amount of weight lifted).
 - Qualitative: replacing the exercises.
3. Law of specificity—The "SAID principle" states that the human body will adapt specifically to the imposed demands that are placed on it. If you want to get stronger, you must systematically incorporate strength-training methods into your program.
4. Individualization—"All people are different. The same exercises or training methods elicit a greater or smaller effect in various athletes. Innumerable attempts to mimic the training routines of famous athletes have proven unsuccessful. Only the general ideas underlying noteworthy training programs, not the entire training protocol, should be understood and creatively employed." (*The Science and Practice of Strength Training*, Zatsiorsky, 1995).



Band deadlifts can be done on platforms with pegs, or they can be done with a little creativity.

The Westside method follows training laws, and that is why it works so well. The objective of the Westside method is to improve absolute strength levels in the squat, deadlift and bench press. The Westside method overloads the athlete through changes in intensity and volume via the four strength-training methods. It avoids accommodation by constantly rotating different variations of the same exercise. The training is specific toward the desired adaptation, and training is individualized by constantly addressing specific weaknesses in each athlete.

Optimal recovery will always precede training frequency and/or intensity, so I may incorporate more rest or recovery training sessions.

Incorporating Westside Methods Into CrossFit

Incorporating Westside training methods and principles into CrossFit is feasible, but certain obstacles may arise. What follows are four generic templates (two that do not include Olympic lifting, two that do) for using Westside methods in the CrossFit program. It would be foolish of me to provide any more detailed programming because doing so would make it impossible to address the laws of specificity (your personal training objectives) and individualization (your strengths and weaknesses).

Option 1: The Traditional Westside Approach

The traditional approach separates max-effort and dynamic-effort days (by at least 72 hours) and may include conditioning workouts on dynamic-effort days only. Following a three-on, one-off schedule, the rotation is as follows:

Day 1: dynamic effort (upper body)/met-con

Day 2: max effort (lower body)

Day 3: met-con

Day 4: off

Day 5: max effort (upper body)

Day 6: dynamic effort (lower body)/met-con

Day 7: met-con

Day 8: off

Benefits

1. This approach takes full advantage of the Westside method by including four strength days (two max effort, two dynamic effort) within a one-week micro-cycle. If you want to see the greatest gains in strength for the slow lifts, this is the route to go.
2. Repetition-method strength training can be cleverly programmed into a met-con if desired.
3. Gymnastics and monostructural movements can be trained and practiced without being too adversely affected by strength work under the barbell.

Programming Obstacles

1. Including max-effort Olympic lifting into this rotation would severely compromise the training adaptation in the powerlifts.
2. Programming met-cons into this rotation can be complementary, or it can be contradictory, particularly if moderate-to-heavy barbell lifts are included.

Option 2: The Combined Approach

In the combined approach, strength-training sessions include both max-effort and dynamic-effort lifts on respective upper-body and lower-body days. Strength sessions are alternated with met-cons, following a three-on, one-off pattern:

Day 1: met-con

Day 2: max effort (upper body)/dynamic effort (upper body)

Day 3: met-con

Day 4: rest

Day 5: met-con

Day 6: max-effort (lower body)/dynamic effort (lower body)

Day 7: met-con

Day 8: rest

Benefits

1. Met-cons consisting of moderate-to-heavy barbell movements can be programmed “away” from strength-training sessions. For example, the Day 1 met-con may include a deadlift or squat variation, and the Day 5 met-con may include a bench or overhead-press variation.
2. Novice, beginner and/or intermediate lifters may enjoy an extra day of central-nervous-system recovery from max-effort/dynamic-effort strength sessions.

Programming Obstacles

1. As absolute strength levels improve, performing dynamic-effort lifts during the same training session as max-effort lifts can compromise optimal training benefit for both.

Incorporating O-Lifts

The next two approaches include max-effort Olympic lifting into the “traditional” and “combined” approaches. Obviously, the additional benefit to both approaches is that Olympic-lifting skills can be trained and practiced alongside the slow barbell movements and met-cons. The additional programming obstacle for both approaches is that the rotation or cycle is extended beyond one week. I would recommend one of these approaches for someone who already has advanced or elite levels of absolute strength.

Option 3: Traditional Approach Plus Oly

Day 1: dynamic effort (upper body)/met-con

Day 2: max effort (lower body)

Day 3: met-con

Day 4: off

Day 5: max effort (upper body)

Day 6: dynamic effort (lower body)/met-con

Day 7: met-con

Day 8: off

Day 9: max-effort Olympic lift

Day 10: met-con

Day 11: off

Option 4: Combined Approach Plus Oly

Day 1: met-con

Day 2: max effort (upper body)/dynamic effort (upper body)

Day 3: met-con

Day 4: rest

Day 5: met-con

Day 6: max effort (lower body)/dynamic effort (lower body)

Day 7: met-con

Day 8: rest

Day 9: met-con

Day 10: max-effort Olympic lift

Day 11: off

Tom Seryak's Results

I currently follow (roughly) Option 3. Optimal recovery will always precede training frequency and/or intensity, so I may incorporate more rest or recovery training sessions depending upon how well I am recovered from prior training sessions. I follow this rotation for three to five weeks. During this time, max-effort strength and speed-strength development are the priorities, while conditioning is maintained or slightly improved. After this period, I will program one to two weeks of training that prioritize conditioning while strength is maintained or de-loaded.

I want to enjoy training, realize steady progress across all disciplines and, most importantly, feel great when I train. My experiences with the other approaches did not meet my personal needs, but that doesn't mean that they won't work well for someone else. The traditional approach (Option 1) did not allow me the opportunity to incorporate the Olympic lifts beyond practice weights, and the combined approach (Option 2) left me feeling under-recovered for both strength and conditioning sessions after several weeks, and speed-strength development was not optimized when combined with a max-effort lift.

Option 3 (traditional plus Oly) has allowed me to balance disciplines and optimize recovery. Extending the rotation beyond one week is pushing the limits for the frequency required to develop speed. There is a good reason why speed strength is trained twice a week in the Westside method. However, I have not noticed an inability to improve speed over the extended cycle. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that I have been incorporating speed-strength training on and off for over five years or because of the inclusion of strength-speed training with the Olympic lifts.

I cannot provide comparative data that concludes utilizing Westside methods with CrossFit is better than some other method. However, I can provide data that it is possible to improve absolute strength using these methods while at the same time improving work capacity across broad time and modal domains. I began logging benchmark CrossFit

Logsitall

Benchmark	Starting CrossFit (1/08)	First	Most Recent
Deadlift (conventional)	365	415 (11/08)	465 (11/09)
Deadlift (sumo)	325	415 (8/09)	435 (2/10)
Front Squat	275	315 (12/08)	335 (11/09)
Back Squat	345	395 (3/09)	435 (1/10)
Overhead Press	185	195 (6/09)	200 (9/09)
Bench Press	235	265 (11/09)	300 (1/10)
Clean	185	225 (11/08)	260 (10/09)
Jerk	205	215 (10/08)	245 (1/10)
Snatch	bar	155 (6/09)	170 (1/10)
Angie	25:00	16:25 (12/08)	14:09 (1/10)
Annie		10:40 (1/09)	6:33 (12/09)
Barbara		18:54 (5/09)	16:25(10/09)
Badger		33:30 (10/08)	27:49(10/09)
Cindy	16	24 (10/08)	29 (12/09)
Diane		6:00 (8/08)	2:33 (7/09)
Eva		36:09 (12/08)	33:18(11/09)
FGB	273	315 (11/08)	358 (1/10)
Fran	4:47	4:40 (8/08)	2:41 (10/09)
Grace		4:25 (3/09)	3:08 (5/09)
JT		10:18 (3/09)	6:54 (1/10)
Jackie		6:43 (12/08)	6:03 (8/09)
Nancy		16:20 (5/09)	12:48(10/09)
Murph	45:00	33:58 (10/08)	30:13 (7/09)

workouts and strength lifts into Logsitall starting in August 2008. Unfortunately, I cannot provide as much accurate data prior to that time. Above is the most recent data, which shows improvements across the board in both raw strength and classic met-con WODs.

Bands and chains were not used in training during this time period, but the recent *CrossFit Journal* entries with Louie Simmons have inspired me to bring them back.

Westside and the General CrossFitter

In October 2009, we introduced this method of training to our clients at our affiliate, High Octane CrossFit. Generally speaking, we don't have clients engage in dynamic-effort training until they have progressed (linearly) to and tested a true 1-rep training max for any particular lift. This allows the client to learn and perfect technique. Absolute strength level classification (i.e., novice, beginner, intermediate, etc.) is not the deciding factor for implementing speed work with a client.

It is too soon to present any data from our clientele, but what I have observed so far is that those who are not "speed trained" are slow, which is all the evidence that I need to include speed work in their training.

I will, of course, be observing and documenting the results of my programming for a future article about incorporating Westside methods in CrossFit training for the general athlete.



About the Author

*Tom Seryak is head trainer and co-owner of [High Octane CrossFit](#) in Dublin, Ohio. He earned his master's degree in exercise science at Cleveland State University in 2003. He is **formerly** certified through the National Strength and Conditioning Association (CSCS) and National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM PES). He and his*

wife, Erin, are planning to compete in this year's [Central East Sectional](#), held at the Arnold Classic in March.