

BE THE STRONGEST GUY IN YOUR GYM

Give these powerbuilding techniques 11 weeks and become the strongest bodybuilder you've ever been

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Photos of IFBB Pro Amit Sapir by Rich Baker

Dim the lights. Cue the projector.

The rapid, rhythmic tick of the reels is followed by crude, flickering pictures onscreen of turn-of-the-century strongman Eugen Sandow hoisting barbells overhead with one hand and snapping out of chains with a flex of his pecs. Only after each dramatic display of strength would he take the time to rifle through a few perfunctory poses. For the father of modern bodybuilding, the ability of his accumulated muscle was on par with its appearance. It's clear from this iconic, black-and-white footage from the annals of bodybuilding history that the sport was once about what muscle could do — not just what it could look like.

"In previous eras, bodybuilders were required to perform feats of strength in addition to their posing routines," says Josh Bryant, MFS, CSCS, PES, owner of JoshStrength.com and co-author of the eBook *Metroflex Gym Powerbuilding Basics*. "This means guys with great physiques possessed great strength and power, and guys who possessed great strength and power didn't look like total slobs. I constantly have people tell me they want to get stronger but not be known as 'the fat guy at the gym that lifts a lot of weight.' The flip side is that people don't — or *shouldn't* — want to have heavily muscular physiques with no strength to back it up."

BE THE STRONGEST GUY IN YOUR GYM

The middle ground is a system called powerbuilding, which takes proven methods of hypertrophy (muscle growth) and blends them with can't-miss strength-gaining techniques. The result is a physique that can move a ton of weight through just about any plane while still managing to look the part. It's no coincidence that some of the sport's biggest names such as eight-time Mr. Olympia Ronnie Coleman, 2011 Arnold Classic champ Branch Warren, and the world's strongest bodybuilder Johnnie Jackson are wholly devoted to this type of training.

"Bodybuilders must realize that limit strength, or how much force you can

exert in one all-out effort, is your foundation both for athletics and a great physique," says Bryant. "For strength and physique athletes, it's important to include the small exercises that assist in the ultimate performance of core lifts. Successful powerlifters are part bodybuilder and successful bodybuilders are part powerlifter."

But powerbuilding goes well beyond the "lift heavy, eat more" mantra of your father's offseason routine. This is a system rooted in science and is only for the dedicated few willing to endure its rigors. By following the program Bryant outlines here, you can take a heavy, if figurative step onto the iconic, chaotic Metroflex Gym floor to start constructing a physique worthy of its own highlight reel.


INTRO TO POWERBUILDING

Powerbuilding isn't just about mindlessly lifting things up and putting them down. It's more cerebral in that it caters

to making athletes strong while still enhancing their overall aesthetic. By combining the foundational lifts with a smattering of isolation work, you elicit a greater cumulative hormonal response while also refining the supporting muscles that define eye-pleasing physiques. You won't just be a mountain of amorphous sinew — by the time you're ready to start etching in your fine details with a get-lean program, you'll have less work to put in. Still, some are instantly wary of a mass-building plan that doesn't advocate mass for the sake of mass. But the method and make of said mass is what separates powerbuilding from other less-specific programming. Here are the main points to consider.

➤ Bigger, stronger, leaner.

"By working big lifts, you get big," says Bryant. "Not only is your limit strength your foundation but working core lifts heavy causes a much more favorable anabolic hormonal response to weight training." Studies show those who trained to



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failure at six reps enhanced their metabolisms higher and for longer than those who trained in the 12-rep range. "Training primarily with free weights also forces the athlete to work stabilizer muscles, which will increase muscular coordination. If you want to get that dense, grainy, shredded physique, heavy core lifts will have to play a primary role in your program."

» Exercise selection.

You want to get big everywhere, so you train using every move you can think of. The problem with this approach, then, is its lack of simplicity, says Bryant. Powerbuilding uses a wide variety of movements but everything revolves around the most foundational lifts in existence — the bench press, squat and deadlift. Single-joint moves are added secondarily to enhance overall muscularity as

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well as local joint strength. "Isolation exercises do play a big role in powerbuilding. The core lifts are the foundation, but the isolation movements offer some necessary refining and support strength." To the "big three," Bryant also recommends adding the weighted dip, weighted pull-up and overhead press, all multijoint moves.

» Progression and weight.

For some guys, the mirror and scale are the main measuring sticks for success

11-WEEK POWERBUILDING PROGRAM

Follow this multiphase evolution toward your strongest, most-muscular body ever. You'll follow three three-week phases with two back-off weeks (weeks 4 and 8, see bottom of page). With the major lifts, you'll be progressing to heavy weights (for fewer reps) and taking longer rest periods between sets. With less-demanding "accessory" lifts, you'll be sticking with a moderately high rep range.

	WEEKS 1-3*	WEEKS 5-7*	WEEKS 9-11*
EXERCISES	SETS/REPS	SETS/REPS	SETS/REPS
MONDAY			
Bench Press	4/10	5/3, 3, 3, 10, 15	5/2, 2, 2, 8, 15
Weighted Dip	5/5	5/3	3/10, 8, 6
Rack Bench Press (from dead stop)	1/8	5/1	3/1
Flat-Bench Dumbbell Flye	3/10	3/12	3/12
Zottman Curl	4/12	4/15	4/15
Dumbbell Kickback	4/12	4/15	4/15
Plank	2/1 min.	2/1 min.	2/1 min.
Side Plank (each side)	2/30 secs.	2/45 secs.	2/45 secs.
TUESDAY			
Squat	5/5	6/3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4	6/2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3
Olympic Pause Squat ²	2/8	2/10	2/8
Dumbbell Step-Up ³	3/12	4/12	---
Leg Press (with pause)	---	---	4/30
Leg Extension	4/12	30 secs. + 20 reps ⁴	4/12
Single-Leg Deadlift (each side)	3/6	3/6	---
Leg Curl	4/12	3/12	4/12
Standing Cable Crunch	3/12	3/12	4/15
Oblique Cable Crunch	3/12	3/12	4/15
WEDNESDAY			
OFF			
THURSDAY			
Close-Grip Bench Press ⁵	4/8, 6, 4, 12 ¹	3/10	---
Close-Grip Bench Press (from dead stop)	---	---	5/5, 4, 3, 2, 1
Standing Military Press	3/5	6/3, 3, 6, 6, 6, 6	6/2, 2, 8, 8, 8, 8
Dumbbell Lateral Raise	3/12	3/15	3/15
Bent-Over Lateral Raise	3/12	3/15	3/15
Rope Face Pull	3/12	3/15	3/12
Lying Triceps Extension	4/12	3/15	4/10
Triceps Pressdown	4/12	3/20	2/10
Hanging Leg Raise	3/12	---	3/10
Abs Wheel	---	4/12	4/12
Hanging Leg Raise with Twist (each side)	3/12	4/15	---

* In Weeks 4+8, you'll perform the workout as listed, only you'll reduce the loads to 70% of the weight used in the previous week. These weeks provide recovery transitions between phases.

FRIDAY

Romanian Deadlift	4/10	4/10 ⁶	---
Band-Resisted Deadlift (or chains)	---	4/5	3/1
Deadlift	3/3	3/3	6/3
High Pull	---	---	3/3
Shrug	4/12, 10, 8, 50 ¹	5/20	---
Bent-Over Barbell Row	3/5	4/10, 8, 6, 25 ¹	3/8
Weighted Pull-Up	3/10, 8, 6	3/10, 8, 6	3/4
Wide-Grip Lat Pulldown	3/12	3/12	3/12
Preacher Curl	3/12	3/12	5/12
V-Sit Up	5/8-10	---	---
Medicine Ball Slam	---	4/12	---
Russian Twist	---	---	5/12

In Weeks 4+8, you'll perform the workout as listed, only you'll reduce the loads to 70% of the weight used in the previous week. These weeks provide recovery transitions between phases.

--Doesn't include warm-up sets; do as many as you need but never take warm-up sets to muscle failure.
 --Rest 1-3 minutes on heavy, compound lifts. On lighter sets that call for 12 reps or more, limit rest periods to 90 seconds or less.

--Each week, strive to use more weight on each exercise than you did in your previous workout. If performing a new movement, select a weight that brings about failure at the rep range listed.

¹ Pyramid up in weight each of your first three sets. On the fourth set, reduce the load to a weight that brings about failure around the higher rep range listed.

² In Weeks 5-11, substitute front squats for the Olympic pause squat.

³ In Weeks 5-7, substitute walking lunges for the dumbbell step-up.

⁴ Start by holding the top position of the leg extension for 30 seconds, then perform 20 full reps.

⁵ In Weeks 5-7, perform on a decline bench set to 30-45 degrees.

⁶ In Weeks 5-7, substitute deficit deadlifts for the romanian deadlift.



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on a mass-gain plan. In powerbuilding, the proof is in the performance. "One of the problems in many aspects of life is a lack of quantitative data and going completely off feel," says Bryant. "Many bodybuilders use the same weights over and over, never getting stronger, yet they wonder why they don't grow. Many bodybuilders also operate under the dangerous assumption that the only way to increase weight incrementally is by adding a 45- or 25-pound plate to the bar. Remember folks, there are smaller plates. These can be added to the bar incrementally to increase weight. Jumps of 40-50 pounds are huge, unrealistic and can lead to terrible frustration. Make small incremental jumps and keep quantitative data to know you're improving. Feel is important, but your personal opinion and feel of a workout is just one aspect. Keeping hard, quantitative data will show you your success or lack of. Powerbuilding takes into account actual improvements, not just 'bro science.'" This, of course, requires the use of a journal; your scale can stay in the closet.

➤ Sets and reps.

To the nitty gritty: Exactly how much work is required during a powerbuilding cycle? A lot. But no more than you'd be doing on any other mass-gain plan. Rep ranges and loads will, by necessity,

be a bit different but that's where the biggest gains come in. On a typical 11-week cycle, like the one featured here, you'll perform as few as 1-3 reps on sets of your major lifts but you'll stay in the cozy 12-plus range for less demanding exercises. The higher-rep range exercises, referred to as "accessory" lifts, represent the traditional bodybuilding component of powerbuilding. Because of the wide spectrum of rep ranges, rest periods will also vary. "On the real heavy sets on core lifts, you'll take 2-5 minutes rest," says Bryant. "This is to build maximum strength. On the smaller lifts, it can range from 45-90 seconds. These rest periods allow for maximum gains and ideal hormonal response to exercise."

➤ Frequency.

All the talk about more muscle may evoke a fear of increased workout frequency. But remember — muscles need time to rest and repair. "You can make great gains in size and strength on a four-day-a-week routine, much like a traditional powerlifting cycle," says Bryant. For most weekday gym visitors, this will mean a Monday-Tuesday-Thursday-Friday kind of lift week.

➤ Mental mettle.

Powerbuilding requires a stubborn dedication to progress and an acceptance of the hard work that precedes it. Simply hitting your target number of reps isn't enough — you have to be willing to challenge your body to adapt from week to week, despite what your instincts may tell you. "Anybody can gut out a workout where the only goal is to get tired or get a pump, but when you have to hit certain numbers, you have to gear your lifestyle toward it," says Bryant. "Bodybuilding sometimes requires more physi-

POWERBUILDING NUTRITION

Lifting big requires the right amount of fuel.

Even in these pages, we'll have bodybuilders explain how they eat everything in sight during the off-season to fuel their heavy training. While Josh Bryant, MFS, CSCS, PES, owner of JoshStrength.com concedes that a higher caloric intake is necessary for performing at a high level during heavy workouts, it's all done within reason, and protein, not surprisingly, is the focus.

Bryant recommends 18-20 calories per pound of bodyweight per day for powerbuilders, with a large portion of these calories coming from fuel-laden carb sources, mostly slow digesting, like sweet potatoes, oatmeal and whole-wheat bread. Faster-digesting sources have their place though and don't need to be avoided entirely. Of course, healthy fats to support joints, recovery and hormone production are also on the menu.

When it comes to protein, Bryant simply recommends getting enough of the stuff. "I don't know of any powerbuilder eating less than 1 gram of protein per pound of bodyweight," he says. For a 220-pound individual, this represents 220 grams (and 880 calories) worth of protein per day.

As strength is the priority, there's no dire need for a meticulous logging of daily food intake (although it wouldn't hurt). Rather, Bryant recommends that each powerbuilder again refer to his gym success. If you're making incremental jumps in weight, you're likely on the right track nutritionally. Falter for a workout or two and you may need to increase calories, carbs or protein. Joints sore? Might be time to increase your fat intake a hair.

KEY SUPPS TO MAXIMIZE GAINS

Support your training with this high-octane supplement stack.

SUPPLEMENT	DOSE	TIMING
Creatine	3-5 g	30-60 minutes pre- and post-workout
Arginine	3-5 g	30-60 minutes pre- and post-workout
Beta-alanine	1-3 g	30-60 minutes pre- and post-workout
BCAAs	5-10 g	30-60 minutes pre- and post-workout
Caffeine	200-400 mg	30-60 minutes preworkout
Protein blend (whey, casein, soy)	60 g	Immediately post-workout
Waxy maize	50-100 g	Immediately post-workout



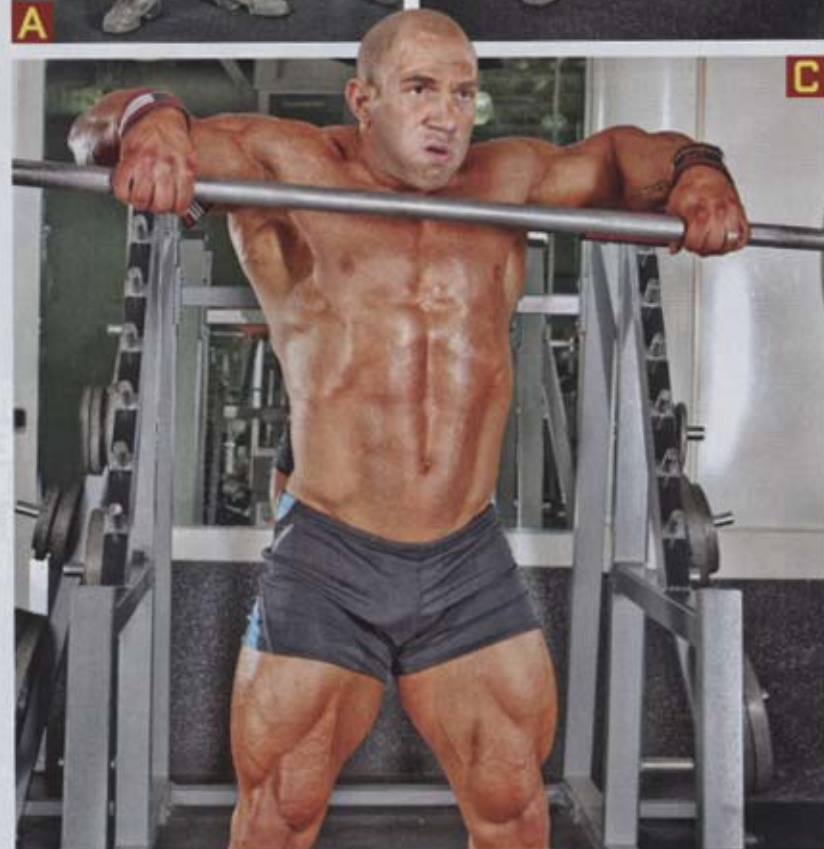


BAND-RESISTED DEADLIFT

Secure the ends of a resistance band to each end of a loaded barbell (alternatively, you can use chains around the ends of the bar and resting on the floor, as shown). Standing on the middle of the band with your feet flat beneath the bar, squat down and grasp the bar with a slightly wider than shoulder-width grip. Allow the bar to rest flush against your shins. With your chest up and back flat, lift the bar by extending your hips and knees to full extension. Be sure to keep your arms straight as you drag the bar up your legs to a standing position. Squeeze your back, legs and glutes then lower the bar along the same path till the bar touches the floor. Allow the bar to settle before beginning the next rep.

NOTE: If your gym has platforms, you can wrap the ends of two bands beneath the platforms and place the top of each loop over the ends of the barbell.

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HIGH PULL

Stand over a barbell with the balls of your feet positioned under the bar slightly wider apart than hip width. Squat down and grip the bar with an overhand grip outside shoulder width. Position your shoulders over the bar with your back arched. Keep your arms straight. Pull the bar off the floor by forcefully extending your hips and knees as in a deadlift. As the bar reaches your knees, forcefully raise your shoulders while keeping the barbell close to your thighs, rising up on your toes. Flex your elbows out to your sides, pulling the bar up to neck height as if doing a wide-grip upright row. Allow the bar to return along the same path and repeat for reps.

CARDIO DURING A POWERBUILDING PHASE

Keep your body lean while making it mean.

The busiest bodybuilders in the industry are the ones who can be ready to shoot or guest pose on two weeks' notice. The trick to that is to keep fairly lean on a year-round basis. Powerbuilders can have that "close to showcase" look while training if they mix in the right kind of cardio.

"To keep conditioning up and bodyfat down, a couple days of high-intensity interval cardio (HIIT) is implemented," Bryant says. "This can be strongman-type events used as finishers, barbell complexes or things like farmer squats. These are very intense so they need to be done only a couple times a week. If you really need to get into shape, you can do things such as jumping rope and walking on the other days."

Cardio on a powerbuilding cycle is entirely up to the lifter. Those looking to stay a little leaner would be well served by performing 2-3, 20-30-minute sessions per week using their activity of choice. The key is to do it interval style, alternating extremely high intensity bouts with periods of recovery. This ensures you're keeping your metabolism high and holding on to as much muscle as possible. After a short warm-up, try 10-15 cycles using bursts of 20 seconds of explosive work followed by 40 seconds of down time.



Top HIIT Powerbuilding Picks:
Farmer's walk, sledgehammer swing, medicine ball slam, jump rope, tire flip, sprinting.

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BENCH PRESS (FROM DEAD STOP) — NOT PICTURED

In a power rack, set the safety pins to a point just below the midpoint of your normal range of motion on the bench press (or close-grip version). Lie faceup on the bench with your feet flat on the floor and take a wide (or alternately, close) grip on the barbell. Powerfully press the bar upward to full extension. Lower the bar along the same path and allow it to settle fully on the safeties to eliminate momentum for your next rep.

OLYMPIC PAUSE SQUAT

In a squat rack, position a loaded barbell so that it rests across your upper traps. Unrack the bar and take 1-2 steps back to clear the safeties. Keep your chest up and back flat, eyes focused forward. With your abs tight and feet spaced hip width apart, bend your knees and hips as if sitting in a chair until your thighs are below parallel to the floor (if possible). As you hit the hole, hold the position for a count in order to eliminate any momentum from the movement, or if you have safeties, allow the bar to momentarily settle on the pins to reduce elastic energy (as shown). From that position, drive through your heels and press your hips forward to return to the start.



LEG PRESS (WITH PAUSE) — NOT PICTURED

Sit squarely in the machine and place your feet on the platform, shoulder width apart. Keeping your chest up and lower back pressed into the back support, unlock the weight from the safeties. Bend your knees to lower the carriage. Stop the descent as your knees reach a 90-degree bend and hold there for a count in order to eliminate any momentum as you reverse direction. From that position, drive through your heels to press the weight back to full extension, stopping just short of locking out your legs.

MEDICINE BALL SLAM — NOT PICTURED

Select a rubberized medicine ball weighing 15-25 pounds and hold it at full extension in front of your thighs. Lift the ball directly overhead in a wide arc and inhale. Forcefully contract your abs and swing your arms downward while bending slightly at the knees to slam the ball to the floor. Catch the ball on the rebound and use the momentum to go directly into your next rep.

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POWERBUILT

So how do you know when you've been successful on a powerbuilding program? If you've done it right, you won't need to ask. A great many bodybuilding programs don't require you to reach hard numbers each workout. *MuscleMag* ath-

DEFICIT DEADLIFT — NOT PICTURED

Stand on a 1-3" platform or a pair of heavy weight plates centered in front of a loaded barbell. Do the movement exactly as a conventional deadlift but allow the bar to settle on the floor momentarily between reps. This variation adds slightly to the conventional deadlift's range of motion.

lete Craig Richardson says he'll cut a workout short if he feels like his muscles are adequately taxed. But that's subjective. Powerbuilding doesn't leave room for feel, fatigue or fear. It's about a brutal and bullish insistence on progress from workout to workout. If you've consistently added weight to the bar each week, your body — ever adaptable and insanely durable — will be a spectacle worthy of celluloid, a la Sandow. ♦♦

Josh Bryant, MFS, CSCS, PES, is the owner of JoshStrength.com and co-author (with Brian Dobson) of the Elitefts.com best-selling eBook, "Metrofex Gym Powerbuilding Basics." Currently, Josh is a strength coach based at Metrofex Gym in Arlington, Texas. As an athlete, he holds 12 world records in powerlifting. To learn more about Josh Bryant or to contact him joshstrength.com.