

Jason Quellhorst's Prescription For Building Mighty Legs

Course No. 1 in the Muscles-of-Iron Series



By

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Feedback

I would very much like to know your thoughts about this course. Your comments, suggestions, and positive criticisms will help to make future offerings from *Muscles of Iron* even better. Please email me at robdrucker@musclesofiron.com. Your feedback is most appreciated.

Introduction

The information provided in this course came straight from Jason Quellhorst during a series of interviews that took place at the Shelby County Athletic Club. These interviews were detailed and enlightening, and I was left awestruck by the vast array of training knowledge that Jason possesses. What I learned from him had me doing a lot of thinking to say the least. And, it is within these pages that I have tried to capture the multitude of exciting ideas that Jason revealed during my visits.

Quellhorst is a drug-free professional bodybuilder, and he was the overall winner of the 2010 Kentucky State Clash of The Champions in the Open Men division. As a pastor and an evangelist, Jason travels around the world to help people find a more rewarding and more meaningful life. Through his *Mighty Warrior Power Programs*, which he founded in 1990, Jason supplements his messages of hope and change with attention-grabbing exhibitions of strength. His demonstrations have included a back squat with over 1,000 pounds and a back lift with over 2,200 pounds.

Much of Quellhorst's success as a physique competitor can be attributed to a unique style of training he does, which he calls *Power Bodybuilding*. This system of training not only has brought him very large muscles, but also extraordinary strength and endurance. In the pages that follow, we will examine Jason's Power Bodybuilding program, and we will learn how it can be applied to build bigger, more proportionate, and stronger legs. You will also see that the training methods presented in this course go far beyond mere leg building; they apply generally to bodybuilding success, and arguably to success of any kind.

Before we delve into the Power Bodybuilding method, I would like to point out that much of Jason's knowledge of productive exercise can be attributed to his habit of talking with successful strength athletes. This is a habit that Jason picked up long before he became an established name in competitive physique competition.

During his younger years, Jason and his training buddies would visit some of the best gyms in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky. At each of these gyms, Quellhorst would start a conversation with the biggest and most knowledgeable lifters he could find. And, after engaging in some small talk, inevitably he would ask these accomplished athletes how they trained, what exercises they did, and what "special" training techniques they utilized. This approach of learning continues today. As part of his missionary work, Jason travels to body-building gyms all over the world. And, with each visit, he still asks the same questions.

Thus, what you have in this course is a hodgepodge of terrific muscle-building ideas that Jason has "picked up" over the years from several accomplished bodybuilders, powerlifters, and other strength athletes around the world. I am very proud to have been involved in the making of this course, and I hope you will benefit from it as much as I have.

Robert Drucker

Feature Presentation

Course No. 1

Jason Quellhorst's Prescription for Building Mighty Legs

Jason first began lifting weights at age 12, and today, at age 44, he continues to perfect his training strategies. It would be wise for any seeker of muscle and strength to study how this bodybuilder from Indiana lifts. He is a walking testament that his training methods really work.

Perhaps most striking about Quellhorst's physique is his remarkable leg development. His legs simply spell P-O-W-E-R. They are heavily muscled, proportionate, well shaped, defined, and extraordinarily strong. And, Jason leaves no doubt that the foundation of a sound bodybuilding program is heavy leg training, the kind that packs muscle and strength across the entire body.

The course that you are now reading is based on the training techniques and strategies that Jason uses and recommends for building powerful and muscular legs. The information provided is geared towards dedicated bodybuilders and other strength athletes who seek to reach the highest level of physical development. Weight trainees with less ambitious goals, however, can still benefit greatly from this course. The suggested techniques and routines can easily be modified or adjusted to meet an individual's goals and abilities.

We will begin our journey into the world leg building by evaluating the 12 "Keys" of Jason's proven success formula. These keys form the crux of the Power Bodybuilding system, and they should be considered as "laws" if maximum training progress is sought. A few of these keys apply only to the barbell squat, an exercise that Jason considers to be the very best leg builder, but most of them have a more general application.

After a review of the 12 "keys" for success, we will look at the exercises that Jason uses and recommends for building complete leg development. We will also consider how our eating habits affect general health and the muscle-building process. Finally, we will learn how to construct a leg-training routine that not only brings forth results, but fits our personal needs.



Jason shows his mighty legs during a physique competition. Photo courtesy of Jason Quellhorst.

Let's now take a look at the first "key" of muscle-building success. Jason's advice here not only can help you build functional muscle, it can also help you establish a long-lasting training career.

Key 1: Stretch Before and During Each Workout

Effective and safe leg training requires that you be loose and flexible. Prior to each leg workout, Jason will stretch anywhere between 20 and 30 minutes, and he will continue to stretch during at least the first half of his training. Such stretching, he exclaimed, loosens his muscles, increases his flexibility, and makes it easier and safer for him to lift heavy poundages.

Quellhorst advises that the strength athlete thoroughly stretch both the front and the back of the legs, the buttocks, and the groin before and during any leg workout. If squats are to be performed, Jason also recommends extra stretch work be done to warm-up the shoulders and back. It is especially important to thoroughly stretch your groin prior to any type of squatting movement. As Jason explained, "You are only going to squat or lift in good deep form as loose as your groin is."

According to Quellhorst, stretching is often overlooked by many strength athletes because "it is not fun." However, the importance of stretch work should not be overlooked. In large part, Jason attributes his near injury-free training career to his consistent practice of stretching before and during each workout. And, he emphasizes that his practice of stretching greatly helps him to maintain flexibility and strength as he becomes older.



The above photographs show Jason Quellhorst demonstrating some of the many stretches he performs prior to and during his leg workouts. Jason gradually increases his range of motion as he becomes looser and more limber. Photography by Robert Drucker.



Jason demonstrating three more stretches he performs prior to and during his leg workouts. Photography by Robert Drucker.

Key 2: Learn How to Maintain Balance

According to Jason, many strength enthusiasts fail to obtain maximum benefit from the barbell squat because they exhibit poor balance while performing this movement. Regarding the squat, the massive bodybuilder observed, “If you don't have balance, you'll be shaky, you won't have endurance, and you won't be able to use the weight you otherwise would.”

If you struggle with balance or “tight” muscles while performing a deep knee bend, Quellhorst recommends practicing a special squat movement after the stretching portion of your leg workout. It is performed by holding onto a secure bar or post with both of your hands and squatting up and down with your feet about shoulder-width apart. Throughout the movement, you should lean back on your heels, keep your back flat, keep your head up, and keep your feet flat on the floor, avoiding any tendency to rise on the toes. Effort should also be put forth to prevent the knees from wobbling, or from moving in or out. Furthermore, this movement should be practiced *slowly* through a full range of motion (all the way down, all the way up), and multiple reps should be performed.

Jason recommends practicing the balance-building exercise described above with body-weight only, and directly after the stretching portion of your leg workout. Such an implementation will not only teach you how to maintain your balance during a squat movement, it will help you develop the needed flexibility to squat low and deep.

Quellhorst has a teaching degree, and he used to teach at local high schools as a substitute. Among the topics he taught was weight training. During his weight-training classes, he would often observe school boys, many of whom were football players, performing the barbell squat. Many of these boys would be shaking and pushing off their toes while squatting, and invariably these guys could handle only a limited amount of weight. In many cases, Jason remarked, lack of flexibility prohibited the students from achieving good balance. In other cases, the problem was lack of knowledge. Regardless of cause, however, when Jason taught his students how to maintain their balance, nearly all of them *quickly* made improvements in their squatting ability, and they were able to handle significantly heavier weights.

Key 3: Position your Feet Properly

Foot position includes (1) how wide your feet are held apart (narrow, medium, or wide stance), (2) how high you rise on your toes, and (3) the direction your toes are pointed (straight ahead, inward, or outward). During a leg exercise, all three of these factors can affect weight distribution, range of motion, balance, stability, comfort, and which muscles of the legs and hips are most stimulated.

Regarding foot stance, Jason generally prefers to squat with his feet held shoulder-width apart, or slightly wider. At times, however, he performs the barbell squat with his heels held closely together, or with his feet held relatively wide apart (“duck” squats). This variation of practice, Jason indicated, promotes balanced leg development, and it helps to prevent staleness, both mentally and physically. Nonetheless, the bodybuilder cautioned that squatting with the heels held closely together can potentially be dangerous if too much weight is used. For this reason, Jason recommends that novice weight trainees avoid squatting with a narrow style. More advanced bodybuilders, who have developed the skill, strength, and flexibility required to handle tougher conditions, may benefit by adding narrow-stance squats into their routine. This is especially true if specialization is needed to thicken the muscles by the knees. However, Jason cautioned that shear and compression stresses on the knee joints can be magnified when a lifter squats with his or her legs held relatively close together. For this reason, he recommends that only relatively light weights should be used when squatting with this style.



Jason demonstrates his squatting form. Note that his back is straight; his heels are flat on the floor; and, the barbell is kept low across the shoulders with a wide grip. Photography by Robert Drucker.

One of the biggest mistakes many weight trainees make while performing a squat movement, according to Quellhorst, is to push off their toes and allow their heels to come off of the ground. Pushing off of the toes transfers the weight from the hips, thighs, and buttocks to the knees. This limits growth stimulation of the larger leg and hip muscles, increases the amount of stress on the knee joints, and limits the amount of weight that can be used. Thus, Jason explained, to gain the greatest amount of muscular strength and size in the legs possible, it is best to squat flat footed, pushing upward with the weight focused on your heels.

Jason typically performs squats with his toes pointed slightly outward, and he recommends this practice. Pointing the toes slightly outward reduces strain on the knees, improves balance, and allows for a greater range of motion while the squat exercise is performed. However, point your toes outward only to the extent that you can perform the squat comfortably. Too extreme of an angle, Quellhorst pointed out, will also increase strain and reduce range of motion.

As a general guideline, Jason advises that a bodybuilder position his feet so that he or she can squat most effectively, and with a high level of comfort and stability. Within this restraint, variation of foot position should be practiced from time to time so that the various leg muscles are stressed more uniformly. A closer stance will isolate the quadriceps more, but a wider stance will generally allow you to use heavier weights and build greater body power.

Key 4: Squat with the Barbell Held Low on the Shoulders

If you have ever watched an accomplished powerlifter squat, you probably noticed that the lifter placed the barbell relatively low on his shoulders. In fact, many powerlifters rest the barbell as low as they can without causing undue strain, or risking that the weight will fall. Jason also prefers to perform squats with the barbell held relatively low. He explained that by lowering the barbell, the weight is moved away from the midline of the body and more closely over the heels. This is important because the closer the barbell moves over the heels, the more weight the lifter will be able to squat. In fact, Jason reported that he has seen cases where a trainee increased his squat weight by 50 to 100 pounds merely by lowering the barbell on his back by one inch!

Another advantage of holding the barbell low on the shoulders, Quellhorst observed, is that stress forces placed on the neck and spine are significantly reduced. In addition, by holding the bar low, your body is better protected from the heavy weight. Reflecting upon this, Jason noted, “When the bar is moved down on towards the middle of the back, it is placed on thick muscles, such as the rhomboids, the teres major, and the deltoids. These muscles provide a natural padding.”

In order to place a barbell low on the back, a trainee must have flexible and loose shoulders. This is another reason why Jason recommends that a lifter include plenty of stretch work for the shoulders and back before and during a squat session. If your shoulders are inflexible or tight, you will likely have a hard time getting the barbell down low on your back, and the risk of injury will be higher.

Performing multiple warm-up sets of squats also helps to loosen the shoulders, and it is important, says Quellhorst, to *gradually* lower the resting position of the barbell on the back as mobility is gained. Going too low with the barbell too soon is an invitation to injury, so the process should not be rushed. Jason's method is to lower the barbell down his back a little more with each succeeding set of squats until the heaviest weights are reached. He finds that this approach, along with plenty of stretching, allows him to safely work up to maximum weights without undue shoulder strain.

Key 5: Focus on Intensity

To make meaningful gains in the gym, it is well known that a strength athlete must train often enough (frequency), long enough (duration), and hard enough (intensity). However, of these three components, Jason considers intensity to be the most important. In his own words,

“How many times do you see people, even bodybuilders, in the gym talking? They're not serious. If you're really serious, you are going to come in and focus on what you need to do to build muscle. While your partner is lifting, you should be spotting and thinking about your next set, not engaging in conversation. And, although you are not circuit training, there is not time to waste. You need to keep your muscles warm, and you must keep going at a steady pace.”

Quellhorst further explained,

“I can lift for two hours, or I can lift for one hour. However, if I train intensely for just one hour, I can get more done than the guy who talks and messes around for two hours. This is what I mean by intensity. It means really being on it and concentrating on what you are doing. When you quit thinking about what you are doing, I think that you're losing about half of your workout!”

Key 6: Set a Standard and Rise to It

Arnold Schwarzenegger once remarked that a person's potential for bodybuilding should be considered in light of both his physical and his mental characteristics. This is true, but Jason considers the mental side of potential to be most important. And, practically, it is only the mental component of your life that you have direct control over.

Quellhorst has mastered the mental side of bodybuilding, and this is perhaps the biggest reason why he has gone so far in the sport. And, *if* you pay attention to what is said in this section very carefully and with an open mind, you will learn what is perhaps the most efficient and powerful path to success in existence. And, this success path applies to any endeavor, not just to strength training.

Some years ago, Jason and a few of his friends drove to Fairfield, Ohio to train under the guidance of John Parrillo, a renowned personal trainer and the founder of Parrillo Performance. After taking Quellhorst and his friends through a series of stretches, Parrillo had them perform a special version of the belt squat exercise, hereto referred to as the Parrillo exercise.



The belt squat requires a special belt or harness, as shown above. This photograph was captured from John Parrillo's Extreme Training Camp - Belt Squat video. Courtesy of John Parrillo.

As its name implies, the belt squat is done while wearing a special belt or belt harness that allows the trainee to squat safely with the weight supported by the hips via a strap or chain. While performing the belt squat, the trainee stands atop of two benches or platforms so that he or she

can descend fully without the weight plates hitting the floor. By holding onto a guided bar with the arms held nearly straight out and parallel to the floor, the lifter leans back so that the weight falls directly under his hips, inline with the lifter's center of gravity. The lifter then squats up and down while holding firmly onto the support bar. Several consecutive repetitions are performed, and emphasis is placed on keeping the heels underneath the shoulders, the back flat, and the chest held high and out. Typically, a relatively wide foot stance is used to provide clearance for the weights, and the toes are pointed slightly outward.

At the Parrillo camp, the renowned trainer instructed Quellhorst and his training partners to each perform several sets of the belt squat. Jason would do a set of this exercise, and then he would rest just long enough for each of his acquaintances to complete a set. This sequence continued until they had each performed about five sets of 15 to 20 reps, working up in weight with each succeeding set. The exercise weight was then decreased, and each lifter performed a couple of “very demanding” 40-rep sets. Then, things turned even more demanding for the trainees. After a bit of rest, Parrillo challenged Jason and his partners to each perform two more sets of belt squats, this time for 100 reps a piece! For this grand finale, the belt weight was adjusted to make the task at hand doable, but only with the greatest possible mental and physical effort. And, failure was not an option. The training camp’s leader instructed each crew member to complete 100 reps during each of the two remaining belt-squat sets no matter how difficult, seemingly impossible, or painful (from fatigue) things would become.



The belt squat can be used to great advantage to build muscular and powerful legs. Photo taken from the Parrillo Belt Squat Showdown video. Courtesy of John Parrillo.

So what was Parrillo trying to accomplish by ordering that such a nearly impossible number of reps be completed? Jason explained,

“Here is what John was doing: He wanted to see how much heart we had, but he primarily wanted us to experience ‘thinking through the lift.’ You know, when you’re lifting and you get that burning sensation? Mentally, it’s pressure, pressure, pressure – I want to stop, but I keep going. This is thinking through your pain barriers. Here is what I mean. During the two 100-reps sets, I remember getting past a major pain barrier at about the 50th rep. And, now, I’m going onto the 60th rep, and I’m thinking, ‘Okay, I can’t do this.’ But, I’m also thinking, ‘I’ve got to do this.’ I set a standard, and I had to live up to it. And, John, who is a professional trainer, kind of also set a standard by being there and watching me. It was kind of like a coach thing, and I wanted to live up to my coach’s expectations. So what happened was, I got to the 70th rep, and I had to overcome another pain barrier. Then, I got to the 80th rep, and I had to overcome yet another pain barrier. This continued until I got the full 100 reps.”

So here is the whole point of this. When most bodybuilders perform an exercise, they quit

mentally long before their body *physically* cannot continue. This is because they have not taught themselves how to train through multiple pain barriers, and / or they have not set their “achievement bar” high enough. Jason explained that the primary purpose of the Parrillo exercise was to help students of strength improve their mental focus and ability to “think through a lift.” Parrillo was also teaching the value of setting a high standard, and rising to it. Talking further about the Parrillo exercise, Quellhorst added,

“It is one of the hardest things you can ever do, but when done, you’re glad you did it. It feels really good, and it really shows what you are made of, and where your threshold is. It’s really a good thing. Now, when I come into the gym, almost anything else I do is a piece of cake compared to what I did.”

All too often, Jason observed, bodybuilders either set their expectations too low, or they don't set any goals at all. They approach their training as just a physical thing, not realizing that one's true power can only be harnessed when the mind is totally focused on “rising to the occasion.” Jason further explained,

“You will stop mentally before your body gives out. It is how much heart, how much passion, how much mental endurance that counts. This is proven in any professional sport. Look at Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, or any other top athlete. They didn't become champions until they got into those situations where a higher standard had to be met. In other words, they had to rise to the occasion.”

Important:

The Parrillo exercise described above is very demanding, and only strength athletes who are in top condition and without any heart or other health problems should consider its application. If you have any doubt about the state of your health or physical condition, please get your doctor's okay before performing this or any other type of demanding exercise. In addition, because of the extreme nature of the Parrillo exercise, the use of a spotter is a must. A spotter will not only provide words of encouragement, he or she will be needed to guide your efforts during those last seemingly impossible reps. Again, do not perform the Parrillo exercise without a spotter, or if you are not physically conditioned for the task. The risk is too high to ignore this advice.



John Parrillo spots one of his students as she performs the belt squat at his Extreme Training Camp. Photograph courtesy of John Parrillo.

Key 7: Train with Good Form

Jason is a firm believer that a bodybuilder should train with slow, smooth, and deliberate motions only. He advises against

training with sudden jerks, emphasizing that such a style significantly increases risk of injury. Training slowly at the beginning of a workout is particularly important, says the bodybuilder, because the slow movements provide additional warm-up and prepare you for the heavier weights to come. He also stresses that by using good form you will work harder and more productively. Training too quickly or with sudden jerks, he remarked, introduces momentum forces which actually *reduce* the amount of work your muscles must do.

Quellhorst advises the beginner to train with relatively light weights until basic training skills are mastered. The beginner, he says, should focus first on developing flexibility, balance, and good exercise form. All too often, Jason warned, beginners use too much weight too fast, and they end up developing bad training habits, habits which eventually cause lack of training progress and injury.

Many bodybuilders often train to beat the clock, rather than to keep continuous tension on their muscles. Their goal, Jason pointed out, is to end a set as soon as possible, “because it hurts.” Such an approach, unfortunately, reduces the effectiveness of a workout and introduces a greater injury risk. Elaborating further, Quellhorst reflected,

“Don't try to hurry because you have 50 reps to do. It's not a sprint; it's more like a marathon. Go slow, nice, and easy. Concentrate on form. I concentrate on going deep. I concentrate on movement. And, that's when I get the sorest. It's not from squatting with 800 pounds that brings best results; it's from using a medium-heavy weight and doing lots of reps while concentrating on form.”

Key 8: Train Progressively

Following a period of stretching, Jason typically begins his leg workout with the barbell squat. For this exercise and others, he starts out with a light weight, and he gradually increases the training poundage used across several progressive sets. In addition, during the barbell squat, the big man slowly increases his range of motion as his muscles and joints become looser and more pliable. He also continues to stretch between sets until he arrives at his heaviest work sets. This method of progression, says Quellhorst, is necessary to minimize the risk of injury and to fully prepare the muscles to use heavy weights.

Below is shown a progression scheme that Jason has successfully used to build enormous squatting power. He also uses a similar type of pyramid structure for many other exercises he performs. Note that the weight is increased incrementally across the



Jason uses a much lighter weight for his last few sets of squats. However, he makes these final sets extra hard by slowing his motion, going deeper, and by doing a static hold for two to three seconds during the descent portion of the lift. Photography by Robert Drucker.

first several sets, and then decreased for sets of relatively high reps.

Set 1: 135 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 2: 225 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 3: 315 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 4: 405 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 5: 495 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 6: 585 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 7: 675 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 8: 675 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 9: 585 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 10: 495 pounds x 8 to 12 reps;
Set 11: 405 pounds x 15 to 20 reps;
Set 12: 315 pounds x 20 to 25 reps;
Set 13: 225 pounds x 25 to 30 reps.

During the early sets, Jason typically squats slightly above parallel. However, as the sets and reps progress, he goes deeper, often reaching or breaking the parallel position. He also continues to stretch between his first five or six sets. The continued stretching brings a greater margin of safety for the heavier sets to come by providing additional warm-up, and also by helping to keep his muscles warm, loose, and pliable.

Although Quellhorst may do more than 10 sets of squats during a leg workout, the first few sets serve mainly to prepare him for the subsequent “heavy” sets. The heavy sets build great strength, but, more importantly, they provide a vital psychological purpose. Jason observed,

“I develop a threshold, or tolerance, say for 700 pounds, for example. So, when I start working down, the lighter sets are going to be easier, because I conditioned myself for something much heavier. So, that's why I want to keep getting higher – so when I get back down to medium-heavy weights, they will feel light. By going heavy first, I've set the standard way high, and the lighter sets feel comparatively easy.”

Quellhorst considers these final “light” sets to be most important. In fact, all of the preparation he does is just to get to these sets! And, during the final stage, when the weights are a bit lighter, Jason really tightens his form, and he squats more deeply, generally going down until the back of his thighs touch his calves. These high-rep sets, he explained, better promotes muscle growth, and they also build cardiovascular fitness and endurance to a remarkable extent.

Important:

The training poundages outlined above are based on weights that Jason used when he was in his late twenties and early thirties, a period when he trained most extremely and competitively. Today, at age 44, he doesn't train as heavy as he used to, and he performs fewer exercise sets. Nonetheless, he uses a similar progression scheme to the one outlined above. In his younger years, Quellhorst sometimes worked up to 700 to 800+ pounds in the squat, but more recently he

“only” pyramids up to 400 to 500 pounds. Don't let these indicated weights intimidate you. Always work within your safe limits, and remember to judge your progress based on your own improvement, not on what Jason or somebody else can do.

Key 9: Focus on Injury Prevention

Jason is a firm believer that safety must always come first, and this has been the key for his long-lasting career as a bodybuilder. Torn ligaments, muscle tears, and the like can keep you out of the gym for weeks, perhaps permanently, and you must avoid such injuries if you want to make steady progress. All too often, Quellhorst pointed out, bad training habits catch up with a strength athlete, and a promising bodybuilding career is needlessly halted or ended.

We have already seen four safety measures that Jason incorporates into his training program to minimize the risk of injury: (1) he stretches for 20 to 30 minutes before a workout, and he continues to stretch in between his first several sets of the workout; (2) he trains with good style and proper balance, avoiding sudden jerks and bounces; (3) he slowly increases his training poundages across several progressive sets; and (4), he gradually increases his range of motion when performing squats and other similar exercises.

Jason is adamant that a young lifter should continually aim to increase his training poundages, for progression is the key to making steady progress. However, he also points out that strength athletes, regardless of their age or experience, must be careful not to let their ego cloud their judgment. All too often, he reflected, a lifter trains too heavily because he wants to impress his fellow gym members and / or, because he is afraid other people will look down at him for using lighter weights. In either case, Quellhorst warns that training too heavy reduces the muscle-building value a workout, and such a practice significantly increases the risk of injury.

As a rule of thumb, says Jason, a weight is too heavy if it does not allow you to move the barbell up and down with a steady and smooth rhythm. Excessive strain, poor form, bouncing, and jerking are sure signs that the weight is more than it should be.

Over the last 10 years, Jason has come to the realization that his joints cannot handle the super heavy poundages that he once used. As you age, he explained, you need to make adjustments, or an injury is likely to result. Quellhorst has compensated for his increased years by reducing his training poundages, warming up and stretching more, fine tuning his training form, and by not going “full out” every training day. Unfortunately, quite a few lifters don't adequately compensate as they become older, and they injure themselves. Jason further explained,

“I see many older powerlifters and bodybuilders who can't get over their ego, and they continue to use massive weights. You can still use heavy weights [as you become older], but you must be very careful. If an older guy trains heavy day in and day out, he can injure himself. I have seen guys tear biceps, triceps, pecs, hamstrings, and groins.”

With all this discussion about big weights and injury potential, some readers may have the

impression that Jason does not recommend that strength athletes train with heavy weights, especially if they are middle aged or older. This is not the case; he merely stresses the importance of working up in weight during an exercise only to the extent that you can *safely* handle the load. And, each lifter's "safety limit" is influenced by many factors, including his or her age, his or her level of conditioning, and the strength and condition of his or her muscles and connective tissues. Today, at age 44, Jason still pushes himself to his limit in terms of training intensity, and he still trains with more iron than most fellows half his age. Furthermore, the big man still gets quite sore after each workout, just like he did during his younger days.

Despite the long-term importance of building up your training poundages, Quellhorst recommends that beginning bodybuilders not rush to use heavy weights, but instead concentrate on developing flexibility, balance, and good exercise form. The goal here is for the rookie strength athlete to learn how to train correctly before focusing on pushing heavy iron. As mentioned previously, bad training habits, once acquired, can be difficult to break, and they can cause lack of progress and serious injuries.

Jason classifies pain into two categories. There is a good pain associated with tearing a muscle down for growth, and there is a bad pain that indicates you need to stop because you are hurting yourself. While working out, the bodybuilder from Indiana feels a little twinge, say in his hamstrings, he immediately stops what he is doing. This way, he will not tear a muscle, or have some other type of injury. "You always want to be able to lift another day," he exclaimed.

While performing exercises that place stress on the back, such as the barbell squat, the deadlift, or the bent-over row, Jason highly recommends that a trainee wear a weightlifting belt. The belt, he said, reminds the lifter to keep his spine in the correct position during the lifting, and it gives an added layer of protection against injury. For his heavy sets, Jason tightens the belt slightly, just to the point where it is a bit uncomfortable and snugly fit around his torso. At the conclusion of each set, he removes his belt until the next set is to be performed. This practice minimizes the amount of time that belt pressure is placed across the abdominal muscles.

In addition to a weightlifting belt, Jason also recommends that an accomplished lifter wear knee wraps during heavy sets of squats. The wraps, he stressed, help to protect the knees when heavy weights are employed. Beginners may not benefit from wearing knee wraps, because they typically use relatively light weights.

Note:

There is quite a bit of controversy in bodybuilding and powerlifting circles regarding the value of wearing a weightlifting belt. Opinions vary as to whether or not a belt gives the lifter an added margin of safety, or improves training performance. Some "authorities" argue that belts give a false sense of security, or cause injuries to be more severe when they do occur. Other "experts" disagree, saying that the use of a weightlifting belt stabilizes the spine, particularly in the lumbar region of the back. In any case, Jason has squatted heavy for over 30 years with a belt, and he has never had a serious injury while squatting.

Key 10: Train for Balanced Development

Gym members often concentrate on training the “showy” muscles of the front body, and they fail to sufficiently train the inner and back portions of their legs. The posterior muscles, Jason pointed out, tend to be “out of sight, out of mind.” The result is that more than a few strength athletes look impressive only when they are viewed from the front. When viewed from the side or the back, they appear flat and disproportionate.

Quellhorst possesses prize-winning legs in large part because he performs a variety of exercises to achieve size, balance, and symmetry. He leaves no muscles of his legs left behind. All of them, the quadriceps, the vastus medialis, the vastus lateralis, the sartorius, and the hamstring muscles in the rear, get thoroughly blasted each leg workout. This is why Jason's legs appear thick, striated, defined, and powerful regardless of the view angle.

The message is this: If you want to build really impressive legs, then you must not only train the front portion of your legs hard, you must also put *equal or more* effort into building the inner and rear portions. Jason advised that whatever he does for the front of his legs, he often does two to three times more for the back of them. This is to compensate for the extra work the frontal portion of the thighs receive second hand in the gym, and from daily tasks.



Jason trains for muscular balance and symmetry. Photograph courtesy of Jason Quellhorst.

Key 11: Eat to Grow and to Maintain Good Health

To get the most from your training, Jason emphasized it is imperative that you eat a wide variety of *healthy* foods each day. Eating properly, he elaborated, provides the body with the energy and nutrients it needs to fuel hard workouts, and to foster subsequent recovery and growth of the muscles. And, perhaps more importantly, Quellhorst advised that healthful eating will help your body function in peak form, and very possibly extend the quality and length of your life.

For serious strength athletes, Quellhorst recommends that a trainee eat four to six small equally-spaced meals per day. These meals, he said, should provide the lifter with the right proportions of (1) starchy carbohydrates, (2) fibrous complex carbohydrates, (3) proteins, and (4) fats. Each of these nutrients is essential for the growth, development, and maintenance of the human body.

For best results, the strongman emphasized that meals should not be skipped, and generally only wholesome and nutritious foods should be eaten. Nevertheless, the bodybuilder is not against occasionally eating a special “treat.” Eating a hamburger or a pizza *once in while* will not cause harm, and doing so may even prevent uncontrollable cravings. Nonetheless, Jason strives to “eat

well” at least 90% of the time, and he recommends any strength athlete interested in gaining muscle, strength, and health do the same. With this said, let’s take a look at how carbohydrates, proteins, and fats should be balanced to get the most benefit from the prescribed leg-training program, and to maximize health.

Carbohydrates provide the most efficient source of energy needed for muscular contractions and intense training. And, for this reason Jason advises that strength athletes consume a large serving of oatmeal, rice, corn, pasta, beans, or other starchy food one-half to two hours before a workout. The *complex carbohydrates* that these foods provide give lasting energy for training, and they also help you achieve a better “pump” in the gym. Quellhorst pointed out that when he trains most competitively, he generally eats a big bowl of rice about an hour before training. The energy the rice provides through carbohydrates, he explained, “energizes” his muscles and allows him to establish a super “pump.”

Jason also advised that the strength athlete must supply his or her body with enough complex carbohydrates to ensure that sufficient glycogen is stored in his or her muscle tissues. Carbohydrates stored as glycogen give the muscles “fullness,” making them look larger and more impressive. More importantly, however, stored glycogen can be broken down into glucose, a simple sugar that is needed by the muscles for energy production. In short, if the muscles run out of glycogen, they run out of their desired fuel source. For bodybuilders, glycogen deprivation must be avoided. This is because as glycogen reserves become depleted, the body may “burn” its own muscle tissue to generate needed energy! Now, this is not to say that consuming more carbohydrate foods than your body requires is a good thing. Carbohydrates consumed in excess are converted into body fat, not into additional glycogen.

For maximum health and muscle-building benefits, Jason advises serious strength athletes to consume daily three to four servings of fruits, three to four servings of vegetables, and three or more servings of fiber-rich starchy foods, such as whole-grain cereal products, bran cereal, whole wheat pasta, brown rice, and oatmeal. Fruits excellent for bodybuilding and health include oranges, pears, grapefruit, apples, bananas, berries, and peaches. Recommended vegetables include tomatoes, asparagus, cabbage, carrots, peas, snow peas, squash, green peppers, green beans, spinach, broccoli, zucchini, and onions.

As most bodybuilders undoubtedly know, protein is needed by the body to build and repair muscle tissue. While some controversy exists regarding how much protein strength athletes need, Quellhorst contends that a hard-working bodybuilder will gain best by consuming daily one to two grams of “high quality” protein per pound of body weight. For a 200-pound person,



Jason not only eats to build muscle, he eats for good health. This is one reason why he stays muscular all year long! Photography by Robert Drucker.

this translates to 200 to 400 grams of protein each day, consumed across four to six meals.

Jason prefers to get his protein primarily from chicken, fish (grouper, cod, salmon, trout, and tuna are preferred over “bottom swimmers” such as catfish), turkey, and eggs. He doesn’t eat red meat regularly, perhaps just four to five times per year, because of perceived long-term health risks (e.g., clogging of the arteries). However, as a replacement for red meat, Quellhorst takes several desiccated beef liver tablets each day. The desiccated beef liver, he said, provides him with the protein, iron, and vitamin B12 that red meat possesses, but without the unwanted cholesterol and saturated fat. Jason also observed that the beef liver tablets provide him with additional energy, and that this supplement boosts his immune system. Not surprisingly, therefore, Jason highly recommends that all serious strength athletes supplement their diet with desiccated beef liver.

Jason typically eats about two to three egg yolks per week, although he generally will eat egg whites much more frequently. Quellhorst minimizes his consumption of whole eggs because some nutritionists believe that eating egg yolks daily can potentially increase blood cholesterol levels. However, Jason pointed out that there is much controversy regarding the research that has been done on this subject. Based on this observation, the bodybuilder added, “It may be okay to eat a whole egg or two every day, but I am just being prudent.”

In addition to eating lots of high-protein foods, Jason also takes a high-quality protein supplement (protein powder in milk or juice) once or twice a day for convenience. The key word here is *supplement*. The bodybuilding champ stressed this point highly, indicating that there is no substitute for high-quality food. In his own words,

“If you rely too much on supplements, you are going to be missing a lot of nutritional value. There are many nutrients in food that are not in supplements of any kind. Only good food can provide a balanced diet. The protein powder is missing a lot [of other nutrients]. It is not a substitute, and it is not a food.”

Jason also warned that not all protein powders are desirable to use. Some, he indicated, contain a high amount of cholesterol, a lot of artificial sweeteners, a lot of saturated fat, and / or a lot of filler material. He advises the strength athlete to do a lot of research before selecting a brand and type of protein supplement. Both the cost efficiency (amount of *actual* protein the supplement contains per dollar spent) and the protein concentration (purity of the supplement) should be highly considered before a purchase.

Like carbohydrates, fats are an important energy source. Fats provide the body with fuel during periods of rest, and they also help to fuel the body when limited glycogen supplies become exhausted, as often happens during the end of grueling workout or long run. Dietary fat is also necessary for proper brain functioning, and to help the skin maintain moisture. However, not all fats are equal. Jason emphasized that there are “bad” fats – the saturated, unsaturated, and trans types, and there are “good” fats – the monounsaturated and polyunsaturated types.

The Bad

Saturated fat is primarily derived from animal sources, although some vegetable sources also contain this fat. Common animal sources include meat, poultry, egg yolks, and dairy products, such as cream, ice cream, and whole milk. Common plant sources include coconut oil and cocoa butter. Many food scientists believe that saturated fat, if eaten in excess, may increase LDL cholesterol (bad type), and increase the risk of certain types of cancer.

Unsaturated fat, which is found mostly in plants, appears to pose less of a health risk than do their saturated counterparts. However, there is some evidence that unsaturated fats may also contribute to heart disease and increase the risk of certain types of cancer.

Trans fat is found in hydrogenated fat products, such as margarine and vegetable shortenings. This type of fat also has been linked to increased LDL cholesterol. Unfortunately, various snack foods are loaded with trans fat, including many kinds of cookies, chips, crackers, and various fried foods commonly served in “fast-food” restaurants.

The Good

Monounsaturated fat is found in olive oil, coconut oil, canola oil, nuts, seeds, and avocados. This type of fat tends to *reduce* LDL (bad) cholesterol and increase the HDL (good) form. For this reason, Jason highly recommends sprinkling olive oil on your food from time to time to gain health benefits. However, for cooking, he recommends using coconut oil. Coconut oil is stable when heated, and, despite having a relatively high content of saturated fat, many studies show that it generally promotes a favorable HDL / LDL ratio. Olive oil should not be used for cooking because it breaks down when heated to relatively high temperatures, and in broken-down form it can be harmful to the body.

Polyunsaturated fat is another fat that tends to reduce LDL cholesterol and increase the good HDL component. This type of fat is found in fatty fish, such as salmon, trout, sardines, and mackerel. Other good sources include flaxseed oil, sunflower oil, corn oil, walnuts, and soybeans. Cod liver oil, which is derived from the liver of cod fish, is another excellent source of polyunsaturated fat. In addition, this supplement has high levels of the two omega-3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA, both of which have shown to provide a variety of health benefits. Cod liver oil also is a rich source of vitamin A and vitamin D. For these reasons, Jason often supplements his diet with this nutrient-rich oil.

The main point here is that Jason does not recommend eliminating fat from your diet. Not only is this practice unhealthy, it can prove detrimental for building muscle and strength. The key, Quellhorst advised, is to supply your body with enough fat to ensure good health. A good rule of thumb, he advised, is to get about 30% of your calories from fats, with emphasis on consuming the monounsaturated and polyunsaturated types. You will need to pay attention, he cautioned, not only to which foods you eat, but to how your foods are prepared. It’s all too easy to overlook that a food item has been fried in vegetable oil or padded with a thick layer of margin.

Jason explained that many bodybuilders have a hard time reducing body fat without losing muscle. This is because dietary fat and carbohydrates each have a tendency to be stored as body fat, although their intake is essential to maintain and build muscle mass. One solution to this problem, said Quellhorst, is to take a supplement known as CapTri®. This supplement, which is available from Parrillo Performance, is a special type of fat that digests in the body faster than do carbohydrates, and it has almost no tendency to be converted into body fat according to its manufacturer. CapTri® is typically used while following a high protein, low carbohydrate, and low fat diet, and many strength athletes who use this supplement report that it allows them to maintain or even build muscle as they lose body fat.



Jason built his contest-winning legs by practicing many exercises and variations. By continually mixing up his routine, he keeps his muscles growing. Photograph courtesy of Jason Quellhorst.

As a final note on nutrition, Jason recommends that bodybuilders eat organic foods to the extent practically possible. An organic food is one that has not been treated with or influenced by pesticides, fertilizers, hormones, dyes, preservatives, industrial solvents, additives, or genetically modified organisms. Quellhorst explained that organic foods typically cost more, but he believes that they taste better and are healthier.

Key 12: Train with Variety

Jason rarely practices the same exercises or the same set and rep scheme for more than a few workouts. He has found that unless he continually “mixes up” his training program, progress will slow down or even cease. This is because, he indicated, the body is developed to quickly adapt to a given stimulus.

To illustrate his point, Jason pointed out that many strength athletes do the same routine week after week, year after year, and they don't grow or get stronger. As an example, he reflected,

“I have a guy in my head here. Every time he prepares to train his shoulders, I already know what he is going to do. He's going to walk into the gym, stretch, walk straight over to the Smith machine, begin the shoulder press, do three sets of 10 reps with the same old weight, then go to the next exercise that he always does. He's been doing the same thing for 10 years, and he always looks the same!”

In contrast to the one-track gentleman described above, Quellhorst refuses to perform the same routine over and over. One week, he may focus on squats during his leg training. The next week, he may emphasize the leg press. Another week, it might be the Hack squat, close-stance squats, or the duck squat that gets the leading role. In any case, he continually mixes up his

training so that his body never has a chance to adapt. This approach, Jason revealed, is necessary to stimulate continued gains in muscular size and strength.

It is common practice for bodybuilders and other iron athletes to perform their heavy main lifts first when they train. Jason, also, ordinarily follows this established procedure. However, from time to time, he breaks tradition to “shake things up a bit” and stimulate new growth. He reflected,

“Most people are going to come into the gym, and what are they going to do first? A ‘heavy’ exercise, like squats. We’ll who says that I can’t come in and start with an auxiliary exercise, such as the leg curl? In other words, why can’t I come in and train hamstrings first? Here is why they do the heavy stuff first: because, they want to get the maximum number of reps with the maximum amount of weight they can. I look at it from a different angle. What is my goal? Is it to feed my ego? Oh, I bench pressed 500 that day. Well, no. I want to get my body thinking. My goal is to exhaust my muscles and give them a new stimulus.”

Now, all of this leads to a very important point: Jason does not believe that there is one best routine or a single best exercise. Variety is his pitch, and he believes that this approach has been responsible for his balanced and extraordinary development.

Exercise Selection

Over the years, Jason has practiced many different exercises to develop his legs. The ones that he most often performs and recommends are shown below in Table 1. Note that the exercises listed are organized into three categories. In the first category, Jason places the barbell squat, the leg press, and the belt squat. The second category consists of the close-stance barbell squat, the Hack squat, the leg extension, and the lunge. And, the third category is comprised of variations of the leg curl and the stiff-legged deadlift.

Jason considers the exercises listed in Category 1 to be most fundamental for building the legs. They not only greatly develop the quadriceps, they also strengthen the muscles of the hips and buttocks. And, to a lesser extent, these power builders develop the hamstrings, lower back, and calves.

Jason believes that the barbell squat is the most fundamental and important leg builder known. And, anybody who seeks to build big and muscular thighs should work this exercise regularly and hard, the bodybuilder advised. Nearly every champion in modern bodybuilding history has relied on this movement to a significant extent to build his or her legs. Simply put, bodybuilders who don't spend lots of time at the squat rack huffing and puffing should not expect to develop massive and powerful legs.

Again, it must be emphasized here that Jason considers the barbell squat to be the very best leg builder in existence, and this exercise should be given the highest rank in your leg training program. Nonetheless, Quellhorst does not recommend that you practice the squat exercise each

leg-training day. For variety sake, he recommends that you focus on one of the other fundamental leg builders, such as the leg press, every third or fourth leg workout.

Table 1
Leg Building Exercises Used and Recommended by Jason Quellhorst

Exercises	Moderate Routine		Rigorous Routine		Extreme Routine	
	Select	Sets	Select	Sets	Select	Sets
Category 1	1	10	1 to 2	12	2 to 3	13
Barbell squat (med to wide stance)						
Leg press, sled type						
Leg press, vertical type						
Belt squat						
	Select	Sets	Select	Sets	Select	Sets
Category 2	1	6	1 to 2	7	2	8
Close-stance barbell squat						
Hack squat on machine						
Hack squat with barbell						
Leg extension						
Lunges on Smith machine						
Lunges with dumbbells						
Lunges with a barbell						
	Select	Sets	Select	Sets	Select	Sets
Category 3	2	6	2	7	2 to 3	8
Lying leg curl on machine						
Lying leg curl using a dumbbell						
Stiff-legged deadlift using a barbell						
Stiff-legged deadlift using a T-bar						

The leg press can be performed on a sled-type of machine (seated), or on an “old-style” vertical apparatus. Jason tends to favor the conventional vertical-type leg press over the seated style, but he said that both versions are good for variety sake. The vertical-type of leg press, Quellhorst suggested, “puts the weight right where you want it - above the hips.” Additionally, the vertical style, because of its direct alignment with gravity, requires less weight to get the same resistance, and it is more compact. In contrast, seated leg press units may prove to be more comfortable to some folks. And, some trainees find that the seated version places less stress on their back, neck, and /or knees.

If you have the proper apparatus to perform the belt squat, Jason strongly recommends practicing this movement regularly. The belt squat, said Quellhorst, takes much of the pressure off of the

spine, and it allows the trainee to focus more intensely on working his or her leg muscles. This is because energy is not wasted trying to maintain balance, or to keep a heavy barbell steadily across the shoulders.

Earlier in this article we discussed the Parrillo-style of the belt squat. In this version we saw that the strength athlete finishes this exercise with two grueling 100-rep sets. We also saw that performing the belt-squat exercise to such an extreme level can be very useful for teaching the body and mind to exceed current limits (provided you are in good health and well conditioned). However, Jason recommends that the bodybuilder generally practice a somewhat less vigorous version of the Parrillo exercise. Reflecting upon the belt-squat movement, he stated,

“Most bodybuilders probably will benefit best by doing the 100-rep Parrillo exercise just two or three times a year. If this extreme form of the belt squat is practiced more often than this, some trainees may become mentally burned out and / or physically over trained. This is because the Parrillo exercise, if done correctly, places great demands both on the body and on the mind. However, I would recommend that the serious strength athlete regularly practice the belt squat in sets of 20, 30, 40, 50, or even 60 reps if he or she has access to a weight-support belt. Such regularly practiced sets should be challenging, but not taken to the extreme. When executed in this fashion, the belt squat can generally be performed safely without a spotter present. However, I must stress again that you should always have a spotter assist you whenever the belt squat is performed to an extreme level, such as when done in Parrillo style.”

In the second category of exercises, shown in Table 1, Jason places the close-stance barbell squat, the Hack squat, the leg extension, and the lunge. Although these four movements are often considered “assistant” exercises, they serve well to further define the thighs and to fill in “hollow” spots.

Jason typically performs the Hack squat on a Hack machine, although this exercise can be made just as effective by holding a barbell behind your legs. In either case, the strongman recommends that the exercise be performed flatfooted for reasons previously stated. The Hack squat places intense stress on the quadriceps, especially on the lower and outer sections. It is one of the best exercises, indicated Quellhorst, for thickening the area around the knees and correcting a “carrot-shaped” condition.

The leg extension is another excellent exercise for building the muscles around the knees. This movement nearly completely isolates the quadriceps, and many bodybuilders use it to “rip up” the front of the thighs.

To get the most from the leg extension, Jason recommended that this movement be performed relatively slowly, and with the back of the knees resting against the edge of the padded bench. Quellhorst also stated that the lifter should go through a full range of motion, and hold the weight for a two-second count when the legs reach the fully-straightened position. During this count, he also advised that the leg muscles be contracted vigorously.

Jason not only performs the leg extension to build up his quadriceps, he believes that this exercise strengthens and helps to protect his knees. When Quellhorst was 40 years old, he participated in a football game with several guys who were 20 to 25 years younger. Furthermore, he hadn't played football since his college days as a running back. During the game, he intercepted a pass, and he took off with the ball. As he was running, he made a sharp cut to juke his youthful opponents, and he severely injured his knee.



After the accident, Jason went to his doctor for evaluation and treatment. The doctor told him that he tore his ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament). Ordinarily, Jason's doctor advised him, when an ACL is torn, surgery is required to fix it. However, the physician explained to the bodybuilder that because he had so much muscle around his injured knee, surgery in his case was not necessary. The sheer size and strength of Jason's lower leg muscles were enough to provide sufficient support for recovery.



Jason practices the leg extension to thicken the muscles above his knees. He believes that this exercise has done much to strengthen his knees and to keep them injury free. Photography by Robert Drucker.

As part of Jason's rehabilitation program, he was instructed by his physician to perform the leg extension exercise, although with much lighter weights than he ordinarily used. Starting with almost no weight on the extension bar, the big man gradually worked up to his former working weight. "The leg extension really worked, and I'm doing fine now," Quellhorst reflected.

Another exercise that helps to develop the lower quadriceps is the lunge. This movement also is excellent for strengthening the buttocks and the hip flexors. In addition, many bodybuilders practice the lunge to bring out separation in their upper quads.

To make it easier to control the weight, Jason prefers to practice the lunge movement on a Smith machine. The lunge exercise can also be performed by holding a barbell across the shoulders, or by holding a dumbbell in each hand. However, Quellhorst warned that care must be taken when using free weights not to "bang" your knee on the floor during the descent portion of the lunge. "I've seen guys hit their knee on the floor and fall down," the big guy noted.

Jason recommended that the lunge exercise be performed with the feet kept about shoulder-width apart, and with the toes pointing straight ahead. During the descent, the "back" knee should be lowered until it is about 2 to 4 inches above the floor, or perhaps a little closer. In unison, the

lifter should step forward as far as possible with the other leg, and the “front” knee should end up well ahead of the foot. To recover, the lifter reverses the process while pushing hard with the front leg. The movement is then repeated, alternating the role of each leg with each successive repetition.

As we saw earlier, Quellhorst puts emphasis on training the back of his legs. Never one to want a “flat” look when viewed from the side, the physique champ routinely gives his hamstrings plenty of work by performing variations of both the stiff-legged deadlift and the leg curl. These variations comprise “Category 3”, and they are listed in Table 1.

The stiff-legged deadlift is a fabulous exercise not only for stretching and working the back of the thighs, but also for developing the glutes and the spinal erectors of the lower back. And, to a lesser extent, this movement taxes the mid and upper back muscles, as well as the forearm flexors.

Most typically, Jason advised, the stiff-legged deadlift is performed by holding a barbell with a pronated grip (both palms facing the body), and with the arms held in front and straight down. The legs are kept straight, or almost so, and the trainee bends at the waist *slowly* until the plates of the barbell just touches the floor. The barbell is then raised slowly by straightening the back until the starting position is resumed. The movement is then repeated for the desired number of repetitions. Sometimes a lifter stands on a bench so that the range of motion can be increased.

In addition to performing the stiff-legged deadlift with an ordinary barbell, Jason also performs a variation of this movement while holding onto a T-bar apparatus (see photographs above). He learned this version from John Parrillo, and the former “Clash of The Champions” winner highly recommends it for stretching and building the back of the legs. When asked which version of the stiff-legged deadlift is best, Jason replied, “They are both good, and each one stretches and taxes the muscles of the hamstrings, glutes, back, and hips differently.”

The leg curl effectively isolates the hamstrings, and Jason considers this movement to be one of the best exercises for building the thigh biceps. This exercise can be done while standing (one leg at a time) if the right equipment is available, but Jason typically performs this movement while lying face down on a padded surface.

Quellhorst sometimes performs the lying leg curl on a machine, but one of his favorite exercises



Jason performs the stiff-legged deadlift on a T-bar apparatus. This unusual exercise is great for stretching and building the hamstrings. Photography by Robert Drucker.

is the lying leg curl with a dumbbell held between the feet, another superb exercise he learned from John Parrillo. As shown by the accompanying pictures, this version of the leg curl is done while squeezing both feet against the dumbbell. The squeezing action, Jason observed, not only serves to help hold the dumbbell in place, it also works the inner thighs quite vigorously.

When the lying leg curl is performed on a machine, Jason stresses that the padded crossbar should rest just above the ankles when the legs are straight. In addition, the kneecaps should remain over the edge of the bench throughout the movement. This style of execution will aid comfort, and it will minimize pressure on the knees. And, like the leg extension, Quellhorst advised that the leg curl is most productive when performed slowly, through a full range of motion, and with a two-second hold when the peak-contraction position is reached (ankles close to butt). Many “experts” also recommend maintaining the hips against the machine bench at all times, but Jason has a different viewpoint. He prefers to raise his hips slightly “just at the sticking point.” This looser style allows him to use heavier weights and to tax his muscles more intensely, the bodybuilder noted.

Constructing a Result-Producing Training Program

As stated earlier, Jason adamantly believes that no single training routine can be considered “best.” Rather, the bodybuilding champ advised that the key to bodybuilding success is to practice a variety of “bread and butter” exercises, and to keep “mixing things up” in the gym. Furthermore, how long and how hard a lifter should train depends upon many factors. These factors, the big guy noted, include the lifter’s age, his or her medical history, his or her current level of fitness, his or her goals, his or her inherent ability to recover from strenuous exercise, what he or she does for a living, how much free time he or she has, and how much sleep he or she is able to get each night. Thus, a training routine that works best for one person may not be practical, desirable, or beneficial to another.



Jason prepares for a set of leg curls by grasping a dumbbell between his feet. Photography by Robert Drucker.



After securing the dumbbell by squeezing against the handle with his feet, Jason lowers himself onto the bench. Photography by Robert Drucker.



With the dumbbell securely held between his feet, Jason begins the leg curl exercise. The squeezing action in conjunction with the curling really blasts the inner thighs. Photography by Robert Drucker.

With the above points in mind, Jason outlined three *generally* suggested leg-training routines, and these are shown in Table 1. His suggested routines present a leg-workout program for three groups of trainees. A *Moderate Routine* is recommended for strength athletes who have less than six months of training experience, who have a limited amount of time to train, and / or do not have the interest or the energy to pursue bodybuilding at an advanced level. On the opposite end of the spectrum, an *Extreme Routine* is suggested for those individuals who have the time, energy, health, and desire required to pursue bodybuilding with full force. And, finally, the *Rigorous Routine* is for serious trainees who fall somewhere in the middle between the two aforementioned groups. Most readers of this article will probably fall into this group.

Regardless of which classification group you fall into, Quellhorst emphasized that your training must be based on the 12 “keys” discussed earlier if you want to build mighty legs. Furthermore, he observed,

“There is no easy path to building a great physique. You must be willing to work hard to make things happen, and you will need to work extra hard if you want to reach your ultimate potential.”

Referring to Table 1, you will see that regardless of which training classification you best fit into (moderate, rigorous, or extreme), the exercises Jason recommends are the same. What varies is only the suggested number of exercises and the suggested amount of sets to be performed. During each leg workout, for example, trainees in the Moderate group should select one exercise from Category 1, one exercise from Category 2, and two exercises from Category 3. Ten sets of the Category 1 exercise should be performed; six sets of the Category 2 exercise should be done; and, six sets of the Category 3 exercise should be done.

Trainees in the Rigorous group should select one or two exercises from Category 1, one or two exercises from Category 2, and two exercises from Category 3. Twelve sets of the Category 1 exercise should be performed; seven sets of the Category 2 exercise should be done; and, seven sets of the Category 3 exercise should be done.

Finally, trainees in the Extreme group should select two or three exercises from Category 1, two exercises from Category 2, and two or three exercises from Category 3. Thirteen sets of the Category 1 exercise should be performed; eight sets of the Category 2 exercise should be done;



Jason curls the dumbbell upward until his feet just pass the upright position. Photography by Robert Drucker.



After reaching the fully contracted position, Jason lowers the dumbbell slowly until his feet become fully extended. The curling action is then repeated for the desired number of repetitions. Photography by Robert Drucker.

and, eight sets of the Category 3 exercise should be done.

Table 2, shown on the page below, outlines a set and rep scheme that Jason recommends for all three categories of leg-building exercises, and for all three groups of trainees. The suggested pyramid structure should be performed as described earlier in the section entitled, “*Key 8: Train Progressively.*” That is, the first few sets of each exercise should serve to provide a warm-up, and the barbell weight should be increased incrementally across progressive sets. After reaching a top poundage, the weight should then be progressively decreased, and the final sets of each exercise should be performed more slowly, with tightened form, with a full range of motion, and with slightly longer “holds” or “pauses,” where appropriate.

Going back to the section entitled “*Key 5: Focus on Intensity,*” you will recall that Jason considers the intensity factor to be more important than workout duration or frequency. This is because no amount of lame effort is going to build muscle; only hard and focused work can accomplish this objective. However, as the intensity factor is increased, the *amount* of work done (frequency and duration) must decrease, or the body may eventually become over-trained. Simply put, following an intense workout, the muscles must be given sufficient rest to recover and grow. Training them again, before they have *totally* recovered, will only retard progress. And, it is for this reason that Quellhorst *generally* recommends that the legs and all other major body parts be trained just once per week. This training frequency, the bodybuilder stated, tends to work best for a lot of people.



Training “Power Bodybuilding” style is both mentally and physically demanding. However, this workout system really packs on the beef. Check out those massive arms and shoulders that Jason possesses! Photography by Robert Drucker.

While there are no sure-fire rules regarding how much rest should be taken between exercise sets, Jason typically limits himself to two or three minutes of inactivity during a workout. Such an approach, he emphasized, “will keep your muscles warm and your mind in the right groove.” Long rest periods, in contrast, reduces training efficiency, breaks down focus, and increases the risk of injury.

Jason typically trains five to six days a week, training just one or two muscle groups per workout. One training schedule Quellhorst *generally* recommends for serious strength athletes is as follows:

- Monday – Shoulders
- Tuesday – Arms (biceps, triceps, and forearms)
- Wednesday – Legs and calves

- Thursday – Chest
- Friday – Back
- Saturday – Rest or do some calves, abs, traps, and / or aerobic work.
- Sunday – Rest or do some calves, abs, traps, and / or aerobic work.

Again, Jason has found that the above training schedule and suggested routines work very well for most bodybuilders. However, he observed that other sensible training schedules and routines could prove equally beneficial, and that you must experiment to find a workout strategy that is best suited for your individual needs.

Table 2
Suggested Set and Rep Scheme

	Set Number	Relative Percentage	Example Weight	Reps	Level of Training Program
Category 1 Exercises	1	20%	60	8 to 12	Moderate, Rigorous and Extreme
	2	35%	105	8 to 12	
	3	50%	150	8 to 12	
	4	65%	195	8 to 12	
	5	80%	240	8 to 12	
	6	90%	270	8 to 12	
	7	100%	300	8 to 12	
	8	100%	300	8 to 12	
	9	90%	270	8 to 12	
	10	80%	240	8 to 12	Rigorous and Extreme Only
	11	65%	195	15 to 20	
	12	50%	150	20 to 25	Extreme Only
	13	35%	105	25 to 30	
	Set Number	Relative Percentage	Example Weight	Reps	Level of Training Program
Category 2 and Category 3 Exercises	1	35%	65	8 to 12	Moderate, Rigorous and Extreme
	2	55%	100	8 to 12	
	3	80%	145	8 to 12	
	4	100%	180	8 to 12	
	5	100%	180	8 to 12	
	6	80%	145	8 to 12	
	7	55%	100	8 to 12	Rigorous and Extreme Only
	8	35%	65	8 to 12	Extreme Only

Closing Thoughts

We have seen that Jason Quellhorst's prescription for building mighty legs involves a multidimensional approach. Hard work, variation, healthful living, and tenacity are all part of his Power-Bodybuilding formula. However, you probably have recognized that what most separates Jason's training program apart from an ordinary approach is his emphasis on mind development. At its core, Power Bodybuilding teaches you how to program your brain for success, both inside and outside of the gym.

Many bodybuilders and other strength athletes merely go through physical motions when they train. They may move a lot of weight around, but they exhibit little drive, concentration, self-control, and other mental forces. Inevitably, the results these trainees reap are much less than what is possible.

The Power-Bodybuilding method works because it teaches the body and the mind to function in perfect harmony. This system establishes a mind-body link that opens up communication between the muscles and the strongest force on Earth, the human brain. And, only through a harmonious alliance of the mind and body can mediocrity be transcended into greatness.

A mind-body link is established when you are completely focused on what you want your body to do. With an established link, your body does the work, but your mind brings forth the results. Stated another way, with a mind-body link established, your workouts are not merely the sum of your physical actions; more importantly, they are comprised of powerful thoughts that you generate to drive your muscles to their limit!

When a trainee establishes a mind-body link in the gym, he or she continuously “reads” signals coming from his or her muscles. Based on this *feedback*, commands to the muscles may be reinforced, or new ones may be generated. In either case, to become a successful strength athlete you must remain alert during each workout, be finely attuned to what is happening, be fully focused on the goal at hand, and be dogged determined to make improvements. This is the Power Bodybuilding success method.

The Parrillo exercise that was described earlier can help you establish a strong mind-to-body link, and this is why Jason highly recommends it for extreme athletes looking to step up a rung or two on the bodybuilding success ladder. And, the process of setting a high standard (Key 6) will also help you strengthen your mind-to-body link. This is because “setting the standard” requires that you *explicitly* define your goals and develop a plan of action to rise up to them. This process inherently involves cognitive thought and programming of the mind to achieve muscle-building success. And, a mind “programmed” for bodybuilding success will “direct” the body’s muscles toward the attainment of greater size and strength. In contrast, an unfocused mind can guide the muscles no better than a captain can guide a ship without a rudder or a compass.