# TRAIN LIKE A THROWER

BY CHAD SMITH | IN [BENCH](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/bench-2/), [DEADLIFT](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/deadlift/), [FOOTBALL](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/football/), [HIGHLAND GAMES](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/highland-games-2/), [POWERLIFTING](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/powerlifting-2/), [SPEED TRAINING](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/speed-training/), [SPORTS TRAINING](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/sports-training/), [SQUAT](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/squat-2/), [STRONGMAN](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/strongman/), [THROWING](http://jtsstrength.com/articles/category/throwing-2/) | ON APRIL 22, 2013

Throwers (shot put, discus, hammer, javelin) are undoubtedly some of the most powerful athletes on the planet. The feats I have seen with my own eyes and heard anecdotally from coaches during my decade as a high level shot putter, could fill a book. From Wernor Gunthor jumping up and over a series of 12 barriers at least 42” in height each (video at bottom of article), to Christian Cantwell’s 635 raw bench, Mike Stulce’s 500 pound clean, Udo Beyer’s raw 400kgx4 squat or Al Fuerbach’s 12’4” standing broad jump, these guys are capable of producing some unbelievable horsepower. The recent NFL Combine/Pro Day process served to prove this point even further as World Junior Discus champion Margus Hunt from SMU ran a 4.60 40, posted 38 reps of 225 and a 34.5” vertical at 6’8” 277# and British National Record Holder in the discus, Lawrence Okoye, ran a 4.78 and had a 35” vertical and 10’5” broad jump at 6’6” 304 pounds. This ability to generate unbelievable levels of force at bodyweights often in excess of 300 pounds can be directly attributed to these athlete’s training. The training of throwers is based around 3 primary modalities, throwing, jumping and explosive/ballistic strength exercises and all of these have applications in improving maximal strength for powerlifters and strongmen.

**THROWS**

Throws, either of shot puts or medicine balls, are a tremendous tool to build acceleration and true explosive strength. One of the qualities that is often touted of bands and chains, is that they teach the athlete to accelerate the bar through the completion of the lift. While they do allow for a more complete acceleration of the bar than straight weight, they cannot truly accelerate through the end of the lift because the bar will remain in the athlete’s hands or on their back. Compare that to the true explosive quality of throws which accelerate through the completion of the exercises because the implement leaves your hands, making throws one of the best ways to build acceleration and explosive strength. Throws like Overhead Backwards Throws, Scoop Throws, Diving Throws, Rotational Throws and Punch Throws can all be used in your training to build GPP and general explosive qualities. Specific throws can be used to build explosive strength qualities needed to improve the squat, bench and deadlift.

***Squat***: Squat to Press Throw for Height-Perform this throw standing near a high wall so you can mark the height of the throw on the wall. This throw is designed to develop the squat, so focus on your legs creating the power and your arms merely finishing the movement.

***Bench***: Power Drops-Make sure to catch the ball with your arms extended and reverse it powerfully right before it reaches your chest. You should use a ball that you can throw at least to the height of your partners face.

***Deadlift***: Scoop Throw for Height-Try to recreate the starting position of your deadlift as well as possible and leave your arms long and relaxed like ropes, to ensure that your legs, hips and back are creating the power in the throw. These should also be done near a wall so you can gauge your throw’s height and progress.

***My own background as a shot putter has had a huge influence on my success as a powerlifter and strongman…***

**JUMPS**

Jumps are some of the highest velocity movements that a human can perform. Jumping forces the athletes to simultaneously recruit a large amount of fast twitch fibers, teaching them to ‘turn on’ their muscles for maximum power. This ability to ‘turn on’ a large number of motor units will help the athlete to develop a high rate of force development which is critical to squatting, pressing and pulling big weights. Jumps aren’t just reserved for the lower body though, upper body jumping variations are a great way to build explosive strength in the chest, shoulders and triceps. Shock training, made popular by East German track and field athletes, is a jump training variation that can have a profound effect on your strength and power but must be used strategically to avoid overtraining and injury. Jumps are a great explosive training option because they were require very little equipment and space.

***Squat***: Depth Jumps-This shock training variation will build tons of explosive strength in your legs and hips but is very taxing to the body and central nervous system, so it shouldn’t be used for more than 3 weeks out of a 12 week period. The height of the initial drop is largely dependent on the athlete’s relative strength. Athlete’s with very high strength levels (3x BW Squat), or excellent reactive abilities, could drop from as high as a 1m box. A good starting point is 12” for heavyweight lifters (275+), 18” for middle weight (198-242s) and 24” for lightweights (181s and under) but obviously adjustments will need to be made based on the individual.

***Bench***: Box Pushups, Drop Pushups and Rebound Pushups-Jumps aren’t just for the lower body, these upper body jumping variations will build great explosive strength. Jacko Gill, a young shot putting phenom from New Zealand, has performed a box pushup onto a .9m (over 35 inches) box, while raw benching well into the 4s and throwing the shot over 67’ at just 19 years old and weighing only 230-240 pounds. It is important when performing these pushup variations to keep your body rigid, like a board, by flexing your abs and hips. Also focus on landing as softly as possible on the boxes, which should be a focus during any jumping exercise. It is important to progress through these drills from least (box pushups), to most (rebound pushups) advanced, giving your body at least 3 weeks with each variation. You can also add an extra challenge to box pushups, by pausing in the bottom position for 1, 3, 5 or 7 seconds.

***Deadlift***: Pause Squat Jumps-This exercise has the ability to greatly influence an athlete’s speed off of the floor, so ensure that your foot placement is the same as your deadlift starting position. Squat down to the same level your hips are in your pull, hold for a 3-7 count, then jump as high as possible and land softly in a half squat position. Weight can and should be added to this movement, either by holding dumbbells/kettebells, a bar on your back or a bar or trap bar in your hands.

***Check out these demonstrations of all the exercises listed in this article…***

**EXPLOSIVE/BALLISTIC EXERCISES**

Throwing events (Shot put, discus, hammer and javelin) are explosive, violent events and their training in the weigthroom must reflect those qualities. Developing power with a barbell is highly dependent on bar speed, as Power=Work/Time, with the workload (weight and reps being predetermined), the only way to develop more power is to perform that work more quickly. Besides just the simple act of moving the bar as fast as possible all the time, which is hopefully something you were doing before reading this article, there are other means to enhance the power development of exercises, such as performing them as part of a complex (strength movement paired with explosive exercise like jumps or throws), changing the dynamics of the lift by lowering it more rapidly or using a submaximal load that allows you to move the bar rapidly. Check out these simple and effective ways to increase the power development abilities of common weightroom movements.

***Squat***: Squat to Weighted Squat Jump Complex-Using a strength movement like a squat prior to an explosive drill like squat jumps, called a complex, will allow for greater muscle recruitment during the explosive drill and hence, a more powerful training effect. For this complex you will perform a set of moderate weight squat for 2-5 reps (I suggest using 70-90% for this) and then as soon as the bar is racked, grab a pair of dumbbells (something that is challenging but doesn’t impair your jumping ability too much, something in the 20-40 pound range is probably appropriate) and perform 3-5 jumps holding the weights at your sides.

***Bench***: Free Fall Bench Press-In this bench press variation you will attempt to let the weight free fall from arms length and then forcefully reverse the weight 1” above your chest. The free falling of the weight will cause a shock effect on the pressing muscles, similar to a depth jump for the lower body or a more intense rebound pushup. This type of shock training is very effective for strength development but also very taxing, so it shouldn’t be used any more than 3 weeks out of a 12 week training cycle. 35-45% of your 1rm for 5-10 sets of 2-3 reps is appropriate in this movement.

***Deadlift:*** Clean High Pulls-Olympic lifters are among the World’s most explosive athletes and the Olympic lifts and their variations are staples in most thrower’s training. When doing clean pulls, 35-45% of your deadlift max is appropriate and focus on driving your heels through the floor, you should NOT come up on your toes in this movement. As you drive your heels into the floor, forcefully extend your knees and hips, slightly throw your head back and pull the bar as high as possible, as if you are doing an explosive upright row, but your lower body should be creating the power, not your arms. This drill will develop tremendous power and strength in the legs, hips, low back and upper back. If you have access to bumper plates, I suggest dropping the weights from the highest position of the pull.

***Beginning at :47 in this video is one of the greatest demonstrations of explosive and reactive strength I have ever witnessed. The athlete in the video is former World Record holder in the shot put Werner Gunthor of Switzerland who stands 6’4″ and 300+ pounds…***

Strength athletes of all types would be well served to examine the training of their counterparts, accept what is useful and discard what is not. If you are a lifter looking to improve your power and acceleration, take these training tips from throwers and watch your strength explode!

***Chad Wesley Smith is the founder and head physical preparation coach at Juggernaut Training Systems. Chad has a diverse athletic background, winning two national championships in the shot put, setting the American Record in the squat (905 in the 308 class, raw w/ wraps) and most recently winning the 2012 North American Strongman championship, where he earned his pro card. In addition to his athletic exploits, Chad has helped over 50 athletes earn Division 1 athletic scholarships since 2009 and worked with many NFL Players and Olympians. Chad is the author of The Juggernaut Method and The Juggernaut Method 2.0.***