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**MATT SCHIFFERLE**

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# The Story of Mark, The Calisthenics Mass Monster

“Good heavens, who the heck is that?!” My friend asked me as I sat behind the front desk of the gym I was working as a personal trainer.

“Oh yea, that’s Mark. He’s new here.” I whispered in a hushed tone while glancing in Mark’s direction to ensure he wasn’t watching us.”

“So what’s his story? Is he an elite bodybuilder or professional athlete or something? He’s gotta be on some serious steroids for sure.”

Conversations like this were the norm for me ever since Mark had joined the little gym I worked at, and for a good reason. Not only was Mark over 6’5” with a ram-rod straight posture, but he was also built like a golden-era bodybuilder. His muscles bulged and strained against his skin to the point where he looked like he was going to burst, and that was before he worked up a good pump.

It would have been easy to dismiss Mark’s success with the usual excuses. Most people believed he was on steroids. Others claimed he must have some crazy genetics to get that big. Both of those reasons seemed plausible until you got to know him. For one thing, he was living on the streets for much of the time I knew him. One of the reasons why he joined the gym was to use the showers and bathroom facilities.

And there’s no doubt Mark had been gifted with some amazing genetic potential, but his genetics were not the whole story. Mark’s physique was impressive, but only from the waist up. If his size was all due to genetics, he had somehow found a way to isolate his genes to only the top half of his body.

Some people believed he spent hours practicing hundreds of different exercises, but that wasn’t the case. Mark’s routine consisted of three simple exercises, and he practiced them in a freestyle manner. He didn’t count sets or reps. Mark just attacked each exercise with savage intensity.

Mark was a true anomaly. He didn’t follow classic rules, like attacking his muscles from multiple angles or timing his rest periods. He didn’t even do exercises to target areas like his upper chest, traps, or biceps, yet those muscle groups didn’t lack any development in the slightest.

The source of Mark's success was always a mystery to anyone he met, that is until you witnessed one of his workouts. Mark was extremely strong and demonstrated his strength by dominating three simple exercises with inspiring technique and control.

First came the warm-up, where he set up camp in the corner of the gym next to the chin/dip station. He started banging out easy sets of close push-ups, neutral grip pull-ups, and dips. After a bit, he put on one of the 40-pound weight vests we had stashed in the corner and continued doing the same three exercises. Later, he would remove the vest and replace it with the 60-pound one we had, making each set and rep look effortless. Eventually, Mark stepped up, put the 40-pound vest back on in addition to the 60-pound vest, and continued with the same circuit he had started.

Watching Mark train was like witnessing a shark-feeding frenzy. It was beautiful and savage, and you couldn't escape the undeniable fact that Mark was built the way he was because he was incredibly good at what he did. His execution was the true definition of mastery.

It's been over twenty years since I saw Mark perform, and I've met only a handful of people who could come close to his athleticism and development. I have, however, met others who made a similar approach with similar results in other disciplines. These individuals practiced several disciplines, but they all embodied the same qualities that set them apart from the competition.

### **Quality #1 A focus on the basics**

From strength training to martial arts, every high-performer I've known maintains a laser-like focus on fundamental exercises. They might dabble in the occasional fancy new technique, but they always keep their attention on their discipline's "boring" foundational techniques.

### **Quality #2 The relentless pursuit of mastery**

Amateurs are quick to learn and then dismiss the basics, but the master understands the results they want to develop come from the constant improvement of such techniques. Anyone can lift, kick, throw, and run, but doing those things at an elite level makes you one of the best. You can always improve on the basics.

### **Quality #3 They do things their way**

You'll never find a high-level performer following some cookie-cutter approach in their training. They may start with a plan they found in a book or online but inevitably change it as they see fit to align with their needs. It's not that they are being rebellious against the status quo; they simply understand what works best for them, and they change accordingly.

I've been applying these basic principles in my approaches to diet and exercise for years. They have always worked, and helped me, and my clients, reach new heights. The first approach I developed was my Traid Muscle Revolution, which was based on Mark's training style. From there, I've applied these principles to develop my [Grind Style Calisthenics](#), [Micro Workouts](#), and more. Now, I'm happy to bring you my latest approach called Push, Pull, Squat. (PPS).

PPS is not a specific workout plan or routine. It's a simple, yet very powerful, approach to strength training that you can use to develop any sort of routine you like. You can apply PPS to any type of equipment and strength training discipline you wish. PPS is a simple framework that allows you to do things your way, while maintaining a focus on building strength and muscle. You're provided with the structure you need to stay on track along with the flexibility to adapt to your preferences and circumstances. But don't worry, I'll also be supplying you with a complete workout program so you're not starting from scratch either.

So without further ado, let's dive into the PPS approach and how it gives you an almost unfair advantage for getting the results you want.

# The PPS Approach

You can apply the principles I discussed earlier toward any discipline, but how do you use them if your goal is to build muscle and strength? Should you just do endless push-ups and kettlebell swings until you've mastered them?

Endlessly working yourself into the ground is rarely the path to success. Mastery requires hard work, but you must apply your effort in an intelligent way. Working smarter, not harder, makes for a fitness motivation post on social media, but how do you put that into practical application?

That answer came to me years ago when I started to develop my Chain Training approach to calisthenics training. It's a methodology I created after spending years of frustration with the two most popular training methodologies; I developed my Chain Training approach. First, I was a "muscle worker," where I would program workouts based on what muscles I wanted to work. I used a classic bodybuilder routine where I had chest day, arm day, shoulder day, and so on. I was also using a variety of exercises to target specific muscles like my lateral deltoids, upper chest, or outer quads.

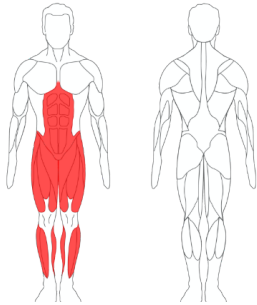
Working muscles was a great way to produce some satisfying pumps, but it fragmented my body into so many pieces that it was difficult to use my body as a complete functional unit. To solve this problem, I jumped head-first into the functional training craze and started training movements instead of muscles. I squatted on balance disks, jumped on boxes, and punched against resistance bands. These movements were great for athleticism but seldom provided enough resistance to increase muscle and strength.

I created Chain Training as a blend between working muscles and movements. It involves placing a high level of resistance against a Tension Chain, which is a group of muscles that work together for a basic movement pattern. You focus on using your muscles, like a bodybuilder, to perform basic functional and athletic exercises like an athlete.

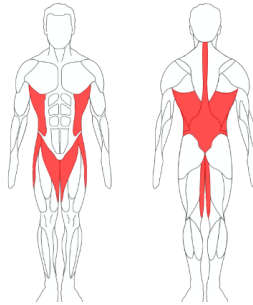
There are six total tension chains along the human body. The first three are the support chains which are the classic anatomical chains. These include the flexion (anterior chain), extension chain (posterior chain), and lateral chains.

# Your Support Chains

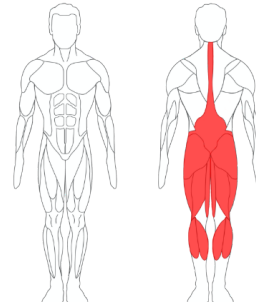
FLEXION CHAIN



LATERAL CHAIN



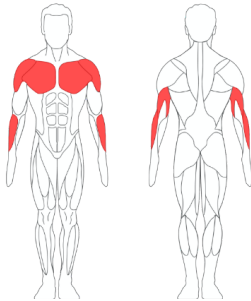
EXTENSION CHAIN



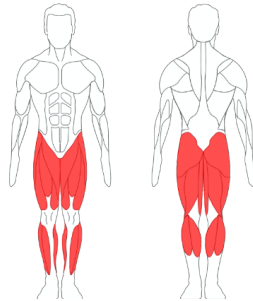
Next, you have your three movement chains. These provide most of the body's movement and external loads and include your push chain, pull chain, and squat chain.

# Your Movement Chains

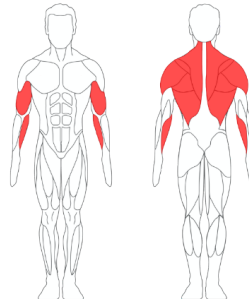
PUSH CHAIN



SQUAT CHAIN



PULL CHAIN



Chain Training allows you to work all your major muscle groups, with plenty of overlap, from only six basic exercises. It makes training easier to program, making your workouts much more efficient. You don't need to worry about working every muscle, nor do you have to perform endless skill-based athletic movements. You only need one or two basic exercises for each chain, and you're done. It has been the foundation for all of my training programs since, including my [Grind Style Calisthenics Program](#), [Micro Workouts](#), and even [Overcoming Isometrics](#).

I've spent years becoming more comfortable applying Chain Training to my and my client's workouts. Along the way I noticed that most of the progress in building muscle and strength came from the three movement chains. While the support chains were important for functional strength and total body resiliency, they don't contribute much to developing the physique.



This observation makes sense when you consider how the training of the movement and support chains is very different. Most movement chain exercises use a lot of resistance and movement at the primary joints, including the shoulders, elbows, hips, and knees. Meanwhile, support chains are usually performed in an isometric fashion and with moderate levels of resistance.



*Movement chain exercises (top) are typically done with more resistance and range of motion while support chain techniques (bottom) are often lighter and not as comprehensive for building muscle and strength.*

Many classic bodybuilding exercises are primarily movement chain techniques, including squats, pressing, and pulling movements. Single-joint exercises like bicep curls and chest flies are also movement chain techniques; they just use a portion of the chain. Support chain techniques are accessory exercises like ab training, twisting movements, and hip extension. Most support chain techniques are also considered “core training,” which can be great for developing your hips and abdominals but seldom work the limbs, chest, and back to a high degree.

Naturally, one of the primary exercises people use to argue against this claim is the classic deadlift. Obviously, this is one of the biggest and strongest exercises in existence and is primarily an extension chain exercise. However, consider how the deadlift relates to other extension chain work. Most other extension chain exercises rarely apply a large amount of resistance or push the muscles to an extreme level of fatigue. The deadlift is the exception that proves the rule that most extension chain work is done with relatively low levels of intensity and fatigue compared to the movement chains.



*The deadlift is a big, heavy, and intense exercise which is in high contrast from most other extension chain exercises.*

That's not to say the support chains and core work aren't important for developing your strength and muscle; they certainly are. However, you're probably not going to build the body you want by focusing on leg raises, kettlebell swings, and medicine ball throws.

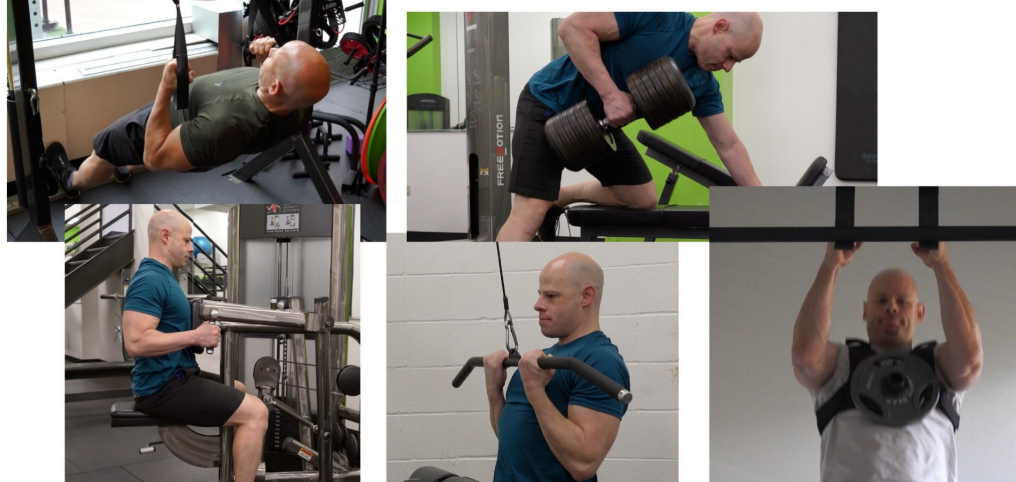
Deadlifts aside, when you get down to what exercises and techniques have the biggest influence on building strength and muscle, it's the three-movement chains of push, pull, and squat. So if you want to build and strengthen your body, that's where you should focus most of your attention.

### **How to apply this perspective**

Focusing on PPS doesn't mean you only work those chains and neglect everything else. It means you *emphasize* those motions with where you spend your time and energy.

Adopting a PPS focus also means focusing on those general movement patterns rather than specific exercises. You can apply those three movements using any tools and techniques you wish.

I enjoy bodyweight training, so I use dips, pull-ups, advanced push-ups, lunges, and various squat techniques. However, you certainly don't need to follow in my footsteps, as you can apply the PPS approach to free weights, machines, bands, and any other methodology you prefer.



*Some common pull chain techniques. They may look different, but fundamentally, they are all just different ways to work the back, biceps and grip.*

You can use any exercises and tools you like, just so long as you accomplish the basic motions of push, pull, and squat. Here are a few guidelines for selecting which exercise may be best for you.

### **Work with your preferences and resources**

Don't worry too much about what the Internet claims are the supposedly the best exercises for building muscle and strength. The most important thing is to discover what exercises fit you best.

Naturally, this depends heavily on what tools and resources you have on hand. If you have a selection of dumbbells and a pull-up bar, then barbell back squats may be outside your repertoire.

It also doesn't matter if 1,000 research studies claim that the barbell bench press is the best muscle-building exercise; if your shoulders do not agree with the technique, it will not be a good fit for you.

Use the tools you have and the techniques you prefer to apply. If you feel an affinity for one type of training or exercise, head in that direction. The techniques you feel the strongest performing are typically the ones you can execute with the best form and intensity.

### **Use exercises you feel proficient in doing**

Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses, both in training and in life. You'll naturally be better and more comfortable with some exercises and tools than others.

Building muscle and strength requires as much proficiency as possible with your exercises. Therefore, if you need help getting the hang of using a particular tool or exercise, swap it out for something you feel more comfortable using.

Don't forget that you are trying to train your muscles with a very strong stimulus. It's crucially important that you feel the muscles themselves working extremely hard during the exercises. So if you feel your chest light up with one exercise but not the other, then it's probably best to use the former to create the stimulus you want.

**For building strength focus on exercises you can contract your muscles very hard.**

Building strength is about making your muscles contract with as much tension as possible. The best exercises for creating such tension will be fairly basic and require as little skill as possible.

Techniques that require more skill and proficiency often limit how hard you can contract your muscles due to a lack of stability and control. So select exercises you feel very stable while doing so you can work against a high degree of resistance.



*Exercises that afford you more control and stability are typically the ideal environment to create a stimulus for building muscle and strength.*

**For building muscle use exercises, you feel comfortable pushing to a high level of fatigue.**

Building muscle takes strength, but it also occasionally requires pushing your muscles to a high level of fatigue. You'll naturally find that some exercises are more suitable for



pushing yourself into that high fatigue zone than others. It's easier to continue pushing your muscles when a lack of stability and control does not limit you. You'll also notice it's easier to use exercises that don't require a perfect technique to maintain your safety.

Exercises that risk a loss of control are typically terminated in the interest of self-preservation. This case makes it difficult to thoroughly work a muscle before you reach a very high level of fatigue. Conversely, you'll feel more comfortable pushing yourself to a high level of fatigue if you select exercises with less risk.



*Some of my favorite high-fatigue exercises are single-joint techniques or low-load methods like calisthenics, band work, and isometrics.*

Some exercises are more suitable for high-intensity training, while others are better for high-fatigue training. My Grind Style Calisthenics approach uses different exercises for each workout's strength and hypertrophy phases. You simply start with the high-intensity strength exercises when you're fresher and then shift to the fatigue exercises when you start to burn out the muscles.

That's not to say that high-intensity exercises are ineffective for building muscle. They certainly are. Nor are high fatigue exercises ineffective for building strength. It recognizes that certain tools are more suitable for achieving a high training intensity and others are more suitable for high-fatigue training.

### **How to incorporate support chains**

The PPS approach emphasizes your movement chains, but you still work your support chains in your training, just not to the same degree. There are several ways you can do

this to ensure you're still covering those bases without having them take over your workout.

One of the easiest ways to incorporate your support chain training is to use them as your general warm-up. You can practice hanging leg raises for the flexion chain, followed by some kettlebell swings for the extension chain, and then some cable chops for your lateral chain. Each exercise will be a great way to prepare your movement chains for the work to come.

You can also incorporate your support chain training with the movement chains to incorporate active recovery in the workout. Try catching your breath while holding a plank for 30 seconds after a set of heavy squats, or get some hip bridges in after some progressive pull-ups.

Lastly, practice your support chains on your active recovery days. Again, most support chain training isn't very hard and intense. The moderate intensity is ideal for getting the blood flowing throughout the body.

### **Train fresh, finish fried (TFFF)**

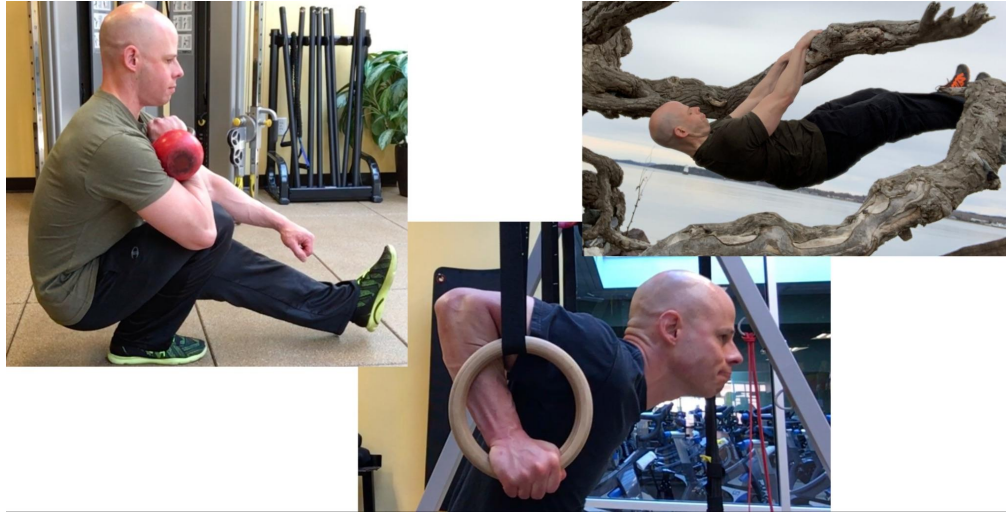
Fatigue is one of the most powerful variables when programming your workouts. It can both enhance your training, but it can also handicap your results depending on how you use it.

Fatigue can be a helpful influence if you're looking to build stamina and potentially build muscle. On the other hand, fatigue is detrimental to proficiency and the development of skillful training applications like strength, power, and coordination.

That's not to say that you can't build strength if you're tired, nor is it impossible to stimulate hypertrophy if you're not creating a lot of fatigue. However, you'll generally have an easier time developing proficiency when you're less tired and build stamina when you're not fresh. That's why I've adopted a train-fresh, finish-fried (TFFF) approach to training over the years.

The TFFF approach is simple. You structure your workout so you focus on improving proficiency at the beginning of your workout when you feel relatively fresh. Your nervous system is ready to handle some heavy loads, and you can work with as much skill or coordination as possible. Ideally, you're also managing

your fatigue, so you're not burning yourself out with each set. Keep a few reps in reserve so you have some energy to continue practicing what you want to improve.



*High proficiency exercises require as much stability, strength, and coordination as you can bring to the exercise.*

### **How many sets should you do when training for proficiency?**

You want to practice as many sets as possible when working on proficiency. The more you can practice, the better; however, your practice will only be worthwhile if you have a good amount of energy. Once you start to fatigue, your ability to perform diminishes, and the stressful cost of each set increases.

Continue practicing your exercise until your proficiency declines. That point may be after just a few sets, or it may be after many. Don't limit yourself to 2-3 sets if you don't have to. However, don't force yourself to continue doing one sloppy grueling set after another if your strength and proficiency diminish. There's little sense in forcing yourself through more sets when you're just going through the motions and not working well.

### **How to go about training for fatigue.**

Once you've noticed yourself struggling due to fatigue, you can end your workout or drive the muscles in that tension chain to a higher state of fatigue. Engaging in

a “finisher” can help improve muscular endurance and possibly stimulate more hypertrophy.

Finisher exercises will differ from those you use in your proficiency phase. You’ll want to use exercises that make it easier and safer to push your muscles into a state of high fatigue. Finisher techniques are usually low-skill exercises that are safe even with less-than-perfect form.



*Losing back support or hip stability are common examples of technical erosion due to fatigue.*

Finishing techniques are also typically lower in resistance, especially compared to any strength techniques you were using in the proficiency phase. Strength training uses heavier resistance so you might go for 2-6 reps. Conversely, higher fatigue exercises usually use a resistance level of 10-15 reps or more. I’ve even known some folks to complete 20-30 reps when performing their “burn-outs.” Regardless you’ll certainly find you can create a lot more metabolic fatigue within the muscles with those higher reps.





*Both high intensity and high fatigue training can bring your muscles to a point of failure, but you'll spend more time in a fatigued state with higher rep training.*

You'll also find that most finishing techniques will be similar to a drop set compared to the proficiency exercises. You may have practiced your muscle-ups on the rings, but the finishers would be high-rep dips and pull-ups. Or maybe you were doing overhead squats, so your finisher would be some hill sprints or a quick round of bodyweight lunges.

Single-joint exercises are also excellent finishing techniques. If your proficiency sets were in practicing archer push-ups, you could finish off your push chain with chest flys and triceps extensions. Or you were going heavy on a hack squat machine, so you finished with some leg extensions and hamstring curls.

In either case, ensure you reverse fatigue management in your finisher phase compared to your proficiency phase. In the proficiency phase, you save a little energy in each set to get some more practice. Finisher phase techniques are different, so you want to use every ounce of energy and deplete the muscles in no more than one or two sets.

So that's the basic gist of the PPS approach, but here are the main points to put a collective bow on the whole deal.

- Spend roughly 75% of your time and energy performing basic pushing, pulling, and squatting motions.

- Practice flexion, extension, and lateral exercises (core training) for warm-ups or active recovery days.
- Use any tool and exercises you like; just make sure they are conducive to your goals, i.e., strength, power, etc.
- Program your weekly routine to fit your schedule and resources so you can stick to your workout plan. The most important thing is to just get the work in.
- Train for strength or skill first when you're fresh, and manage fatigue to get in some good practice.
- Finish with easier compound exercises or single-joint techniques and finish fast.

These six points can make a massive difference toward more effective and efficient training. They provide just enough structure to guide you through better workouts while allowing you the flexibility to adapt to your ever-changing circumstances.

# PPS Programming

Focusing on your three basic movement chains means you're putting more time and energy towards the exercises that will be more influential in helping you reach your goals. Your workouts will become more effective simply because you focus more on those techniques. Your workouts will also be more effective regardless of how you structure your weekly routines.

Most of what makes a routine effective is your ability to work your muscles continuously over time. If you can work your muscles consistently, that's 90% of what makes a plan effective, regardless of how you structure it.

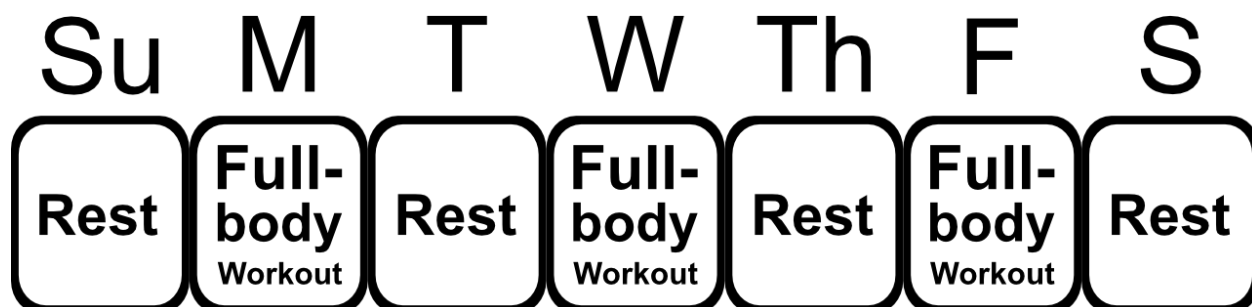
So, when building out your workout routine, consider personal factors like your schedule, resources, and preferences. The most important thing is to plan your workouts so they are easier to maintain. If you can do that, you're already most of the way to an effective training plan.

The other important consideration of a weekly plan is to allow for adequate recovery between workouts. Many variables influence how much recovery you need. A few examples are training volume, training intensity, physical condition,

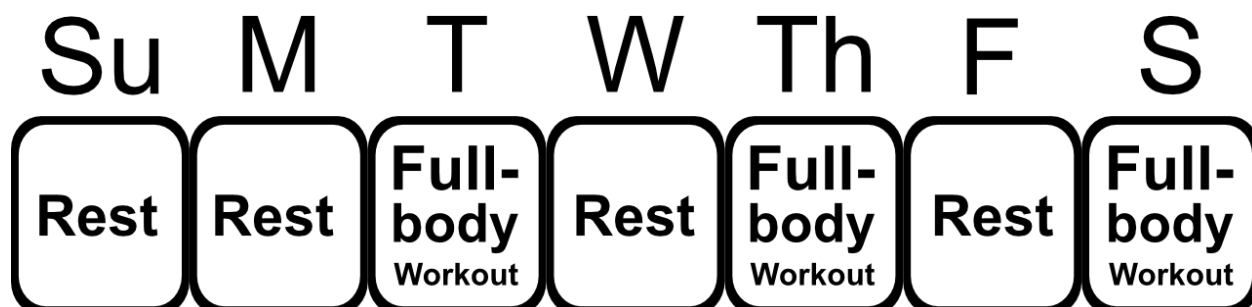
However, that doesn't mean your weekly plan isn't important. A plan that doesn't allow recovery and is difficult to stick to will compromise your ability to train with intensity and proficiency. The following templates are a good place to start. Still, it's your responsibility to adjust and modify these templates however you see fit if they compromise your ability to train as well as possible.

## **Full-chain training templates**

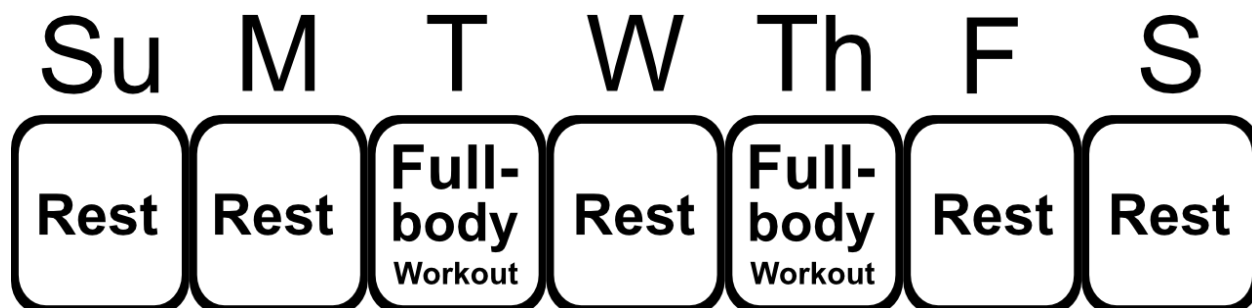
You can approach full-chain workouts with a movement chain focus in several ways. The first is to train all six chains in each workout, where you first apply the support chains (ELF) as a general warm-up. You then pour most of your effort into your movement chains (PPS)



The template above is your typical full-chain Mon. Wed. Fri. approach can work well for those who work a classic 40-hour work week.



This routine is the same approach but places one of the workouts on the weekend. Some people enjoy a weekend workout that feels more relaxed and low-key since it's not performed on a workday.



A two-a-week approach is perfect for those who are tired on the third workout of the week. Again, you don't get results from how hard you work but from how well you train. So if you find you're not training as well on that third workout, give a template like this a try.

### Split chain routines

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S
Rest	PPS	ELF	PPS	ELF	PPS	ELF

This workout template lets you focus on your movement chains in one workout and then use the support chains as “active recovery. Your goal with the support chain days is to get a few light to moderate sets in for the flexion, extension, and lateral chains to get the blood flowing a bit, but not enough to feel drained afterward.

### Week 1

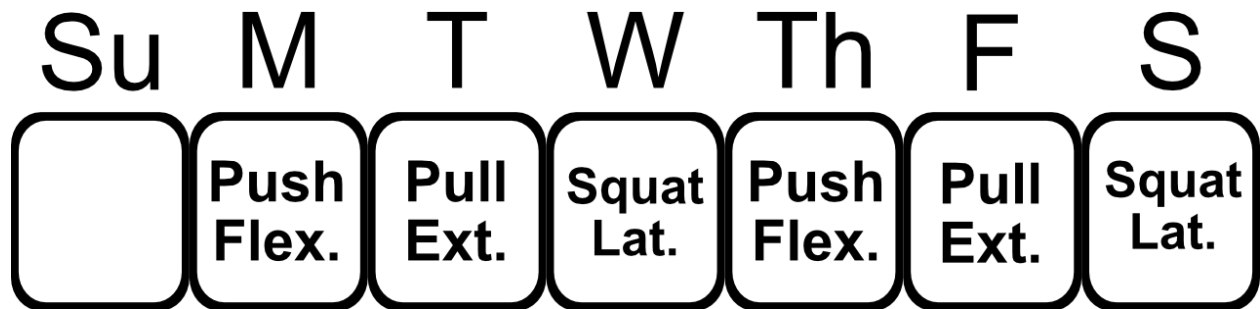
Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S
Rest	ELF	Rest	PPS	Rest	ELF	Rest

### Week 2

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S
Rest	PPS	Rest	ELF	Rest	PPS	Rest

This split-chain template is a little more friendly to those who don't want to train daily. It involves using your movement chains twice with one support chain workout in the first week. Week two inverts the routine with two support chain workouts and one movement chain session. Alternating between the two may

help those who leave everything they have in the movement chain sessions and crave more recovery every other week.



This final training template is another popular approach where you focus on one movement chain and one supplemental support chain each day. It's a favorite of those who enjoy training most days of the week but wish to keep the workouts short, focused, and simple.

Feel free to change the order and combinations within these templates. All these templates can work very well, so use the ones that work well for your resources and preferences.

# The P.P.S Challenge

PPS. is more of an approach to strength training rather than a specific program. It's a structured framework that acts as a guide, while allowing you to fill in that framework as you like. You can use any exercises, tools, or techniques you wish. So be creative and build out your own routine.

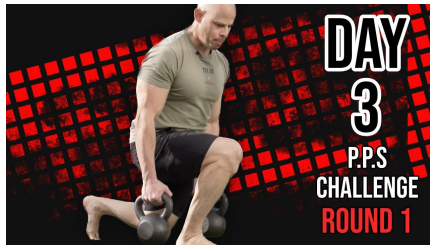
However, I did craft a specific workout program you can use with the PPS approach if you want. I call it the PPS challenge and it's a 6-round workout that works in a 4-day rotation. Day 1 is pushing, day 2 is pulling, day 3 is squatting and then the fourth day is a support chain recovery workout.

You can use this 6-round format however you like. I originally, created each workout video in December, so it ended up becoming a 24 days of PPS sort of thing to celebrate the holiday season. You can certainly, follow the same pattern, but you're probably going to have an easier time applying the workouts in a more long-term format.

Each round is structured to be a stand alone routine, so you can assign each round to a week, two weeks, or even a whole month. Practicing one round a month means the PPS challenge can give you a full six months worth of workouts. You can also cycle through the six rounds indefinitely providing you with years worth of workout routines. Once again, it gives you a flexible framework to apply the workouts in a way that fits your schedule and preferences. Some people find they get bored with a round after a few weeks. Other's prefer to practice each round for six weeks or even longer to squeeze all of the progress they can make from each workout before changing things up. Either approach works fine, so do what you prefer. Let's dive right into the challenge.

Each image below is a link to the video explaining that day's workout as well as a simple "tech tip" that will help you get the most out of the exercise for that workout.

## Round 1



## Round 2





## Round 3



## Round 4



## Round 5



## Round 6



# PPS Q&A

I know you may still have some questions about this approach so allow me to take the remaining few pages to address the most common ones I've received.

## **What if I don't fatigue much during a proficiency phase?**

You want to manage your fatigue to get a decent amount of practice in during the proficiency phase, but you don't want to take it too easy. Whether you're training for strength, power, coordination, or skill, you should be pushing yourself hard enough to become fatigued at some point.

Don't be afraid to increase the intensity of your proficiency phase. If you can do endless sets of 25# weighted dips, bump up to 35#. If you can hold that planche forever, advance to a more challenging technique.

You aren't seeking fatigue in the proficiency phase, but you're not necessarily avoiding it. Fatigue is simply the cost of pushing yourself to your limits and beyond.

## **How do I record these workouts?**

This approach's structured yet flexible nature can be challenging to record in a traditional workout log. It's only natural for variables like weight, reps, and sets to fluctuate from one workout to the next.

These variations are a natural consequence of objective-based workouts. You're not training to conform to a dogmatic formula but instead to accomplish a fundamental objective. In this case, it's to improve either your proficiency or to create fatigue.

That's why the best way to record PPS workouts is to track your performance during the proficiency phase of each workout. Your success depends heavily on your performance, and it's crucial to progress your weight, reps, and technique during this phase of your workout. Your sets will fluctuate, but it shouldn't be a large fluctuation, especially once you are setting into your training habits. Sure,

you'll have the occasional session where you perform significantly more or fewer sets than normal, but those instances should be exceptions that don't warrant tracking.

Track the average number of sets you perform. If you usually do 4-5 sets, use that number. Don't worry if you only get two sets in one or two workouts or go crazy with seven sets because your gym crush is watching you. Just track the usual number of sets you get.

You probably don't need to track your finisher phase. You'll inevitably find yourself with varying energy and focus levels as you enter your finisher phase from one workout to the next. These natural variations will predictably make your numbers in the finisher phase inconsistent and harder to track.

That's why I say don't bother with tracking that part of your workout. You don't need to increase your numbers to accomplish the objective of the finisher phase anyway. It doesn't matter if you burn out your back and biceps doing 15 bodyweight rows or 18. The exercise will accomplish your objective as long as you burn out the muscles no matter how you do it.

You may, however, want to make some notes on what you did for the finisher phase just to remind yourself what's working well for you. You don't need to get too much into detail; just write something like "finished with 95# pull-down" so you have a reference for the exercise and weight you used for next time.

### **How many exercises should I practice?**

You don't need to practice every conceivable exercise, just as you don't need to sample every item on a buffet to have a satisfying meal.

Most exercises are just different "flavors" of the same fundamental techniques. A dumbbell bench press, machine chest press, and weighted push-ups are all horizontal pushing techniques, so they all do the same general thing.

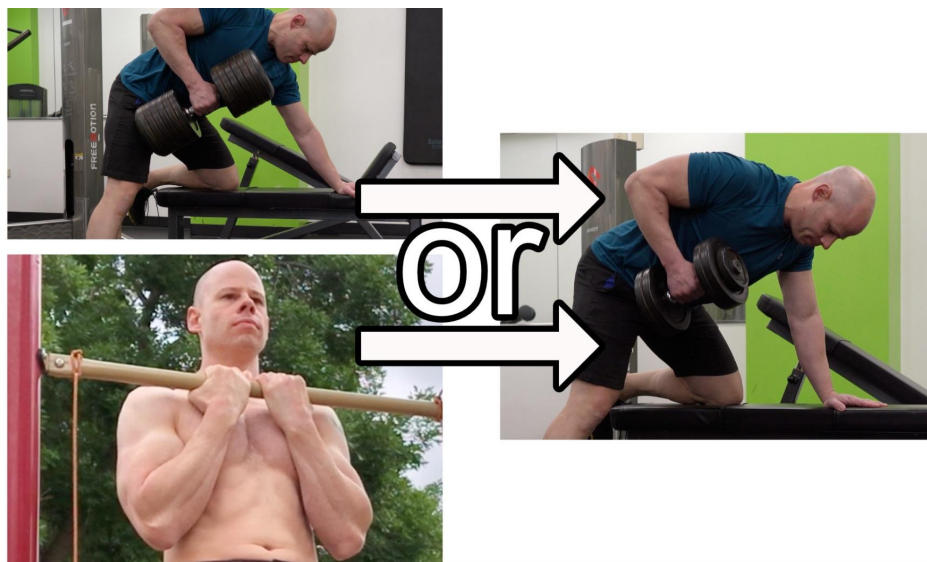
The key is to use a technique that you feel is the best for you. Maybe you love weighted push-ups but don't like how that chest press machine feels on your shoulders. Focusing on your favorite technique while ignoring the rest is perfectly



fine. Don't let exercise FOMO make you feel like you should be doing more. Your success depends on how well you train, not how much work you do.

Mastering a handful of basic techniques will always produce better results than struggling to use every exercise in the gym. If you have a couple of favorites, mix and swap them in your training. You could do weighted push-ups for a couple of weeks and then switch to a dumbbell bench press. Or maybe you do your weighted push-ups at home because you couldn't get to the gym that day. You're getting the same job done either way.

I recommend using different exercises for the proficiency and finisher phases. Switching from one phase to the next is a great opportunity to work from different angles and positions. Not only does this variety make training more fun, but it also helps to work your muscles and joints more holistically.



*A heavy dumbbell row to a light dumbbell row is fine, but you'll creating a more wider variety of stimuli by selecting exercises with different angles, tools, and approaches.*

Contrary to common perception, working in slightly different ways doesn't work "different muscles." Instead, it works the same muscles in slightly different ways. If you're going to do more work, you may as well make a change in how you work your body to gain more benefits.

**What about muscle imbalances and injuries?**

Understandably, any program focusing on a few exercises may make you vulnerable to weakness and imbalance. You can only cover so much ground with a limited approach, regardless of how comprehensive your techniques are.

However, PPS focuses on three basic tension chains rather than specific exercises. This distinction allows you to use various tools, angles and exercises to cover more ground while still using a simple and focused program.

You can change your angles, speed, and range of motion and switch from bilateral to unilateral techniques whenever you like. Not only will this variety make your training more interesting, but it also helps to prevent imbalances from developing.

### **How do I keep from getting bored?**

Once again, you can change your training to incorporate an endless variety. However, changing what you do is only partially effective for staving off boredom.

The best way to stay interested in training is to focus on making progress. Your mind will naturally stay engaged when you go into each training session to improve your technique, tension control, or performance.

### **Aren't I neglecting certain areas like the upper chest or lateral shoulder?**

Not necessarily. The attention on specific areas, like the upper chest, mostly comes from the sport of bodybuilding, where a few millimeters of growth or symmetry can make a difference in your competition scores.

Most people are not competitive bodybuilders, so they don't need specific exercises to address such areas. Basic compound exercises will cover all of those areas just fine. It's not like you won't ever build up your upper chest if you never do an incline bench press. I promise you'll still build some well-developed deltoids despite never doing lateral raises.

Feel free to add in whatever techniques you like. An incline dumbbell bench press can be a great push chain exercise. Lateral raises can be a good finisher move afterward, but you won't miss them if you don't practice those moves.

The best way to ensure you grow those targeted areas is to focus on building the general muscle group as much as possible. The best way to build your upper chest is to build your entire chest. The best way to build wider shoulders is to make your entire shoulder muscle group bigger. If you make your whole leg bigger and stronger, you probably won't need to worry about your lateral quad sweep.

### **Do I always have to perform a finisher?**

Not at all. The finisher puts the cherry on top of your workout, but it's not necessary to build muscle. You're still creating a stimulus for building muscle from the proficiency phase of your training.

It's also a good idea to skip the finishing phase if you are short on time or energy. It's probably a good idea not to drive yourself into the ground if you're fighting a cold or feeling off that day.

### **I'm worried I will get tight from training; got any mobility techniques?**

The best mobility exercises are strength techniques that use a large range of motion. Naturally, you'll find some pushing, pulling, and squatting techniques to offer a good range of motion in your joints.

Pull-ups can stretch the back and shoulders, dips and deep chest presses work the chest, and any deep squatting or lunging technique mobilize your hips.

Feel free to experiment with techniques that stretch chronically tight muscles. When in doubt, stretch a muscle, like your lateral hip, directly when you wish.

### **How do I balance PPS with other activities like sports and martial arts?**

Programing PPS with other physical activities boils down to managing fatigue and recovery. You want to be aware of how your strength training and sports practice relate to each other so they don't create too much of an interference effect.

If you run a hard 5K every Wednesday night, there may be better times to work your squat chain than Tuesday and Thursday. It makes much more sense to plan your squat chain workouts so they don't leave you with tired legs on race day. You also wouldn't want to work your squat chain right after so you can stand the best chance of working your legs hard without being tired from the race.

You'll have to experiment with how you feel and recover from your sports training. Some training sessions may not require too much energy so they won't interfere much with strength training and vice versa. Sometimes, recovering from a strength training session or sports practice may not be possible, so you'll have to adjust how hard you push yourself in your workouts.

Always remember, you don't have to recover from exercise. You only need to recover from stress and fatigue. Adjust your training volume accordingly to give yourself the best chance at recovery.

### **Does PPS mean I should give up deadlifts?**

PPS focuses on your movement chains while using the support chains as accessory work. The deadlift is a posterior or extension chain technique, which would be of secondary importance in this case.

However, while PPS emphasizes your movement chains, it doesn't mean you should neglect your support chains. You're just not using them as the meat and potatoes of your training plan.

It may seem blasphemous even to consider the deadlift an accessory lift. In some cases, it may not even be suitable or necessary at all. Of course, that's not going to be the case if the deadlift is a fundamental exercise for your discipline. You certainly wouldn't treat the deadlift as a secondary technique if you were a powerlifter or strength athlete since it's super important for your sport.

But most people don't need to place that degree of attention on their extension chain to reach their goals. (I can hear the angry villagers storming my email inbox as I write this.) But this doesn't mean the deadlift isn't a valuable tool if you want to use it for your extension work.



Here's another controversial perspective; you don't need to lift super heavy on the deadlift to get most of the benefit. Yes, the siren call of the deadlift is to lift as much weight as possible, and that's great, but it's not the only way to go about it. You can still reap many benefits from using a modest amount of weight.

The primary benefit of training the support chains comes from synergistically working all of the muscles along the chain as a cohesive unit. Support chains primarily train you to create alignment and force transfer along the body. You certainly want to work those muscles, but you don't have to train them to a super high level of intensity all the time to experience those benefits.

I'm certainly not against heavy support chain training; far from it. I'm just saying that you don't always have to go heavy. So don't feel you have always to have a super heavy weight in your hands to have any chance at having a strong extension chain or core. The heavy stuff is primarily reserved for the movement chains. You can work with moderate resistance on the support chains and still build a strong, functional, and visually inspiring body.

### **Is the trap bar deadlift an extension chain or a squat chain exercise?**

The trap bar deadlift is one of the best bang-for-the-buck exercises you can practice. It can work your extension chain but is also an effective squat chain exercise.

If you lift with mostly hip extension, then it's primarily a deadlift technique. The more you bend your knees, the more it's a squat chain exercise.



The trap bar deadlift is a great squat/extension chain combo exercise. Hinging more at the hips (left) makes it more of an extension chain exercise, while using the low handles, and bending the knees more makes it more squat chain dominant.

I've always preferred to use the lower handles on the trap bar and to bend the knees as much as possible when having clients use the trap bar. Bending the knees ensures you are training your squat and extension chains.

Another squat/extension chain exercise I like is the zercher squat. Loading the front of the arms with a barbell or sandbag is a fantastic way to add resistance to squats, lunges, and step-ups. It doesn't place much weight on your spine and can even give you a supplemental upper-body workout. But the real benefit is your extension chain much also work hard to prevent the weight from pulling you down and forward.



*The zercher squat is another effective squat/extension chain combo with more emphasis on the squat chain than the trap bar deadlift.*

### **Is this enough work to be effective?**

It's easy to be skeptical of a simplistic program like PPS. PPS is simple in its focus, but it gives you the freedom to practice any number of exercises you like. You're not limited in what you do, but you do have to maintain your focus on pushing, pulling, and squatting much of the time.

Your success has much more to do with your level of proficiency rather than how much work you do. You may recall that Mark only practiced three basic exercises, yet he was easily the biggest and strongest guy in the gym. It wasn't because he did more work than the rest of us; he was much better at doing those exercises.

### **So will PPS make me strong at everything?**

Sometimes people hold the opposite beliefs about focused programs. All you need are these basic movements because they make you strong at everything. You don't need anything else!

The fundamental techniques of PPS cover a lot of ground, but they are not omnipotent. No exercise can make you strong and proficient at everything. You can perform 100 pistol squats on each leg yet struggle to run a 5K. You may also be a bench press champion, but that doesn't necessarily mean you can throw a decent punch.

PPS is great for general strength and conditioning but far from optimal for anything specific. If you have specific goals, like running a 5K or breaking boards with a punch, you will certainly have to train for those goals. PPS will help you prepare for those events, but strength training is supplemental to sport-specific training. Nothing will ever prepare you for everything, so be clear about what you want so you can focus your training accordingly.

### **What about overhead shoulder work?**

Most pulling and squatting techniques are close variations of one another, so it doesn't matter much if you do one variation today and another different exercise tomorrow.

One of the few exceptions is the business of doing overhead pressing exercises compared to horizontal techniques and dips. Dips and push-ups are very close to one another (or at least they should be), yet there's no doubt doing an overhead press can feel quite different. It's still a push chain exercise, so how do you fit it into the program?

One option is to swap overhead work with other pushing exercises. So you might do advanced push-ups today and handstand push-ups in your next push chain workout.

You can also do both horizontal and vertical pressing in the same workout. This approach can work very well, but be aware that there's still a lot of overlap between the two motions. You're still working your shoulders and triceps very hard in both cases. The primary difference is how much emphasis you place on your shoulders and chest. Granted, you're still working your chest with overhead work and your shoulders with horizontal training.

Another option is to make your overhead pressing work your primary push chain exercise for several weeks. Some people enjoy doing this if they want to focus on building up their shoulders. If you choose this option, use a horizontal exercise or some chest flies as part of your finishers to work your chest thoroughly.

The last option is to leave out overhead pressing altogether. Some people suffer joint issues with overhead pressing, and it's not in their best interest to keep focusing on the exercise. Your shoulders are still working hard with other pushing

and pulling exercises, so it's unnecessary to include overhead pressing. Mark had some of the broadest shoulders you've ever seen and never did overhead work.

### **How do I put PPS into immediate practice?**

Now that you have a basic idea of how the PPS approach works, here are several ideas for immediate application.

#### **#1 Modify your current training program.**

PPS can be applied to almost any workout program. You have the freedom to adopt any training program to the PPS approach. All you need to do is rearrange the exercises you currently practice so you spend more time on the pushing, pulling, and squatting movements. Place the core work at the beginning of your routines as a warm-up.

Lastly, place the exercises most suitable for the proficiency phase toward the beginning of the workout. Then write in the exercises suitable for the finisher phase toward the end.

Remember to adopt a more flexible approach to volume as well. Your old program may say to do two sets of pull-ups, but use however many sets you like if it's in the proficiency phase. If your old program says to do five sets of biceps curls, ramp up the weight or reps so you burn out in just one or two for the finisher.

#### **#2 Start with exercises you can use right now.**

If you're starting from scratch, take stock of any training methods you can immediately use. Maybe your apartment complex has a series of weight machines in the community gym. Perhaps you only have a collection of bands and a doorway pull-up bar.

Whatever, the case, identify a few of the pushing, pulling, and squatting exercises you can start to practice. You only need a couple of basic exercises to get started. Apply whatever you can to one of the workout templates listed earlier.

#### **#3 Have a coach help you build your routine**

Nothing will fast-track your workout program like hiring a coach to help you build your workout plan. You can find plenty of eager trainers at your local gym or do a simple internet search for local independent trainers.

You can also hire me to help build your workout plan. Simply send an inquiry for remote coaching to [reddeltaproject@gmail.com](mailto:reddeltaproject@gmail.com).

The important thing is not to overthink your routine. You can waste a lot of time analyzing every little detail. Some considerations are important, but most aren't. Your program will work just so long as you can stick to it and make progress. Any changes and considerations that can help you achieve those two objectives are probably worthwhile. Most other details are too trivial to make any difference.

When in doubt, learn from experience. If you're unsure about something, put it into practice for a few weeks and see if you receive some effective feedback. The answers you need probably won't be found on the internet or in a book but through your experience.

So I will leave you to your training. Stay focused, have fun and enjoy the process. If you have any questions, reach out to me via email at [reddeltaproject@gmail.com](mailto:reddeltaproject@gmail.com). Otherwise, best of luck, and stay strong!

Be Fit, Live Free,

- Matt Schifferle