

Squat Til You Drop

by

Alan Palmieri

Over the years I've written countless articles concerning the squat, some favorable and some not so favorable. Some based on Vince Gironda's spin on the movement and some of my own that present a direct opposite view. Some people have real back, knee, or hip problems that make the movement impossible if not dangerous to perform. Others use minor aches and pains as an excuse to avoid the most draining of all bodybuilding movements. Another group will claim, as did Vince Gironda, that squatting only spreads the hips and builds a large butt. Well, for some Vince was right, but remember, the butt or glutes is one of the largest muscles in the body. It should and does need to be worked. What bodybuilder would ignore working one of the largest muscles in the body?

Okay, okay... so I've once again offended some people. What's new! The point I'm trying to make is that squats should not automatically be thought of as a pain or avoided because of the negative effect some people think it has on the body. In fact just the opposite is true for the vast majority of people, bodybuilders and non-bodybuilders alike. The one common aspect everyone has with the squat is how demanding it is on the body.

Today, since my heart attack I pretty much train totally instinctively. I don't push myself as I did prior to the attack and certainly do not use weights as heavy as before. I've also eliminated some movements, cut back on others, and changed the way I performed still other old time standard movements. Regular heavy back squats happen to

be one of the movements I am talking about. Oh I still squat alright but not heavy full back squats.

Now days it's more various versions of Sissy Squats, Front Squats, Lunge Squats, Dumbbell Squats and the likes. Ah yes, but at one time did I ever love the squat. So much so I can remember one session that defines the words "stupidity" – "over-training" – "dumb" and a host of other not so complimentary words that accurately apply to squat sessions I have... have mind you, participated in – in the past.

The three of us were pretty close. Big Rick was a massive individual, 6'5" and 320 pounds of solid flesh. Rick wrestled and played football. Pro in both for a short time until he somehow developed a crack in his spine that made his legs go numb when he turned or stood a certain way. On doctors orders he had to give up all such physical activity. Jeff was not as big and not as strong. He stood about 6'2" and weight around 280 pounds. Me, I was the runt of the litter at 5'11" and about 220 pounds. We worked out together from time to time and always had productive workouts. I really loved watching Big Rick train and I loved working with him when I was in a power or heavy lifting cycle. He was pure inspiration.

I have always preferred to train alone but if training with someone else, I wanted them to be bigger and stronger so they could push me to my limits. No problem there. Rick and Jeff were both strong and liked to work fast and furiously. Rick could do 315 pounds in the press behind the neck for reps. I could never even come close to that but his strength made me work harder. It was motivation.

During one training session, on a Saturday, we had the gym almost all to ourselves, just the three of us. It was leg day and I said, "Let's just blast legs until we can't move". "The first one who quits is out". Like being "out" was some penalty. Well, at that time to Rick, Jeff or me it was something. None of us would want to be the first or even second one down and out. Pride you know.

Over the years I've worked out until I became physically sick more than a few times. Looking back I see the foolishness of it, but as with a lot of things in my past, I hope I've learned from mistakes. This Saturday was one such day and I don't think I'll ever forget it.

Set one. 135 for 25 reps of full and I do mean full, not parallel squats. All the way down and all the way back up. Deep breathing starts on reps 12 or 15.

Set two. 225 for 15 reps of full squats. I won't say it again but all sets are full and I do mean full, not parallel squats. Down so low the butt is almost touching the floor.

Set three. 275 for 12 reps.

Set four. 315 for 12 reps.

Set five. 405 for 10 reps.

Set six. 495 for 6 reps.

Set seven. 495 for 5 reps.

Set eight. 405 for all we could do. About 5 reps.

Set nine. 315 for all we could do. About 6-8 reps.

Set ten. 225 for all we could do. About 8 reps.

Some may not find that very challenging but for Rick, Jeff, and me it was all we could do. Squats were performed with no blocks under our heels. Each rep was a full squat. No rest between sets, as soon as one man finished the next man stepped in. We didn't just stop with squats either, we did three other killer movements.



Arnold Schwarzenegger and Dave Draper at the original Joe Gold's gym. Dave is performing a full squat the way it should be done. Rough yes... but rewarding... once you get finished that is.

Immediately after 10 sets of full squats we hit hack squats for 4 sets with all the weight we could handle for 8 reps in each set. We used a Flex Hack Squat unit and placed 3 – 45's on each side, 270 pounds plus the weight of the slide unit. All the way down and just short of lockout at the top on each rep to keep constant tension on the Quads. Let me tell you, the legs are on fire at this point.

Then immediately after the last set of hacks we did leg extensions for 4 sets with all the weight we could handle for 10 reps per set. Once again the unit was a Flex Seated Leg Extension unit and around 100 pounds is what we used. Finally leg curls. 4 sets of 10 reps... you guessed it, with all the weight we could handle, a Flex Leg Curl unit with about 80 pounds.

Talk about sick. I had a good fifteen years on these guys. They use to kid me back then by calling me “old man.” Well, the “old man” kept up but boy did I feel it. Not only me but Rick and Jeff had their fill as well. The problem was none of us was willing to let the other one know how bad we felt. As soon as we finished in the weight room it was Rick who said, “Okay guys now it's a two mile run.” Oh my gosh!!! Surely not!!!

We had a stretch marked off outside the gym on a side road that was one mile in length. Just about a third of the way the road started to incline and around half way it came to a peak. We quite often would run it all the way down and back for a nice two mile jog. Now by an incline remember, we are in East Tennessee where hills are hills. There is no such thing as a bump; it's a hill or a mountain, one or the other. Later that evening Rick told me he was just kidding but once he saw Jeff heading to the door he knew he said the wrong thing.

Jeff was not very happy and his language let it be known. I sure wasn't happy either. Joke or no joke it was taken as a challenge and so it had to be accepted and carried out. That's the way the three of us trained back then. I could tell you some real good stories about our training. We called our most grueling workout sessions being in "The Valley" because they were so demanding. The next day Jeff came by and said: "Never again man." "Rick has got to be an idiot; after all we did he still had enough in him to run two miles, never again."

The three of us completed the two mile run. It wasn't pretty and it wasn't fast but we did it. Even before we could get our breath all three of us emptied our stomachs rolled on the ground and moaned and groaned for a good forty-five minutes. I hadn't been that sick even during bouts with the flu. The workout will be forever etched in my mind. I had pushed myself beyond my own limits many times and during each workout I discovered new grounds I had not stood on before. I always learned a lesson during those sessions. The one I learned during that Saturday was never to do that again and I haven't. I also learned the meaning of "just say no." From that day on, I didn't have a problem letting a training partner know I was not going to be challenged beyond what I felt comfortable with.

There is a line between all out effort and stupidity. It was crossed that Saturday. Younger in better shape and condition and not very wise, I paid a dear price for the foolishness of the day. It was a full week before I could even think about working out again. I could barely walk and felt pain in every step I took. It was so physically

demanding I couldn't even get to sleep at night. Training like that does more harm than good. Once in a lifetime... all out do or die effort in a workout can leave a lasting impression. Taken to the limits it will also leave scars. I would never, under any circumstance suggest or advise following the workout I just spoke of.

I am certain some can use more weight in the lifts, some can do more reps., and some may even be able to add additional exercises to the routine. The reenactment I just described may only be of interest for those with the experience to understand what we went through. It may also be one of those things that... "You had to be there." For me, the lack of rest between sets and reps is what was so difficult. There was not enough time to oxygen re-load. That workout is what nightmares are made of. That day I discovered my limit.

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