



## Legendary Strength Podcast Episode 13

### Deadlift Training

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Welcome. It's Logan Christopher with the Legendary Strength Podcast. Today, we're going to be talking about one of my favorite exercises of all time. I'm talking about the deadlift. Now the deadlift, not a lot of people get harassed, but it's such a great exercise so I want to start by talking a little bit about why I love it, why I think it's a great exercise, and then by then end of this episode, I want to get into all the details on why I've had some success with the deadlift and what the keys have been for me that have really pushed up the numbers.

At a body weight of, I don't remember if I was 185 or 190 at the time, I deadlifted 505 pounds which was an over two and a half times body weight deadlift. This year, I plan on cracking 600 pounds, once again publicly committing myself to that. I'm working on it. I think it is going to happen and that will be an over triple body weight deadlift. I'm currently at 180 so in order to hit that, I might be gaining a little weight but even then, unless I go over 200 pounds, it'll still be more than a triple body weight deadlift.

The Deadlift: Why do I like it?

Well, for one reason it's one lift that I'm actually somewhat built well for. Of all the things I'm doing, the handstands, gymnastics, and all that stuff, I'm quite tall at 6'2" and weight about 180 pounds right now so I'm not really built for these things but the deadlift is one thing that I am fairly well built for, much better than the squat or the bench for instance. I am not built for the squat at all. Just having that natural predisposition towards it, I've taken to the deadlift a lot more than I have towards the squat. Now the squat's a great exercise, too. I just prefer the deadlift and like it a lot.

One of the other reasons I really like it is it goes in along the lines of my deceptive strength idea where I want to be as strong as I possibly can be but I don't want to be huge. I don't want to look like I'm that strong. Sure, I want to look good and everything but I don't want to become huge in order to do this. I want to pull 600 pounds but I don't want to have to weight 250 or 300 pounds in order to be able to do it. I want to stay relatively at my body weight right now. It can go up a little a bit more. I'm actually at the minimum of what I want to be as far as going down so it might increase a little bit but that's really part of what I want to do. I don't want to gain a lot of weight because one, that would really interfere with all my bodyweight goals as well, making them all harder.

Another reason I really like the deadlift is because it's primal. There's something satisfying about just seeing how much weight I can lift up off the ground. You're not putting it overhead or anything. That's all great but just picking up a massive amount of weight from the ground and lifting it is really cool on that level. It is an exercise that you could handle a lot of weight and when you handle a lot of weight in whatever you do, it just seems more fun.

I remember the first time I ever got into strength training at all, my brother was putting me through some workouts in order to prepare me for the high school football season. Let me remind you in case you forgot that I was really scrawny and weak as a kid. I had no natural strength. Let's just put it that way.

I was working on the deadlift. That was one of the many exercises I was doing. I remember one day I was actually able to pick up more than a hundred pounds. Getting into the triple digits, I was actually for the first time really excited like I'm actually handling a decent-sized weight right now. There wasn't even a wheel on each side. I forgot if we had standard plates or not but it was something just to break that hundred-pound limit. Obviously, I lifted a lot more up to this point but that was something that really stuck with me at the beginning. It is a lift that you can handle a lot of weight and that's really good.

Moving on, I want to talk about the whole deadlift form issue. The deadlift, more than a lot of other things people say, you need to have correct form. I am not a huge believer in "correct form" but definitely with the deadlift there are certain things you need to take into consideration. For whatever reason, a certain number of people can seem to get away with round back deadlifting and not suffer any sort of consequence from doing such. I am one of these people. There are several other even elite-level lifters who don't deadlift with classic form.

Just because certain people are doing this doesn't mean that you should. You really have to figure out if it works for you body or not. Teaching anyone, I encourage them to start with that correct form, keeping the back, the lower back especially, really arched, getting into the position, and going from there. What

seems to happen to some people if they're not used to this position at all, everyone kind of reverts to round back once the weight gets really heavy. It's kind of interesting. If that's your strongest position, why are you coming out of this with the weight just pulling you out but if you're able to lift something with more of a round back and you're actually stronger there.

There is some debate to it. Still, you should get good coaching on the deadlift as far as doing it right in order to get started. I would encourage everyone to definitely start with that classically correct form just to make sure you don't hurt yourself. It does seem to be biomechanically a better position. For whatever reason, as long as I'm listening to my body even if I'm not in that perfect position, the deadlift does not seem to hurt my body, even if I'm working with massive weights. Once again, this is something that you're going to have to figure out for yourself to work with, and see what happens to work for you.

One of the reasons I like the deadlift as well is because I've had quite a bit of success in it and anything you have success with, you seem to like more. I like the idea—I think that [Eric Guttman](#) was talking about this—of choosing your nemesis exercise. What's the one exercise—and you'll probably know this off the top of your head—that more than anything, you don't want to do at all just because it's so hard and so difficult? There is definitely good reason to go after and work on that exercise because if it's a nemesis, it basically means whatever it is, you're weak at it. That's why you don't like it so much. It can be because you don't like it or it can actually be like a weakness in your body whereas if you spend time to bring that up, you're going to do much better.

Still, there is also value in working with the exercises you like a lot. What happened for me was after I had gotten through the whole biofeedback training, which I'll talk a little bit about because it really ties into how I do the deadlift, over the period of summer—I forget, this was maybe two years ago—a couple of months, my deadlift just kept going up and up and up. It didn't seem to end. It was closing in towards that 500-pound mark but then I went back to gymnastics and stopped deadlifting so much and all that. By following my biofeedback, I was able to do it without this classic form and just saw my numbers keep increasing and going up and up and everything like that. I wasn't hurting myself at all so that was really cool.

Later once I got back into the deadlifting, I was pursuing that 505-pound goal and I was able to hit it. Again, I was using biofeedback training a lot. That is testing your exercises to see how your body is reacting to them, whether it's a good exercise to go with or variation and all that. In this time—this is contrary to what most people will tell you to do with the deadlift—the deadlift is usually trained at most I'd say once a week in most programs. Some beginner stuff, just getting used to it can be twice a week, something about most elite people—I'm not necessarily calling myself elite at this—train in this exercise not very often.

For instance, [Dru Patrick](#), who I'll be talking a little more about who was at the [Superhuman Training Workshop](#), ends up training his deadlift once every two and a half weeks, something like that. That's not very often at all yet he is able to get much stronger doing that. For me, during this time when I was going up to 505 pounds, I was actually training to deadlift or some variation of it for at least three times a week. The only reason I was able to do it with that sort of volume, although these weren't necessarily

all high volume days, doing it with that sort of frequency was because I was listening to my body's biofeedback and I was varying the intensity of the exercise. I was never going all out super intense. If you do that or try to do that three times a week, it's not going to work.

There are basically two ways that you can train successfully. You can do quite a bit of frequency and volume as long as the intensity of everything you do is moderated. By intensity, I'm not talking about how heavy of a weight it is but how much effort you put into that. You can do a lot of training if you don't do all that much effort into it, which is also a big part of the biofeedback training. It works very well.

A different model is you can go balls to the wall in everything you do. If you do this though, you need time to recover. You need lots of time to recover. Most people that go with this route don't allow enough time to recover and that's really what leads to injury and all that. So these are two different models. I highly encourage you to experiment and find what works for you.

For me, especially since a lot of what I do is more skill oriented so it requires more consistent practice, I'm really working with the moderated intensity, much more frequent practice. Doing this with the deadlift, even though I'm handling heavy weights, I can work with different variations of the exercise and can actually do it three, sometimes four, times a week with some variation and actually be setting PRs. I've never been a big person with light, medium, or heavy days or anything like that. If I'm going to lift, I'm going to try to set PRs. I don't like to ease back. That doesn't mean I'm going balls to wall but I'm still going to be working to some degree. Eventually, following this, I was able to hit the 505-pound goal. After that, I changed what I was working toward, stopped deadlifting for a while, and have just recently gotten back into it with, I guess I could say, full force going after that 600-pound mark.

Now I want to talk about what my training is. I mentioned a little bit about it but let's go into more detail about the number one key that has worked for me in increasing my deadlift: variation, variation in a couple of different things. First of all, in the exercises that I used and then variation in weights, reps, and sets.

Let's talk about the exercises first. When I talk about how much I love the deadlift and everything, usually the way I lift, the classical one, is I use a conventional stance and I pull from the ground. That is the main lift and what I'm really seeking to go up because when I do compete in anything like the technical strength challenge, that's the deadlift that's used. If I did other competitions, that would be the lift that is used so that's my main benchmark and what the goals happen to be.

But that's not the only lift that I train with. Right now, I've actually just been working with that and the [Jefferson deadlift](#) which is where you straddle the bar where one foot's in front of it and one foot is behind. I've been working with just those two variations. I need to start bringing back in more of the variations like I did when I was pursuing that 505 and what led me to hitting it.

Let me mention why I like something like the Jefferson. One, it's a forgotten old-time lift that not many people do so just for that reason alone, I seem to like it more. I really enjoy the exercise by itself for a couple of reasons. One, because you're straddling the bar, you have one foot ahead of the other, you

have an offset stance. You're bringing into play a lot more, stabilizing your muscles like your obliques, and you'll feel this exercise all throughout your back, your rhomboids, everything when you're doing it because you're in this offset position. You have one hand behind the front leg and one hand in front of it so it's just an awkward position yet it is quite a stable position.

In some ways, it's better than the conventional deadlift because even though you lift real close to your body—in a conventional deadlift, pretty much everyone will say you don't want the bar out in front of you. Actually, I think everyone would say that—you're still, because the weight is slightly in front of you because your legs are in the way, you're not pulling directly in the center of gravity that you have for your body. There is some potential for hurting yourself because if your back isn't in place, you can end up being pulled out of place just because the weight is a little in front of your center of gravity. With the Jefferson, you're actually going in line with the center of gravity so overall, even though it is a bit of an awkward, twisted position, I would say it's actually a safer position.

Another way you can actually have this more safe position is to do trap bar deadlifts. In the past, I really liked these. I have a trap bar but just haven't used it recently. I enjoy the Jefferson more. That way I don't have to be offloading and unloading a bar all the time. The trap bar is another way you can do that where the weight is centered where your center of gravity is, your balance, and everything so it's a safer position to do. For those reasons, I like the trap bar.

I also really like the Jefferson deadlift. That is something that I work with a lot. I'll talk about tracking some more but I keep track of all the lifts that I do and everything with the deadlift but I basically go one-to-one ratio of working conventional to Jefferson. Going back the biofeedback idea, I just try out each exercise and see which ones feel better. Lately, that's all I've been working with, those two variations. I'm going to start bringing back in a lot more of these other variations.

One other variation of the deadlift is the sumo deadlift. The sumo deadlift sort of mimics the squat position more. People with different body types will favor this one and it's completely legit in competition. It's a completely different feel for the exercise. I'm still not very comfortable with the position. I don't like it that much but as a variation I throw it in. Sometimes, it feels really good. You're working the body differently by doing a sumo deadlift than a conventional deadlift. By getting those reps in that way, you're able to increase weight. You can do it that way which should lead to increasing what you can do with your conventional style. If you prefer sumo, then lift primarily that way but sometimes do conventional. You may find that it works well for you.

Those are some of the normal range positions or ranges of motion. You have the conventional deadlift, the sumo deadlift, a trap bar deadlift, and the Jefferson deadlift. Let me also say with the Jefferson deadlift, you can have your right foot forward, you can have your left foot forward. Likely, you're going to find one of those is better than the other. For me, it's my right foot forward but I still do reps with my left foot as well. It just has a different feel. Also with the Jefferson, you can position your body differently. You can use more of a high hip position, a lower hip position. You can be turned more to the side and face parallel with the bar or still face primarily towards the front so you're perpendicular to the

bar. There are all sorts of variation you can play within that one exercise alone. That's why I like it so much. Those are some of the normal deadlift variations I do.

Another thing I really like to work with is changing the range of motion. This is huge for really putting up your deadlift. One that isn't used too often, I don't see it too much, is an extended range of motion so you raise up your feet. There really doesn't need to be a whole lot of range of motion that needs to be added to it. You shouldn't just work on keeping on increasing it. Just adding in a couple of inches can dramatically change this lift, especially if the hard part for you is breaking the weight off of the floor. Then you'll want to work there. You're going to analyze and find what you're weakness is. In this case, it would be breaking it up off the floor. The extended range of motion deadlift specifically would help you because by working from an even worse range of motion, you're going to be building power there. Then when you go back to a normal range of motion, then you're going to be much better at doing it.

Let me say this also at this time. Actually, the deadlift just because of the weight of the plates, although that's a standard and everyone uses that, it really isn't a full range of motion itself. A full range of motion I guess would be touching your hands to the ground so it is sort of just arbitrary that it happens to be there but that is what's used in competition. It seems to be a standard that works for people so let me just say that.

In the extended range of motion, you can just work a little bit to further your range of motion. Like I said, this can really help you if you're having trouble getting the weight off the ground in the beginning. That's something you're really going to want to look at if you're pursuing deadlifts to a big degree. What is your weakness in the lift? It's not just the whole lift but there is some part of it that is holding you back because you have more than enough strength in other parts of it.

For me, it's not the ground so much. Although I like to throw these extended range of motion in every once in a while, it's really not my primary go-to exercise that I need for assistance. For me, my dead spots are somewhere around the knee region, basically a little under the knee. The best way for me to work those is set up the deadlift in a power rack at different heights that correspond to that. If I'm right around the knee range of motion, then it's very hard for me to lift it.

We were actually at the [Superhuman Training Workshop number 3](#) this past weekend and Dru was teaching the deadlift. We started off with these partial deadlifts. He set it up at one height. Depending on the height of the person and everything, it changed where the lift was. For a lot of people, it was over the thigh. For me, it happened to be right where the kneecap was. One, it was very uncomfortable to be in the position and I didn't have much power pulling from there because that is one of the weakest points for whatever reason, my leverage, my body in that and I don't have that. What that means is I need to work exactly in that range of motion despite the fact that it's uncomfortable to get a lot stronger.

The reason I'm able to pull better than what I could actually do in the rack there was because I used momentum coming up off the ground to blast through that area. If I work specifically on that dead spot a lot more, I'll have more strength there and with that, combined with the momentum of the floor, I'll

be that much stronger for the whole lift. With the power rack, and this can be done in certain ways even if you don't have a power rack, you set up the pins at different heights and work that.

A great lift that I really like that can really work the grip a whole bunch is just doing the hand and thigh lift. This is an extremely short range of motion. It's not even really a deadlift. It's not a support because you are actually lifting in place although you can hold it at the top. You're doing a very small range of motion lift where basically you are just picking it up off the top of the pins and lifting less than an inch in many cases. Often times, they call it the hand and thigh lift because you're not really using the deadlift position so much but you're actually getting your thighs a little under it and able to lift up with those as well as you do it. So it's something fun to play it with.

Working partials in all different ranges of motions is great. One thing I haven't been using recently but I used back when I did 505 was [the plateau buster](#). This is a specific item from Ryan Pitts. It's a swing handle so you can do really heavy kettlebell swings with it, which is great fun, loading up like 200 and having a two-handed device to do that. It's also great for deadlifts. It sits in a partial range of motion. You're going to be a little wider than normal but this is something that I've used a whole bunch. It was fun and [I got over 700 pounds on it](#). I had to modify it to be able to fit more plates and actually used pretty much all of the plates that I had at the time. It was very fun and it was an easier way to set up than actually getting the bar and the rack, unloading it, then loading it back up. I used this plateau buster swing handle often in order to be able to work this partial range of motion.

Those are the variations in the exercises of the deadlift that I used. Like I said, using the biofeedback training I can go into the gym and I can test out exercises, find out what works well for me and what feels the best on a given day, then I'll do that. Lately, I've just been going back and forth between the conventional stance and Jefferson deadlift and like I said the ratio seems to be one to one. How well those feel, on one day the conventional will feel better, one another day the Jefferson will feel better but I need to start working in more of these partials, specifically the partial because that is my weak point. I know by working on that, it'll bring up everything else.

Another thing I need to do is change my position slightly. I've always gone with a high hip deadlift, meaning I'm using much more of my back in order to do this. I need to be sure to squat more into position so I can use my legs as well to help with the drive. I'm altering my position a little because I know that even though it's not as grooved in as the other one and it feels a little more difficult in some ways, I know by working on it and making that a habit, it's going to be much stronger and lead to those bigger numbers that I'm going for.

The other cue of my training, like I mentioned, we have this variation of exercises but also variations of the weight, reps, and sets. This is something I like to do with everything that I do, all exercises. The deadlift just happens to be one of all exercises. It's something that I probably do even more variations of than a lot of the other stuff and I think that's a big reason for my success here versus some other places I haven't done nearly as much variations in. I need to seek that out as well.

What do I mean by variation of weights, reps, and sets or what I like to call waving the loads? If you work with a heavier load, that means you're going to have to do less sets and reps. Sure you can do a lot

of sets but the reps will definitely be lower. If you work with a lighter load, whatever light and heavy happens to be for you, then you're going to be able to do more reps and sets. Depending on what weight you're going with, that is going to dictate how many reps and sets you do. This is a way of focusing on just what you can do with a given weight rather than saying okay, I'm doing a 5x5 schedule or 5/3/1 where I'm only doing singles. If you do that, by having that frame, you're dictating exactly what sort of weight you're going to be able to use.

By changing it up here, what I find is if I increase what I can do with even something as light as 50% of my weight and sometimes even less than that, if I increase what I can do there, that in turn will lead to me being able to lift a heavier weight, to go for that big single. If I increase what I can do with that big single or with 90% intensity weight, something very high—and I can do that for doubles and triples—I increase that a little bit, that's going to increase what I can do with the easier weights. It all goes up together.

Just to give you an idea of this, these are the goals I set out this month that I'd like to hit: I wanted to do a single with 455 and I happened to hit that at the [Superhuman Training Workshop](#) so that got right out of the way real quickly. I wanted to hit 405 for a triple and also do a total of ten reps in a workout. I haven't done that one yet but it should be pretty easy if I hit 455. I should pretty easily be able to hit a triple with 405. With 365, I want to hit a set for five and also do 20 reps total in a workout so that can be four sets of five. With 315, I'd like to hit ten reps, a total of 30 in a workout. With 275, hit one set of 20 reps and hit a total of 60 reps in a workout.

If my max right now is 455 that means basically 50% is 225. If I look at my all-time max, this is about 40% to 45% of what I've lifted before, somewhere in that range. With 225—I just did this the other day and I'm a good amount sore from it—I hit a total of 100 reps and I did 25 of those in one single set. I did 25, then 15, then, 6 sets of 10 after that. That all happened in about 28 minutes.

Working these different ranges, I'll go in there, I'll test, and find out which variation of the exercise I want to work with. Then I will start with a light weight and see that that feels good. Then I'll increase it in weight. I know, with my body and having done this for a while, that I basically go back and forth or I sort of ramp up to working with a heavier weight then I go back down. So having just come off of doing 455 at the workshop, I think the next deadlift workout for me after doing that was 315, which I was doing four sets of six. I'm getting closer to my goals here but didn't quite hit the set of ten that I wanted. I think I did a total of 24 reps, four sets of six. So I did 315 and that felt pretty easy.

I decided to go in and work with something really light, the 225, and decided to go after this goal. Now I had to stretch a little bit. This was not an easy goal to hit. I definitely got pumped up and was a little bit tired, even a bit woozy at the end, hitting that hundred but I wanted to go for that and see what I could do with it. So I was very happy to be able to hit that. That's what I mean.

After I recover from this, I'm going to have to do really light deadlift workout. Right now, I'm currently doing deadlifting twice a week. As far as my schedule, that works well because I actually train in different places on different days. Instead of just deadlifting whenever it feels great for my body, I am

sticking to these days. If it really doesn't feel good at all that day I will skip it but for the most part, I can find some variation on that day that will work well.

Since I'm sore and I'll probably still be sore, I'll probably be focusing more on some of the accessory stuff like doing these partials the next time I go in. After that, I'm probably going to be able to work with a heavier weight. Maybe I'll go with 405 or 365, something like that, and just see how it feels for me. Then after I do that, I may be able to ramp up and hit another really heavy single again. This is how my body seems to work with this exercise, working with these variations with the schedule I have. It works well for me.

I encourage you to take what info you can from what I've said here. There's a lot of info here. I should charge you for this information because this is really my whole deadlift program I've laid out here. This is a lot of great information and that is really what I do. I vary the exercises. I do the different variations and I vary the load that I'm working with, which in turn determines what sort of sets and reps I can do with it. I always follow my body's biofeedback. Sometimes, I'm following it more completely. Other times, it's just sort of taken into consideration.

This is what I do and this is what's going to lead me to breaking 600 pounds in the deadlift this year. I guarantee it. I'm already up there. I hit 455 much easier than I expected to be able to hit it this month and I did it at the start. Granted I was at a workshop with the whole group effect, which always helps out and everything, but I was able to hit it there so that means I should be able to get to 505. By March I should be able to match my previous best and then after that, it's all new intensity PRs that I'm hitting along the way.

The last thing I want to leave you with is a couple more resources and ideas for deadlift training. If you don't have a coach, you can still learn this exercise. It's actually a pretty simple exercise but there are a lot of small details you really want to know about so it is something worth learning about. I recently picked up that new product from Pavel Tsatsouline and Andy Bolton called [Deadlift Dynamite](#). It looks pretty good. I've only scanned through it. I started reading it but I haven't gotten into the meat of what's on there. I figured I could learn a couple of things in there that would really help me with my deadlift so I'll provide a link to that if it's still available. I believe it is on the website. I'll post links to this stuff on [LegendaryStrength.com](#) where this podcast is posted.

As I mentioned, at the recent [Superhuman Workshop](#), Dru Patrick was coaching everybody in the deadlift. People were having lots of success, lots of PRs and everything right there. There were some really cool stuff that I picked up. We're going to be having the videos of all that released relatively shortly, within the next couple of weeks. I've got a lot of editing to do but that is coming along so I highly encourage you to check that out. We have information not just for the deadlift but in all sorts of different areas. You can either pick up the whole set, which is highly encouraged because there's so much great there, or individual stuff. We're trying something new this time. Anyway, we'll have more details about that coming out next week so definitely keep your eyes and ears peeled for that.

I'll also provide some other links on my blog if I think of anything else. I'll also link to some of my articles about training the deadlift, the video of my doing the 505, the Jefferson deadlift, and all that stuff so be

sure to check out [LegendaryStrength.com](http://LegendaryStrength.com). Go to where [this podcast is posted](#) and you'll see details about that.

That's going to wrap it up. We had a little bit of a longer episode today but I hope you gained something useful out of how I trained to deadlift. Be sure to let me know how you liked it. If you have any questions, post them on website or email me. That's going to do it for today. Thank you very much for listening.