



RUGBY

OFF SEASON

STRENGTH MANUAL

DISCLAIMER

All forms of exercise pose some inherent risks. The author advises readers/trainees to take full responsibility for their safety and know their limits. Before practicing the exercises in this manual, be sure that your equipment is well-maintained, and do not take risks beyond your level of experience, aptitude, training and fitness. This manual is designed as a guide to help those with an intermediate to advanced knowledge of resistance training. If that is not you, you should seek further assistance before implementing such a program. Like all exercise programs it is advised that you consult your doctor prior to getting started. With that being said, should you continue, it is under the premise that you accept all risks inherent to the program are of adequate physical capability and hold the author free of all responsibility.

Note – this is a general program and will work for most, but it must be highlighted that individualised programming and coaching should be considered the gold standard for athletes looking to maximise their potential – this program is not designed to replace high level coaching and programming. **For more info on coaching contact AJ at aj@smithsfitness.com.au.**

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This program is designed to provide structure and guidance to off-season Rugby and Rugby League players with the goal of improving strength and power for the following season. A high level of strength and power is a vital component for any rugby player, however, for those not in professional setups and even some that are, off-season physical preparation is simply inadequate. This program attempts to fix that.

This program is relatively simple. Strength is built on a foundation of fundamental movements performed with relatively heavy loads. Being overly sports specific can be detrimental and a poor use of time, especially early in an athlete's career, remember your time in the gym is to build your capacity to be a better athlete, not to emulate your sport.

P R O G R A M D E S I G N

This is a 12 week off season strength program. There are a number of program designs we could use for the off-season and depending on other factors they might be more appealing for your situation.

However, for this program, I've gone with an ideal setup that I believe will help you get the strongest and most powerful, that is 4 training days per week, 2 upper body and 2 lower body sessions.

W H E N T O I M P L E M E N T

The best time to implement this program would be as soon as possible after your season finishes. Sure, you might like to have a week or so off depending on how your body is holding up, each athlete will be different but ideally giving yourself more time to get bigger, stronger and more powerful will be advantageous. Most Rugby off-seasons will be shorter than 12 weeks which may mean that your structured pre-season begins before you finish this program – even more reason to get started straight away.

Depending on your club's setup you could possibly finish the last block of this program as pre-season is beginning, that is nothing to worry about.

B L O C K P E R I O D I S A T I O N

This program uses a traditional block periodisation style with 3 distinct training blocks: Hypertrophy, Basic Strength and Strength/Power. In simple terms, these blocks are designed to increase muscle mass, increase strength and then display that new strength as you get closer to the beginning of your next season. Each block is 4 weeks long and is structured to prepare you for improvements in the next block.

% B A S E D L I F T S

The majority of your lifts throughout the program are percentage based off your current one repetition maximum (1RM). If you are unsure of your current 1RM's you can either test them or estimate them using the calculator provided in the excel file. Forewarning – underestimating your 1RM is fine to a certain degree, but overestimating will create a very hard program so take caution. **Input your 1RM's on the "1RMs Go Here" worksheet of the excel file.**

O T H E R L I F T S

For the exercises where you aren't prescribed a specific load simply use a load that is appropriate and try to slowly progress it from week to week or block to block. These exercises are less important than those with prescribed weights so don't lose any sleep over them. The only thing I would advise is to choose a weight that allows you to complete all repetitions without breaking form.

I F Y O U C A N ' T D O S O M E T H I N G

If you can't do a certain exercise in the program for whatever reason – equipment, gym setup etc, simply exchange it for a similar exercise. Nothing is ever set in stone with programming, good programming is forever adaptable to each and every athlete, so swap it out and get back to it.

PULL-UPS & PUSH-UPS

Throughout the program you will perform pull-ups, chin-ups and push-ups. Your goal initially is 3x10 with your bodyweight. Once you can do 3x10 you should start adding external resistance. If you can't do pull-ups chin-ups & push-ups, do them with an assistance band off a pull up bar, even the plyometric push-ups in block 3 should be performed with band assistance if you struggle getting reps out.

WARM UPS

Warming up is important, make sure you do it. Here is a video link to all of the warm up exercises prescribed in this program.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIlevQYnYmU>

If you click "see more" on the youtube video you can see timestamps for each individual exercise.

Do all of these exercises for 10 reps each before every session as well as warm up sets for your main lifts. Great athletes don't take short cuts.

PLUS SETS

Strategically placed throughout the program are what we call plus sets, these are denoted by a + sign following a rep amount for example 8+. This means you should perform a repetition maximum for this set, ideally it would be a few more than 8 (but might not be).

We can use these rep records to re-evaluate our 1RM's for the following block to make sure we are training optimally. Simply re-adjust numbers accordingly if any of your plus sets show signs of big improvements. If so, well done on your gains! If not, stick with your initial numbers.

HYPERTROPHY BLOCK

The hypertrophy block is all about increasing your amount of muscle mass. We know that bigger muscles have the potential to create more force. In a sport like Rugby it is particularly important that training programs are designed for continually hypertrophy as improvements in strength are highly related to increases in lean muscle mass.

The off season is the ideal time for increasing lean mass and/or improving body composition as there is less interference from high loads of aerobic work which are typically seen during the season and pre-season. Depending on the structure of your season and your level of cardiovascular fitness, there will typically be a window of opportunity where conditioning training is drastically decreased, you need to take advantage of that period.

The hypertrophy block is characterised by high volumes, moderate repetitions and moderate intensities. Simple and effective movements have been selected to enhance size and subsequently strength.

STRENGTH BLOCK

Increasing strength is a desired outcome for all athletes and for Rugby players even more so. Strength distinguishes between playing level, stronger players are faster, more powerful and more resilient to injury. Maximising strength as a Rugby player should be a key focus throughout your career.

The Strength block is exactly that, it's designed to get you strong.

After the initial hypertrophy block, hopefully we have seen increases in lean muscle. It's now time to put it to use. Again, simple compound movements have been selected, these movements typically allow us to use the heaviest loads and as such help us to create high amounts of force.

S T R E N G T H / P O W E R B L O C K

Being strong is great, but Rugby is a dynamic sport and displaying force quickly is what sets players apart, especially at the top level.

With an increased ability to create force from the Strength Block it's now time to display it.

Increasing strength is still the basis of this block but we have re-structured the training week to include maximum effort days and dynamic/repetition days. For these dynamic movements, it can't be emphasised enough how important moving fast is, load is less important than doing these exercises rapidly. On dynamic effort days loaded exercises have been paired with dynamic exercises to keep the sessions practical and possibly harness any potentiation effects. Maximum effort days are all about shifting weight, each day requires a plus set on your last set with a certain percentage, if you are beating these plus sets significantly you may need to adjust your numbers.

T E C H N I Q U E V I D E O S

Like I mentioned previously this program is not designed to replace high level coaching. That is the gold standard. With that said I understand it's sometimes out of our control and that's why I have added videos of exercise techniques for those of you who are unsure. If you are still having trouble, feel free to drop me a message and together we can sort it out. Links to videos are located on the last worksheet of the excel file.