

WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



MASS & STRENGTH COACHING CALL with Lee Hayward and Mike Westerdal

LH: Okay, we're up and running and welcome everyone to our Mass and Strength Coaching call. Myself and Mike Westerdal are here on the line and we're going to be focusing tonight on sharing some insider tips and tricks to help you get the most out of our Mass and Strength combo programs.

If you're listening to this now, you're getting access because you ordered our "[Blast Your Bench](#)" and "[Critical Bench](#)" combo programs we've put out, a special for 10th year anniversaries of these programs. And like I said, they're totally updated, totally revised and we're really excited about it.

So, how about we just start off, because obviously some people here are probably followers of LeeHayward.com and myself. And others are probably followers of Mike and Critical Bench. So, why don't we just quickly introduce ourselves, Mike? So, if you want to give our listeners a little overview and an intro to who you are and what your experience with regards to training and stuff like that.

MW: Yeah, sure. Hey, everybody. I'm Mike Westerdal here. I'm the founder of CriticalBench.com and I've created the "Critical Bench" program. Just a quick

background on how that program came about and how I got involved, my family moved to Connecticut when I was in high school, about 16 years old, and I was trying to play football in high school with no football background. I was a really, really skinny kid. I think the freshman year of high school I was like 115 pounds. It was really sad.

I found the YMCA, having moved to a new area, I didn't know anybody at the school, didn't have a lot of friends. I just started lifting weights every day at the YMCA, over-training my ass off, doing full body routines every single day. And you know when you first start lifting, you just grow no matter what. Like, anything you do kind of works even if it's not the smartest. But, I was just reading the muscle magazines and just getting things all wrong.

There are pictures of me, if you've seen me in high school when I was like 155 pounds. But, I did put on some weight over high school. I got a little stronger and I ended up walking on to a Division I-AA football program at Central Connecticut State. That's where I met some guys that really had some knowledge when it came to getting stronger, which I learned has a lot to do with getting bigger.

So, I had always been training with like eight to twelve reps, typically, when I was in high school. I learned to lower my reps and change my form and start more of a power building type routine. That's when my bench just skyrocketed. I mean, in high school, by my senior year, my best was 275 pounds. By the end of college I was well over 400 pounds. I made a huge jump during my college years. That's how the [Critical Bench program](#) started.

I just logged all the workouts that I was doing in college, when I got so strong. And the guys that were doing that with me and kind of wrote all that down, had the whole program written. People were always coming up to me asking, "How can I increase my bench?" It was just like the most common question. I had one of the biggest bench presses on the football team, so everybody wanted to know how to do it.

Then, at the same time, we had a school project to start a website and I didn't know what to make the website about. I was like, well, everybody's asking me about this bench press thing, why don't I put that up? So, that's how the website started. It's been 10 years now, maybe actually 11. That was like 1999. So, I'm pretty psyched. Right away when I got on the internet I saw Lee and his website, [Blast Your Bench](#), and I was like, all right, cool.

We were kind of like...didn't know each other back then. I was following him. He was probably keeping track of me and stuff, and then later on we became friends and kind of joined forces instead of being like competitors against each other.

But, yeah, after college I just went on and I did the office marketing, like business jobs for a while, but I just couldn't take it. I wound up doing personal training. I went to Europe for a little while and played some football, started writing for some of the magazines and basically realized I could help so many more people just by focusing on the website and publishing information and writing programs to help a lot of people at once.

As a trainer, I mean, you've got 40 hours in a week, 50-60 hours. I mean, how much can you actually train people in a week? There's only so many people you can help. So, the internet just gave me so much more freedom to help more people and just create more freedom in my life, too.

Later on, I wound up moving to Florida. I'm based in Tampa Bay, Florida now. I enjoy competing in powerlifting. I joined a Barbell club here called Tampa Barbell. So, I'm learning from like really high-end competitive power lifters and that took my lifting to a whole other level. I'm always looking to learn new stuff and that's why I'm really psyched to team-up with Lee here and learn some of his techniques and stuff he's been teaching, too. I'm not too proud to be a forever student, always learning new stuff. So, that's kind of my background and where I'm coming from.

LH: That's awesome, man. I can see a lot of similarities in how we got started by just hearing about your story and stuff, because very similar situation. I actually started working out again in school, in high school and in college. I did a computer studies course in college. Now, I mean, of course computer studies a decade ago was nothing like computers today. But, none the less, one of our school projects was to start a website and I actually started a bodybuilding website as a school project, just the same as you did. So, I mean, that's how I got my start online. So, that's pretty ironic how we both got started the same way.

That's how I started, it was just a simple site. I think I put it up on one of these like Geo City sites. Do you remember those, Mike, back in the day?

MW: Yeah, I remember that.

LH: That's what I started with. As they say, the rest is history, right?

But, with my training, I focus primarily on...first I just wanted to work out. I mean, I had no set plan or anything. But, once I got a bit more serious into it, I focused on bodybuilding primarily and I also did some powerlifting as well. I actually competed in a meet several years ago now. But, it was 2004, I did a powerlifting meet, a local meet, and at that time I benched 445. So, that was my personal best when it comes to powerlifting, right there, on the bench press.

My main avenue now is more along the lines of bodybuilding, that's where I like to focus my efforts and that's where I've been competing mostly. In fact, I did my most recent show this past spring, which was...I think my 12th bodybuilding show. I'm usually doing one show a year as a bodybuilding competitor. So, I've been at it quite a while, started competing in '95.

And how I got involved with the studying and kind of teaching people, very similar to yourself, Mike. I started off following a lot of stuff that I was reading in books and magazines and things like that, and these little cheesy workout programs that came with home gym sets and stuff like that.

I mean, at first, yes, you do see some progress, but you quickly plateau, and that's what I was really looking for, you know, what can I do to really take this to the next level? And I started hanging around some local bodybuilders and power lifters. I find that a lot of smaller areas, bodybuilders and power lifters, they tend to train in the same gyms.

Newfoundland, where I'm from, is not a big spot. It's a lot of trainers. They tend to focus on the same area. So, it's very niched-out. I mean, a lot of bodybuilders will train in powerlifting, a lot of power lifters will kind of do some bodybuilding. A lot of them go to the same shows and things like that. So, I really got to know a lot of the local bodybuilder and lifters. And just by picking their brains and getting training advice and working out in the gym, that's where over the years I came up with the program, "Blast Your Bench", and took it from there. So, kind of similar story to how you got started as well.

MW: Cool.

LH: Okay, so like I say, we've kind of introduced ourselves for everyone here on the call, and now, Mike, with the "Critical Bench" program, I mean, I actually picked up a copy of this when you first started. You probably remember, you used to send out little spiral bound copies that you, I think, printed off from your computer or something like that. But, back ten years ago I bought a copy, I think, and I still have it here. I do. Handwritten numbers on it for the customized workout logs and everything else.

MW: Yeah.

LH: I don't know if you remember sending me that now, over ten years ago, but I still have my copy of "Critical Bench" here. Give us an overview of how that program works, because I know you've added a lot to it with your revised version. You've got a de-load phase put into it and all this stuff, and actually, some of the questions that came in were specific with regards to how to go about the different phases of "Critical Bench". So, how about just giving us a quick overview of how the whole program works?

MW: Yeah, I mean, one of the newest things of the program is just going over the techniques. I mean that's something that I've really learned a lot about in the last couple years as I started competing and training with some of the top level power lifters and there is a ton of information about technique. But, no matter what program you do, the technique is one of the most important things you need to get down. That's why we've got that Bench Press Fundamentals video, just showing you how to do that, which is so important before you even start using heavy weights, just getting the form down right, because that alone immediately can give you so many more pounds on your lift.

But, as far as the program setup, the way I structured it, this is really a hybrid program. It's a mix between powerlifting and bodybuilding. Now, I think that in order to grow muscle mass and to get bigger, you need to get stronger. When you get stronger, your muscles adapt and they change and they grow in order to handle this heavier weight that you're lifting.

There are different schools of thought. Some people think the volume training and the higher reps do it, and that may be true for some people. But, from what I experienced, this is when I packed on the most muscle in my life and got the strongest in my life. It happened at the same time, and that's when I started using compound exercises and it's when I started lowering my reps.

Now, I didn't go full-blown, just low reps on every single exercise. And that's what we do in the "Critical Bench" program. We take the compound exercises and we do those for lower reps for multiple sets. But then, we add in assistance exercises or auxiliary, supplemental exercises. And with those, you do a little bit higher rep range.

If some people respond more to higher reps and that actually grows more muscle, that's why those are in there. Another thing, a lot of people just focus so much on just bench pressing, but there are so many other muscle that are involved in the lift that you need to hit those other muscle groups. Like, back is just as important as your chest. You need the strong back to stabilize the weight coming down, like doing rows and lat pull-downs. Those are so important, but as a kid and as a teenager, you just go and bench and do biceps every other day and you think you're bench is going to keep going up. But, these other muscle groups are so important.

So, it's a very strategic split. There are some muscles that you do use a lot more in the bench. I mean, primarily everybody knows you've got your shoulders, your chest and your triceps involved. So, I like to hit all those muscle groups really hard, but keep them spaced out, so you're never training when a muscle group should be sore. You're never hitting that again. I try to keep on...because it's a bench specialization program, I want you completely fresh on bench day. Everything is healed up and ready to go.

That's your main day. But, it's a full body program. So, you get stronger, all your lifts should go up, and it's a true power building program where you've got powerlifting reps and compound exercises build in with some bodybuilding type exercises with some of the higher reps.

It's a ten week program. And it gives you the weights to do as you go through. Everybody in here, on this call, has already purchased it, so they know how it's set up. But, it takes you through to the end where you get like a max-out schedule that you follow to hopefully go up 50 pounds. Some people, beginners, can go up more. If you're super-advanced, some people get less. It varies from person to person.

LH: Absolutely. I mean, that's one of the things. I mean, I guess we're kind of preaching to the choir here, but we've gotten this...I know I have and you have as well, like our claim to fame is 50 pounds on a bench, and it's a nice, round number. And like I say, a lot of people do reach it. But, very often, it's an average, like you say. Beginners can very often over-shoot that and achieve more, whereas people who have been training for several years or people who are a bit older will probably gain less.

But, nonetheless, by going through these programs... I know for myself, everybody who's went through the program has come out bigger and stronger on the other end. There's nobody who can go through the program, follow it to the letter, and not make gains. I haven't seen that happen.

MW: I think for my program it's ideal for getting people up to a 300 pound bench. I mean, people that have gotten to around...into the 200's and they're trying to get to 300, I think it's absolutely perfect for that. I think anybody that gets it and just learns the techniques that are involved with this lift should get another 25 pounds alone, just from practicing those techniques.

LH: Yeah, for sure. Now, with the whole training thing, obviously the people who are following the programs now, they know they're two totally different programs, "Blast Your Bench" and "Critical Bench". I'll just quickly give an overview here of how these programs work.

With "Blast Your Bench", my claim to fame is upwards of 50 pounds in three weeks. But, there's a little bit of gray area for that, because you actually have to prime yourself before you're ready for that three week growth phase. It starts off with a two week preparation phase and during that phase you totally eliminate flat bench from the workout and focus on bringing up those assistant and stabilizer muscles.

Very often, a lot of guys, like you mentioned, are in the gym day after day, usually like bench press and arms. They'll go over to the bench, max out, get their buddy to deadlift the bar off their chest and then they'll spend the next hour doing

preacher curls, hit the showers and then come back and do the same thing the next day. How often do you see that, chest and arms, day after day? Usually that ends up going nowhere fast.

So, the first phase I like to do in the “Blast Your Bench” program is to totally give your body a break from bench pressing and we focus on some other core exercises to build up the same muscle groups, but just working them from different angles.

Then, we get into the actual bench press specialization phase, which is a three-week course. I use a variety of set and rep patterns within that three-week course. So, I mean, there’s heavy pyramid days, there’s high volume repetition days, low volume days where you’re doing multiple sets of low reps. I mean, it’s all strategically built into a three-week program.

And then, after that, I go into a squat specialization phase, again, using kind of similar training strategies that we did for the bench press specialization phase, but applied to the squat. That’s a three-week blaster squat routine. And then I go into a 12 week general mass and power building routine, which will really help solidify these rapid gains that you make during the specialization phases. So, it is a complete program covering all strength bases as well.

So, again, both programs, there’s different methods to them, but they complement one another. We were actually talking to a person earlier before we started the recording for this call, who’s actually followed...started with the “Blast Your Bench” program, upped his bench somewhere in the vicinity of 20 pounds in a matter of a few weeks. Now moving on to the “Critical Bench” program and hoping to take his bench to a higher level. He’s seeing another growth spurt by just starting the other bench press specialization phase. So, both programs really complement one another.

MW: That’s kind of why we put them together. I mean, you can do one of these programs and do a de-load and then move onto the next and then go back and forth. It just helps mix things up and shock your muscles and your nervous system just with different training.

LH: Yep, for sure. I mean, I’ve heard a great quote, and it’s one that I often follow in my training. Like there’s no best workout program. If there is a best workout program, it’s the one you’re currently not doing, because it’s just providing unique muscle stimulation that helps get your body growing again. Because, if you keep doing the same thing over and over, your body is smart and it’s going to adapt. You need to provide some unique stimulation just to keep things fresh, keep yourself on the edge so that you’re continually making progress.

MW: Yeah, and that’s why the de-load is so important, too.

LH: Yeah. We're actually going to get into that. We have a lot of questions that people have sent in. So, that's what I'd like to jump into right now. Seeing we're talking about the de-load, we mentioned that a couple of times. Where was it, somebody had actually put it in. I can't find it now. I'm scrolling through my questions here.

MW: I'll look for it, too.

LH: Do you have it there? I believe I emailed it to you.

MW: Yeah, I'm looking.

LH: Okay, here we are. Okay. "Mike, I'm almost at the end of the Critical Bench program and wanted to know, should I take a week off at the end and then de-load. Or, do I go right into the de-load after week ten?" Seeing this is your program, obviously you're the best guy to ask for this. How does this whole de-load phase work with the Critical Bench program?

MW: Well, this question, I mean, you've got to know your body and see how you feel, different programs, how much weight you're lifting, depending on your stress levels, what's going on in your life. I don't know. So, you've got to feel this out. If you feel beat-up, your joints are hurting, you just feel over-trained and you feel like you want to take a week off... It feels like you're asking me, "Mike, is it okay to take a week off first?" If you feel like it is, then sure, definitely take a week off.

You just trained hard for eleven weeks. You can take a week off, then start the de-load program. That's fine. If you're still feeling fired-up and you want to get right back in the gym, you're feeling antsy and you want to start another power program, don't start it right away. Do the de-load program that's scheduled and then get back into one of these heavier programs.

So, see how you feel. If you feel like you need the week off, take the week off. If you're ready to jump right back into this, don't jump right back in. Start the de-load immediately and then start up again. What do you think, Lee?

LH: That's a great answer in a way, because I find that with my own training, you can't purposely plan when you need to take a break. You've got to listen to your body. Because, everybody's different, we all go through different situations with life, from work and school or stress or things like that. You can't really plan when you need to take a week off.

I mean, you might be going several weeks in a row, making great progress, and then all of a sudden just feel like you hit the wall and you need to take a break. Other times, you may be able to go for several months, training hardcore and still feel strong. So, again, you really need to listen and just follow your body.

MW: I mean, I think that comes with more experience, too. So, I think if you're a beginner or you're just starting out, that might be a time when it's okay to schedule it in, just because sometimes if you don't have that scheduled break in, your body schedules it for you. That's what you don't want. That's what you want to avoid.

As you get more experience and you know your body and you know how you feel, you'll know when it's time. But, if you don't know and you don't have that feeling yet, it might be a good idea to take the few weeks after...every ten to twelve weeks, might be definitely time.

LH: Yeah, that's a general guideline that a lot of people go by. Twelve weeks of hard training, then back off, take a week off and then start the process again.

MW: Yeah, I mean, built into my program, week five is a much lighter week, half way through. So, I mean, you take competitive power lifters, some of them de-load every 3rd week or 4th week. But, they don't completely skip lifting. They just do higher rep things or more explosive training.

LH: All right, let's see what else we've got there. Here's another question, I'm just going back to our main question list here. This one, he's an amateur bodybuilder and he's 20 years old and was wondering if taking a year off and training like a power lifter would be beneficial for returning to the bodybuilding scene later.

I have to totally agree with this. In fact, I think all bodybuilders would benefit from doing powerlifting training for at least some time. I mean, say like your off season bodybuilding could be like your "in-season" powerlifting. I think the foundational muscle that you build through powerlifting is going to carryover and help you with your bodybuilding.

One thing that you'll notice is some of the most successful bodybuilders, I'm talking about like the top pros, were, at one time, competitive power lifters. Ronnie Coleman was a competitive power lifter. Branch Warren was a competitive power lifter. Johnny Jackson, he still is a competitive power lifter. I mean, there's so many big, muscular guys, and some of the guys who are dominating the pro stages who built their foundation through powerlifting. So, I definitely think that it can certainly help a bodybuilder.

MW: Even back in the day, like Columbo and stuff, he used to do those feats of strength, different contests. It just builds a good foundation of muscle mass. And then, later you can sculpt that or lose more body fat and things. But, it definitely does not hurt. I think it's a great idea to just build some size and some solid foundation.

LH: Yep, for sure. That's one thing, when you think back to the old time bodybuilders, I mean, old time...back in the Muscle Beach and the pumping iron days and stuff, I mean, there wasn't like a distinction between powerlifting and bodybuilding. It was just these are the guys that work out, pretty much.

Arnold did powerlifting, Franko Columbo did powerlifting, it was just...that's the way they trained. It was hard and heavy and they also, of course, did bodybuilding as well. But, it wasn't the big distinction like it is today, the bodybuilders and the power lifters. It was basically just the guys that worked out.

MW: Right, I say just combine them both and just do power building.

LH: Yep, for sure. All right, but nonetheless, it's a great question to cover there.

Okay. There's another question here, Mike...

MW: Yeah, we can move on to the next one. It says, "I'm finishing Mike's ten week program, ten days before a competition. I'm in week seven now, what's the best way to maintain those ten days before the competition to hold the gains I've made and be at top form. Thanks, Ted."

Now, here's the thing. He's doing it exactly right. Before you go into a competition, taking one week up to ten days completely off from lifting even, is fine. That's actually what you want to do. You want to go into the competition, you want to have your nervous system refreshed, you want all your muscles fully recuperated and ready. You're not going to get any stronger that one week before the competition. If you're still lifting heavy the week before, all that's probably going to do is hurt your when you are maxing out.

So, taking a full week off before a competition is perfectly fine. So, to maintain your strength, you don't need to do anything to maintain that strength the week before. You're not going to lose anything. What you wouldn't want to do or what I prefer to do, but this is just purely personally preference, I like to just get some blood moving around. So, let's say the competition is on a Saturday, my last workout of the week might be Tuesday. And Tuesday I might do a full body routine, doing like 15 reps per body part, just to get blood moving around, just to break-up any soreness and just get the blood moving and feeling good.

That's really just some guys can't sit still and you kind of get all jittery, taking a whole week off and you want to get those last few training sessions in. But, they're not going to do anything. You've already built the strength you're going to have. Just try to relax and rest and get mentally prepared for the meet. And if you have to go to the

gym, go ahead and just do some really light stuff just to get the blood flushed and moving around.

LH: That makes a lot of sense. I know when I competed in powerlifting several years back, I actually followed something very similar. The way I did it was my last workout was the week before the competition. That was a light workout. So, I worked up to my opener that I was going to do at the competition, but I didn't push myself hard.

I guess it was kind of just a mental thing. I wanted to make sure that I could nail the opener with good form and everything else and make sure I could touch the bar and stuff like that without having too much trouble.

How do you think about something like that? If somebody wanted to do a light workout one week prior to a meet?

MW: I usually save the opener for the week before that even. So, not the week of the meet. So, what's the normal bench press day. Let's say your normal bench press day is Tuesday and the meet's on Saturday. That Tuesday before the meet I really wouldn't go heavy at all. You just go in and make sure you have your form down. You might do some speed reps, just get the blood moving.

That's just me. I've seen guys do openers that same week. But, what I do is the week before that Tuesday, that's when I hit my opener. It's actually two weeks before the meet almost.

LH: Okay.

MW: And the week before the meet I just kind of get the blood flushed and moving around.

But, it's totally something you've got to try out and see how you feel about it, because I've seen guys doing it both ways.

LH: But again, the main thing is...Ted here is doing the program right. He timed it out in such a way that he's going to be finished ten days before his meet. So, he should be at top form just by resting up those last ten days.

MW: Yeah, rest up and just get a couple of light workouts in, that's it. That's all you need.

LH: Yep. We pretty much nailed it there. But, with the timing of the Critical Bench program, like if somebody is using this for powerlifting, would you literally use this the ten weeks before the meet and just do a countdown from there.

MW: Yeah, there's ten weeks of actual training and then week eleven in the program is maxing out. So, you can go through and do your whole ten weeks and then take a full week off before, or even a week and a half before the meet. It just depends the date of the meet and which days you're benching. But, try to get a full seven days off of no heavy workouts before your meet.

LH: All right. Good stuff. Moving along to our questions here, the next one, this is one that I get asked a lot, and maybe you do, too. "Lee, quick question, first, I love your program and making huge gains. My question is, is there an advantage or disadvantage to doing bench presses off the Smith Machine?" This is from Jack.

I think everybody has their own opinions about Smith Machines. I have to admit, there are a couple of exercises where I actually think that it's okay. But, when it comes to your compound exercises, your benches, your squats, your deadlifts, your shoulder presses and all these big barbell exercises, I don't think the Smith Machine is even a substitution for those exercises.

How do you feel about it, Mike?

MW: How I feel about the Smith Machine is, if you have access to the free weights and you have access to a spotter, always take the free weights. The reason is, the Smith Machine, it's on that guided path for you. You're not able to use all your stabilizer muscles. What you can do on a Smith Machine is not going to transfer over to the bench.

So, if your goal is to be getting stronger and getting better at the bench or whatever exercise you're doing, it's not the same thing on the Smith Machine. The only time I would say to do it is if you absolutely to not have a spotter, and I mean, I'm not saying you don't feel like asking somebody or something like that. If there's somebody at the gym, ask them for a spot and use the free weight. Don't use it for the main exercises.

There is some stuff you can do over there for your assistance stuff. If you want to do like some upright rows or some shrugs using it, that's fine. But really, try to use it as a last resort. Free weight is always better.

LH: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Like you mentioned, I find that it's very uncomfortable, actually, especially for exercises like bench presses, where the bar doesn't travel in a vertical, straight up and down line. Same with squats, the bar doesn't travel in a vertical, straight up and down line, or deadlifts or any of these.

I mean, if you watch somebody from the side, the bar is going to move in an arc-like pattern. So, I find that it really can throw-off your form, place extra stress on your

joints, especially like the shoulders and stuff like that. I just really hate the Smith Machines when it comes to bench pressing.

MW: Yeah, that's a good point. It can definitely throw-off your technique.

LH: But, again, at the same time, I do know some beginners who probably like have one of these Smith Machine home gyms and they start off with it. It's not terrible, but if you have access to the free weights, like you said, by all means, move to those.

MW: Right, and for safety. If you don't have a spotter and you're trying to go heavy, I guess you have no choice.

LH: All right, next question here. This is for you, Mike. "What's your opinion on training to failure for powerlifting? I notice that a lot of power lifters train heavy, but they don't necessarily rep-out to failure like many bodybuilders do." This is from Brian.

MW: That's actually a really good question. I'd like to hear your input, too, on training to failure for bodybuilding. But, when it comes to powerlifting, they guys, you're right, they do not train to failure. The reason that I think that people don't train to failure is because when you train and you miss lifts, you're actually training yourself to miss lifts. I don't know if this is all mental or if it's physiological also, but it seems hard to get past a sticking point.

Picture a guy that's trying to get that 300 pound bench, right? Every time he comes into his workout and he tries that 300 pounds and he keeps missing it, I don't know what's going on, but you're training your head right there that you can't get 300 pounds, because you keep missing it. It's bad for your confidence to keep missing it and going for something like that.

I think you always want to keep your confidence high by going for lifts and numbers that you can make. You don't want to have spotters helping you with it. Now, that's just the mental standpoint. I'm not sure why. I've had some guys explain it to me before, but it can also train you physiologically to mess-up the lift, too. So, in powerlifting we don't train to failure. As soon as it gets stuck and it's not making any progress, the spotters just take it and rack it for you. I mean, they don't make you sit there and struggle and hold it the whole time. If you're not going to get it, you're not getting it. They just take it.

And you know what? Everybody has an off day. That's something people get really upset about. They're like, "I just didn't do as well today as I should have." And there's so many reasons why. We could make up all these reasons or guess what the reasons are. But, the matter of the fact is, it happens to everybody. Everybody has a bad day. Maybe you were out working in the sun or you're stressed-out, you had a fight

with your girlfriend or something's going on, you ate really bad that day. It's so hard to tell what the reason is. Just don't let one of these...

If you feel it, you're having a bad day, it's okay. It happens to everybody. That might be a day just to go a little bit lighter than what you're supposed to be doing. It's fine. Go a little bit lighter for that workout and just get all your reps in. That's much better than feeling like crap and still trying to do weight you don't think you can get, and then you miss them and then it just kind of compounds.

LH: Yep. I agree totally with that, man. It is a huge mental block. So, you always want to be in the gym setting little, personal records, making these little itsy-bitsy jumps in weight. Like you say, shoot for that five pound gain and make those little five-pound jumps on a regular basis just to keep yourself feeling like your succeeding in the gym rather than trying something that's too heavy and totally breaking down mentally in that.

Another thing, I agree with this totally as well, and even in bodybuilding training, I mean, in my own workouts, I rarely will rep-out to failure. Almost always I will rack the weights on my own. I don't like to be, like you say, struggling there.

How often do you see this? Guys doing bench press, for example, and they'll be stuck and then they'll want the spotter to help them do a forced rep, and then they'll say, "Okay, like two more." And then they'll do like forced reps after forced reps. It's just breaking down your body. You're tearing your muscles down faster than they recover.

Rather than stimulating more growth, like a lot of people think they're doing, I think it's just hampering your recovery. So, push yourself hard, yes. But, when you know that, okay, I can't get another good rep on my own, I usually just rack the weight. Very rarely do I have to have a spotter pulling the weight off of me. And of course, I just have them there for safety reasons. But, I don't rep-out to failure and then do multiple forced reps and all that stuff, like you see a lot of typically newer guys doing in the gym. The newer guys who want to pretend they're hardcore typically do that. But, I've found from personal experience I can make better gains and stay relatively injury-free by just stopping short of failure.

MW: Good point.

LH: All right, let's move along, see what else. This one is from Josh, and he's saying, "Lee, can you briefly explain the hand variation you do with pushups? I notice that you place your hands in a very certain way. It's like you bend them."

All right, Josh must have been watching some of my videos or whatever where I'm doing pushups and stuff. I do like to mix-up my grips and my hand positions with

pushups, but I don't really have anything particularly special. I guess the way my hands bend when I do a pushup is just the way it is.

But, typically when I do pushups in my workouts, I like to start off with a narrower grip and as I fatigue with each set, I will move my grip out wider just to work the different areas of the chest, shoulders and triceps. Usually the narrower your hand is facing, the more you're going to emphasize your triceps and your inner chest. And then gradually, as you work your hands out wider, it's going to be more of the chest and even more of the outer chest as you get really wide. But, I don't really pay particular attention to my hand spacing.

But, one little tip that I like to throw out there. If you have access to pushup-bars or even these hex-shaped dumbbells where you can actually lay them on the floor and they're not going to roll on you, doing your pushups holding onto a handle will actually allow you to squeeze out a few extra reps that you normally wouldn't be able to do if your hands were flat on the floor. I don't know what it is, but just the angle of having your hands grabbing a bar and then position of the wrists, you're in a stronger position than if your hands are totally open and flat, as they are if you're just doing pushups flat on the floor.

MW: Probably just like when you bench and you squeeze the bar harder. You're able to get more reps. Now, you've got something to squeeze. You activate more muscle to help you out.

LH: Yeah, you're bringing your forearms in, and again, there's more muscle activation happening when you're actually holding onto a handle versus just hands flat on the floor.

MW: I thought you said Shake Weight there for a second. You know what that is?

LH: Shake.... (laughing) Yes, I know what the Shake Weight is. If you don't know what the Shake Weight is, go to YouTube and just do a search for Shake Weight.

MW: Yeah, but type in spoof afterwards and find some funny...

LH: Yeah, Shake Weight spoof. Oh, my God, it's... That just shows you what crap people are selling on infomercials and late night TV and everything else. Yep, the Shake Weight...

MW: I got a question from Jeremy. Were you done? Did you have more to say on that, Lee?

LH: No, man, move on. Sure.

MW: All right, cool. We've got Jeremy, sent a question. "I was wondering if the theory of progressive overloads should be applied to all exercises, not just the main ones?"

My answer to that, we kind of touches on this briefly in the previous question, yes, I think you want to be trying to improve on every exercise. It's not like you just focus on one and ignore everything else. Because, they're all related and connected to each other. So, try to improve on everything you're doing.

For those that aren't familiar with progressive overload, it's trying to improve, and there's different ways to improve. You can try to get more reps with the same weight, you can go up in small incremental weights with dumbbells or something, or just add a couple 2 ½ pound plates, just doing that, improving a little bit. Or, even trying to get more sets or reps in a certain amount of time, are all ways you can show some kind of improvement. So, I say definitely try to improve on every exercise.

LH: Yeah, for sure.

One thing you'll find with the different exercises... I mean, obviously the big basic compound barbell lifts, it's going to be easy to make those small, five-pound jumps on a regular basis. When you're getting into some smaller isolation type exercises, it's going to be harder to make those jumps, obviously, because... For example, deadlifting 300 pounds and adding 5 pounds to the bar, there's a huge difference between doing that and adding 5 pounds to say, like a 30 pound dumbbell curl. I mean, percentage-wise, it's huge. So, obviously there's going to be smaller increments in smaller exercises. But, nonetheless, progressive overload should definitely be applied to all movements.

With these smaller exercises, especially like dumbbell moves, I usually work within a rep range rather than trying to move up to the next heavier set of dumbbells. I'll probably have like a rep range. So, like say eight to twelve reps, and when I can get all my sets with twelve reps with good form, I'll move up to the next heavier set of dumbbells and then drop my reps back to eight. And then build them up so the next workout try to get nine reps, ten reps, eleven, twelve. And then, when I hit the top of the rep range, move up to the next heavier set of dumbbells and drop the reps down again. I find that that allows you to make progressive overload without increasing the weight each workout.

MW: I do the same thing. That's a good idea. I mean, my whole program is based on progressive overloads. I've said this before, you can't just start with one max. Go through the whole thing, get a new max and just start right again, even though it's all progressive overload. I mean, eventually something's going to happen. Your body's going to adapt. It's going to get used to it and you're going to hit some kind of a plateau.

You cannot do progressive overload forever without changing up your routine. So, that's a perfect time to take a break, change your training and try a different kind of program. So, if you started doing Blast Your Bench, that could be a time, you're starting to struggle at a certain point, that's when you try a different program. You stack that with the Critical Bench program next.

So, that's another advantage of having access to both of these programs. Instead of always doing the same program over and over. You do the same thing over and over, eventually it's going to get harder and harder to make those increases.

LH: Yeah, for sure. Definitely, you need to change things as your body adapts.

Seeing we're on the topic, how often...actually, nobody actually submitted this question. But, it's one that I've received in the past, and I want to get your opinion on it. How often should somebody follow the Critical Bench program?

MW: Let's see, how many weeks? It's twelve weeks. I like doing it two times a year, for me. That's how many times I like to follow it. But, you could do it more, up to three, I would say.

LH: Okay. I've gotten that question with people asking me with regards to Blast Your Bench, how often can they follow it. I usually recommend that people go through the entire training cycle as it's outlined. One thing that I find...a mistake that a lot of guys make is they just want the program for the bench press phase. So, they'll usually do the two week preparation phase, then they'll do the three week bench press specialization phase, and then they're like, oh, squats are the next. It's a squat specialization phase and people are like, oh, I hate squats. So, they usually drop the program and they move on. So, they just do it for the bench.

But, if you can muster up the willpower and everything else to do the entire program, which is what I definitely recommend, go through the two week prep phase, the three week bench specialization phase, three week squat specialization phase and then the twelve week general training phase. You could literally repeat that cycle over and over again. I mean, until your body is really adapting to it, like you mentioned before, until your body's starting to say, "Okay, I need to do something different." But, there's enough training variety and different kinds of muscle stimulation built into that long-term cycle. Some people like to follow it over and over again.

MW: How many total weeks is your from start to finish?

LH: So, it's a twenty weeks, if somebody were to do the entire training system, as is. It's eight weeks for the two week prep, three week bench, three week squat, and then

twelve weeks general total body mass and power. So, it would be a 20 week program from start to finish.

But, unfortunately, most guys don't do it. They get to the bench, set a new personal record in the bench and then they're kind of happy with that, I guess, and just move on.

MW: I mean, if you go through that twice, you're talking like ten months almost.

LH: Yeah, that's right.

MW: Same thing doing the Critical Bench program three times, with some de-loads in between. You do it as many times as you can or until you want to change it up or until you feel like you're not making the same gains. Save it and go back to it later.

LH: And that's one thing, I like to use these specialization programs. I mean, not as the foundation, like you're going to do this all the time. But, like I say, once or twice a year to go back to it, I find that you can really jumpstart your gains again and really get the most out of it, rather than trying to stick with it as your exclusive training program. That's just my two-cents worth. That's what I find works well with the Blast Your Bench program.

All right, so, do you want to take some more of the questions that you're people sent in?

MW: We got one from Peter, actually. We were chatting with him before. He's got a deadlift question. He's glad they're part of the workout, so that's good. Deadlifts are great exercise. He wants to know, "Do you wear a belt? It seems it would catch when you lift up. What do you do to adjust for that?"

Yeah, it's pretty important to wear a belt when you are deadlifting, especially as you go heavier with the lower reps. It helps support your stomach. Not only is it safety for your back, but it's also something for your stomach to push against when you're holding your air as you do the lift. So, it's important to wear it. And you're right, I can feel like the bar gets caught on it then. So, I actually pull the belt up a little higher. It's not sitting as low as usual.

Same thing for squats. It's not like where you'd picture, right above your hips. I pull it up some, so it's kind of like half way up my stomach almost. But, try doing that. They also have like skinnier belts you can try as well that don't catch as much. What you don't want to do it get them caught on your ribs and things. So, just find like a comfortable spot, a little higher, might do the trick.

LH: On the topic of belts, what kind of belt do you recommend, because there are a lot of different belts available.

MW: Personally, I like the ones from ProWristStraps.com, APT Pro Gear. It doesn't matter if it's got a leaver or if it's got one of the belt buckles in it. I'm not sure what the material is, but they have powerlifting belts there that are really good.

I don't like the really skinny, like little tiny leather ones with the padding on them that you buy at Sports Authority. I don't know what those are really going to do.

LH: Do you like the thick powerlifting belts that are the same width all the way around the belt?

MW: Yeah, the same thickness all the way around and you don't walk around wearing it everywhere. Like, your cable crossovers, you don't need to have your belt on.

I get asked this question all the time, so just real quick, I didn't get asked the question today, but when to wear belts. Wear it when you're doing heavier weight. For me, I'd say if you're doing three reps or less, put the belt on for sure. But, don't shelter your back and your abs all the time, everything you're doing. You're actually protecting those muscles from getting stronger and developing your core. So, don't use it until you're starting to do some heavier weight.

LH: Yep, for sure. Don't go around the gym with your workout gloves and your belt on during your entire workout.

MW: I used to do that in high school. If you're doing that, don't feel bad. Now you know.

LH: Fashion statement.

MW: My first weight belt was one of those black and white zebra ones, like Velcro. So, would walk around with that. I don't remember if I had the gloves on or not. I was like 110 pounds, walking around with a zebra belt everywhere I went.

LH: I remember, they were Velcro belts, weren't they?

MW: Yeah.

LH: They weren't even leather.

MW: No.

LH: Oh, God.

MW: I don't know. The football coach or somebody told you you've got to wear a belt and you just like wear it all the time.

LH: Oh, man. But, yeah, good point to cover that, because I know a lot of people are confused when it comes to belts. Don't go to the store and get those little cheesy workout belts that are really thick in the back and then really tiny in the front. One of the main benefits of them is not to support your back. It's to have something to push your stomach against, which is going to draw tension throughout your entire core.

You mentioned this before, Mike, when you were saying you want something that you can push your stomach against and hold your air. That's a big misconception. You see these cheesy belts at the department store. They're six or eight inches across the back, when you don't need all that padding there and all that leather. And then, they're probably only like two inches in the front. You need something thick in the front.

I'm the same way. When I put on a belt, it's usually right up around... Like, if you blow your belly out, right around the belly button, probably a little above it, that's typically where your belly will expand the most. That's usually where I end up putting the belt, right where I can blow my air out and get the most tension.

MW: While we're on the topic, same thing with straps, which helps you get a better grip and when to put on wrist wraps, if anybody's got a question about that. I think we covered it in our programs, but if anyone else is listening. It's the same rule. You're only as strong as your weakest link. So, if you're always using straps to help you lift more weight, now when the straps are gone, you've got a weak grip and weak hands. You need those muscles for you lifting.

So, again, only use these tools and these safety things as you get up in the heavier weight, just to help you as it gets heavier. You don't need to do it when you're doing like ten to twelve reps.

LH: Right. I guess that would apply, too, for wrist wraps and knee wraps and all sorts of assistant aids like that.

MW: Yeah.

LH: Typically, as you're working up through your sets, I mean, the way I like to do is for, like a belt for example. I'll do my warm-ups without the belt and then as you're getting heavier and the reps are getting lower, put the belt on and work it from there. Definitely, all the warm-up sets are done without a belt or without any assistance aids like wraps and stuff like that.

MW: Yep.

LH: All right. Actually, we were just talking about deadlifts there. There was another question that came through with regards to deadlifting and it's kind of a unique one. This one is from Willy. He's saying, "I have a question about squatting and deadlifting. My squat is 325 pounds and my deadlift is 475 pounds. I notice that a lot of powerlifters squat more than they deadlift. Should I set a goal to get my squat higher than my deadlift, and do you think that everybody should work their way so that their squat is higher than their deadlift?"

MW: Willy, you noticed that because it's true. Most people do squat more than they deadlift. I mean, if you look at the typical numbers, the results of powerlifting meets, you're going to see the highest number is going to be the squat. The second highest number is going to be the deadlift, followed by the bench. That's normal, and not everybody's like that. Yours is a little different here and mine are weird, too. Mine are all exactly the same, it's really strange. That's with gear. Raw it's a little different.

But, yeah, your squat should definitely be... I would say maybe 100 pounds higher than your deadlift. And then, your bench could even be like 100 pounds underneath your deadlift. But, it all varies.

Based on what I'm seeing from your numbers, it sounds like your squat is the lagging exercise here. So, that's definitely something that I would work on. I think as you improve your squat, your other lifts will benefit from it as well.

LH: Yeah. One thing that we should point out with these numbers here, I'm assuming that Willy is your typical gym member and not using powerlifting equipment. When you put on a squat suit, you'll get a lot more assistance out of that squat suit versus putting on a deadlift suit. I mean, the carryover from a squat suit is huge. Versus a deadlift suit, it kind of just adds support, but not really a whole lot of poundage.

Do you find that when you're training as well?

MW: That's true. Even with gear for deadlifting, I mean, people don't get a lot out of it. I think people might get like 50 pounds at the most. But, the squat suit, I mean, you can get hundreds of pounds and nothing to put on, and you can all of a sudden do the weight. Your nervous system has to get used to this. There's a lot of technique involved. It takes a long time just being able to handle this weight. It really takes a lot of practice and that's one of the main things. It's practicing more so.

But, if we're talking just no equipment and we're talking just raw, I mean, even getting them close to each other should be a goal.

What do you think? Do you think he should be able to deadlift more than he squats? Or, do you think that varies?

LH: It's going to vary and I think it depends a lot on the person's body type. Typically, someone with a thinner build more of an ectomorph type of build, they tend to be really strong deadlifters. And then, you have some of the shorter, stockier guys, tend to be real strong squatters and benchers. So, I think it has a lot to do with somebody's structure.

Yeah, you should shoot for a squat and a deadlift that are pretty close to one another. I would say like within 100 pounds of each other, would be a good goal. But, I mean, if your natural tendency, you have a deadlifter's physique, don't worry about it. I mean, build your strong points, by all means. But, still, this case here, there's 150 pounds between his squat and his deadlift. These are relatively low poundages.

MW: I mean, he's got some strength there in the deadlift, so I think he can get the squat up to 400 or so.

LH: Yeah, for sure. But again, like I said, everybody has their own unique body type and some people are going to be stronger in certain lifts. So, there's not like one answer that everybody should squat more than they deadlift. No. I mean, even amongst the top powerlifters, you're not going to see that.

MW: I've got another good question from Peter. I kind of want to hear what Lee has to say about this one, too. He's got a goal of reaching 300 pounds in October for his 40th birthday. He says, "After that, I'm going to get ripped." So, it sounds like after he hits the 300 pound bench goal, he really wants to reduce his body fat. But, he does not want to lose his bench press strength. What can he do to maintain the bench press strength while, at the same time, trying to get 'ripped'?

I've done a couple of big interviews on this and I mean, this is really open for debate. It's a really loaded question. There's probably...we could spend a couple of hours talking about just this alone. But, from my experience there's a fine line between how much cardio you can do before it starts affecting your strength. And it's different for every person. I've seen some people that do a ton of cardio and still keep their strength, and some people, if they do just a little too much, it immediately affects their strength.

So, Lee, do you have any suggestions how he could keep his bench press strength and lose some body fat at the same time?

LH: Yeah, definitely this is like opening a can of worms. First off, I'm going to... This is probably not the most positive thing, but I just know from experience. Chances are, if you want to get ripped, and I mean truly ripped as in single digit body fat with visible abdominal definition and everything else, chances are you're going to lose a little bit of strength in the process. I find every time I diet-down for bodybuilding competition, as

much as I try to maintain my strength and everything else, the leaner you get, it's just inevitable that you're going to lose a little bit of strength along the way.

Now, of course, there are some genetic freaks out there who are super strong, powerlifters and Strongmen who have ripped abs year round as well. But, they're slim and few. I just find that typically you can start a diet plan and maintain or even gain strength in your diet as long as you're not too extreme. I mean, you're still keeping adequate protein in there, you're still keeping an adequate fat intake. I usually make my biggest cuts in my starchy carbohydrates. Still keep vegetables and healthy carbs like that, fibrous carbs and green veggies in there. But, typically I cut back on the heavy starches and of course sugars and sweets and crap that you shouldn't be eating anyway.

I find that that allows you to maintain a lot of strength while stripping away body fat. But, you will... Once you get to a certain threshold, I mean, once you get so lean, it's almost inevitable that some strength loss is going to come along with it.

For me, usually when I get up to about six weeks out from a bodybuilding show, I'm able to have really good, strong workouts up until about six weeks out. And then, for whatever reason, once I get to past that point and I'm starting to dip down, get extra lean at that stage, like contest-ready, it's just like my strength just drops off big time.

I've talked to a lot of bodybuilders and a lot of people who've went through this process. It's very similar across the board once you get so lean. You can't maintain that strength.

Now, in Peter's case, he might not want to get super lean. I mean, you can still be reasonably lean and have a darn good beach body and maintain your strength at the same time. So, I guess it's all depending on how low do you want to go when it comes to the body fat.

MW: Right, I mean, if he wants... I don't know where he's at now, but he could probably keep a ton of strength and get down to like 12% or something like that.

LH: Absolutely. Yep.

MW: If he wants to just up your cardio, you want to just try to lose a lot of body fat but not get to where you're trying to compete or get into single digits or anything like that, I think getting onto like a 5X5 program is good maintenance mode. But then, at the same time, what you really need to do is clean up your diet and start adding in more cardio than when you're really trying to up your one-rep max.

So, that's something you could try. Get onto like a 5X5 program for a few weeks, really tighten up on your diet, but that doesn't mean eat less. I'm talking about just

cleaning it up. Make sure you're still getting enough protein. I say get a gram at least per pound.

LH: Absolutely.

MW: Per pound of body weight, for a minimum. That's just going to keep you from breaking down and keep your muscles growing and recovering. Make sure you're getting your gallon of water a day, get your vegetables. If you can just cut out three main things like the three white evils or whatever, like sugar, salt and white flour. Just get those three things out of your diet completely, start drinking a lot of water, get your protein and your vegetables and then Lee might have some more suggestions on carbs. There are a lot of controversy on that. I try to stick to the lower glycemic carbs. I don't avoid them completely.

If you eat a lot of protein and a lot of vegetables, drink a lot of water and up your cardio, I think you should be able to maintain a lot of the strength you've gained.

LH: Another little trick you can do to help maintain your strength and your muscle mass it to eat low carb for the majority of your meals. But, for your post-workout meal, you could have a high carb meal there. So, that would be a meal where you could have generous servings of potatoes, rice or pasta or oatmeal or something like that, good, solid starchy complex carbs. But, save it for your post-workout meal to help rebuild and recover your muscle tissue, replenish your glycogen levels and things like that. At the same time, those carbs aren't going to be shuttled towards body fat, because you're consuming them post-workout.

So, that's a little trick that I often do in my training when I want to get leaner. Save your carb meal for your post-workout and that helps to keep your strength up as well.

MW: Yeah, good point, definitely.

We're getting close to the end now. You want to do one more, maybe the calf question?

LH: Let's see what we got here, yeah. We've got a lot of questions come through and unfortunately, we've not going to have time to cover them all. But, we tried to cover a lot of main ones that we know probably apply to a lot of people. This next one, I'm just going to throw this out there, because Mike spurred me on. The question is, "Hey, Lee. My question is, do you need to have great genetics to have great calfs? Or, if you don't have good genetics for calfs, can you train them so they will be great, almost to the size of yours? LOL." This is from David.

I have to be upfront and honest. I've got big ole calves. You can call them cows if you want. I got those from my mom. My mom has huge calves and it's not really due to training them. I mean, I've always had big calves, it's just a genetic thing. It's one of those muscle groups, for the most part, you either have them or you don't.

Yes, you can train them and yes, you can make improvements. But, when it comes to having really huge calves, usually it's a genetic thing. That's the honest truth of it all.

Like, a lot of even pro bodybuilders struggle in the calf department. They might have huge arms and shoulders and chest, back and quads, and then it's just like chicken legs from the knee down. I mean, obviously someone who's at the elite levels of bodybuilding have tried everything that you can imagine to get their...

MW: Including calf implants.

LH: You know, you name it, from injection oils, synthenol crap or whatever some people use to implants to whatever. If pro bodybuilders sometimes struggle with calf development, then it's a genetic thing.

MW: You remember the quote by Arnold?

LH: What was it?

MW: I don't know if I'm getting it right, but I think he used to be embarrassed of his calves. So, they like cut all of his jeans off at the knees so he had to walk around showing his calves everywhere he went so he'd be embarrassed of them and train them real hard. Somebody said, I might be getting it wrong, but I think he said like, "Your calves don't even show any growth until you've put in like 1,000 hours of calf training." Or, something like that. It was something ridiculous.

LH: Okay. I've heard some crazy stuff from Arnold. I remember he was actually...one time he was talking about that at the Arnold Classics a few years back and he said that he trained his calves every single day, first thing in his workouts to try to get them to grow. I mean, yeah, improvement is always possible with any body part, but still, I think genetics are going to have a huge impact on your size potential for any muscle group.

Some people have huge arms. Some people have huge shoulders. Some people have huge calves, whatever. I mean, we just have these genetic muscle groups that are just naturally bigger. Still, I mean, if you want to put in the work and the effort, you can certainly make improvements. But, again, the size does come down to the genetics.

All right, is there anything else you want to cover here, Mike, before we close it up for the evening?

MW: I think we got most of them, most of the ones we can get in without being too long.

LH: Yeah. Some questions here, I'm just quickly scanning through them. Some are kind of repetitive. Some are like nutrition related questions and stuff. Okay, there's one quick question I'm going to throw in here and this one's from John. And it's with regards to the Blast Your Bench program. He's saying, "I've got a question. I'm in week three of the Blast Your Bench program. I just finished the workout which is five sets of three reps. I went up from five pounds from yesterday and I could only do three sets of three reps. The fourth set, I could only do two and I didn't do the fifth set."

Okay, one thing that it mentions here, in the program, I do recommend that when you can get all the sets and the reps for a given workout and you do all those sets and reps with good form by yourself with no help from a spotter, up the weight by five pounds for your next workout. Use those little 2 ½ pound plates and get the five pounds jumps on the bar. If you can't get all those sets and reps by yourself, or you need to get help from a spotter, then keep the same weight for your next workout. Don't increase the weight if you can't complete all the sets and reps by yourself.

This is a question that I've been asked by several people who have followed the program. It is a very demanding program. I mean, the Blast Your Bench, three week bench press specialization phase, I mean, you are kicking your ass in the bench. But, it's like controlled over-training. We're going to blast it hard for three weeks and really get a big growth spurt, but you're going to push it to the limit. Yeah, you're going to make some great gains, but after those three weeks, you need to back off and give your body a break from it.

So, definitely listen to your body, and if you can't get all the sets and reps by yourself, keep the same weight for your next workout or maybe even consider dropping the weight. Because, a lot of people tend to over-shoot and try to do too much too soon. I like to be a little conservative with my weight jumps so that you can get all your sets and reps. Lift the weight and feeling strong and have high confidence going into your next workout rather than hitting failure, feeling burnt out and feel like the weights are too heavy. I just find that that mentally kind of screws you up for the next workout. I find it's better to play it a little bit more on the conservative side and ride that wave of momentum to make the most of it.

MW: I agree with that. I get that question all the time from people. We talked about people just having an off week or backing off if you're not feeling that great. But, I give you a rep range to do, per set, and if you struggled... Let's say you're in week two and

you struggled and you didn't quite get as many reps as you wanted to on each of your sets. What I recommend you do for the following week is on your first few sets, go for the minimum rep range.

Let's say in the first set you could do six reps. Don't. Do the lower end of that rep range instead, just do the five. Then, for the next set, go for the low rep range again. Now, when you get to your last set, which is your heaviest set of the day, how you've got more energy because you shot for the lower end rep ranges in the previous sets. Does that make sense?

So, otherwise, if you're going for the high end of every set, all the way up and then you get to your last set and you miss it, it hurts your confidence. If that happened to you in one week, the next week, go for all the low rep ranges and then save your energy for the last set and you'll probably be more likely to get it.

LH: That makes a lot of sense. I often have done similar things when doing multiple sets of the same rep range. For example, let's say you're doing five sets of five, or four sets of eight or whatever rep range you pick, but you're keeping the same weight for each set and kind of the same rep range. If I can get through the first... Okay, say we're doing five sets of five. If I can get through the first four sets of five and feel real strong, sometimes I may push it a little more, put on a little bit more weight for that last set, if I'm feeling super strong for the first four.

And again, you finish the workout feeling strong, feeling confident and actually looking forward to your next workout rather than doing it the other way around where you get to that last set feeling beat-up and actually... It's a big confidence breaker as well, if you fail and get the spotter to pull that off you or something like that. I mean, it's not a way you want to end your workout.

MW: Yeah, for sure.

I got one more real quick one, just before we end things. I just wanted to get this one in. I just saw it. Different people have different schedules and it's easy for us to say to this on this day. But, you've got to make this work for your lifestyle and your other commitments and family and other activities you have going on. So, this is from Richard and he just wanted to move his rest days around. He's got judo class and he wanted to move his rest days to Tuesday and Thursdays. Can he do that?

I say, yeah. You can move things around, make it work for you. But, here's what I don't want you to do. This is split up like a bodybuilding split, some of these workouts. For your chest day, I don't want you to do shoulders or triceps the day before your bench workout. So, don't move things around like that. That's a pretty important key to my program. If you are changing the days around or moving your rest days, you just

can't stick to the way it is due to your schedule, try not to do shoulders or triceps the day before you bench press.

LH: Yeah, that's a good point. I get that question a lot, too, because obviously people have different schedules. So, yeah, things can be manipulated, but you still have to stick to the foundational principles of the program. So, yeah, thanks for covering that one.

All right, Mike, like I say, we've gone over an hour. I know that. But, that's okay. I don't mind over-delivering, providing a bit of extra. But again, I think we'll clue it up unless there's another quick one that you want to throw in there last minute.

MW: No, I think we're good. We snuck in like four more since we said that.

LH: Yeah. Good stuff.

MW: Yeah, thanks for being on the call and talking about all this stuff. I appreciate everybody listening to us and sharing all your comments, feedback, success stories. It keeps us motivated to keep doing this, hearing about everybody's journey and things you're learning and sharing your information with us as well.

LH: For sure. I think that's the highlight of my day when I can go check my email or something and somebody sends me a success story saying, "Hey, I followed the program," and they share their results. There's nothing I enjoy more than getting those emails. So, by all means, guys, you're listening to this call, if you have a success story or you want to be a future success story, by all means, let us know. Shoot us an email, let us know about your progress with the program. Both Critical Bench, Blast Your Bench, don't matter, send it in. We'd love to hear about your success, because again, that's what keeps us motivated on our end, hearing about the results that you guys are getting.

MW: Yeah, and if you want to learn more, who knows how you got this interview, maybe it gets passed along way around. But, go check out BlastYourBench.com and CriticalBench.com. You can also check out Lee's personal blog over at LeeHayward.com.

LH: Your blog, is it CriticalBench.com? That's your main blog site as well?

MW: That's the main magazine area of the site where there are tons of articles, exercises, lots of other free information. My little personal area of the site where I blog and just do rants and just kind of talk about whatever I want. That's CriticalBench.com/strength. That takes you to my blog.

LH: Okay, cool. So, definitely check those out. Like I say, I will have the replay of this call posted up and sent out. So, again, there's a lot of stuff we covered here. I definitely recommend, save this to your MP3 player, go over it again, because the more you listen to this, the more it's going to sink-in and the better results you're going to get.

All right, Mike, thanks for sharing all your words of wisdom. I mean, I picked up a ton of stuff myself. So, I'm sure that our listeners got a lot of benefit from this as well.

MW: Thanks, Lee, likewise. I learned a lot, too.

LH: All right, cool. Awesome. All right folks, that concludes our Mass and Strength coaching call. Like I say, we'll probably be doing some more stuff like this in the near future, but you'll be hearing about that. In the meantime, when you complete our programs, either Critical Bench or Blast Your Bench, again, please send us in your feedback. We'd love to hear about it.

All right, guys. Take care. Over and out.

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