



## Man of Steel

An injury-proofing workout that'll turn you into a superman!

by John Davies

There's nothing I like better than standing on the dewy football field as the crisp early morning air ushers in a fresh group of athletes. Whether they're high-school kids or seasoned professionals, you can see in their eyes an enthusiasm that's both contagious and powerful.

For some, the tasks are a ruthless climb in which they look to silence every critic who said they couldn't perform at this level. For others, the motivation lies within the primal emotion of being part of the team, a veritable "wolf-pack." The concept of earning the letter, wearing *that* jersey and being a part of the tradition is a powerful intoxicant that pushes them onward.



But outside of this situation, lying in wait and ready to derail every athlete's dream, is the ugly face of injury. Whether it's an untimely act of chance or poor training protocols, injury terrorizes our body and spirit and often destroys the great joy that sports and physical activity gives us.

In all the written work on training, injury is nearly unmentioned. Little is written of it outside of highly complex journals geared toward medical practitioners. What is written seems to be of a passive nature, from an after-the-fact vantage point. While many have considered Renegade training insanely tough and even reckless, few speak of the tremendously low incident of injuries within my group of athletes. The reason for this is simple: while some injuries are impossible to avoid, many can be avoided, especially those that occur during training. Preparation isn't just there to prepare you for the season, but also to put you in the best position possible to avoid injuries. Excellence begins with preparation!

My athletes use a specific plan of attack to protect against injuries. First they recognize that they're only as strong as their weakest link, then they rigorously strengthen the areas that are most susceptible. This approach is very basic, but it'll ward off injuries, improve your weight room numbers (if that's your main focus), and of course, give you a great athletic physique.

While we can't eliminate the incidence of chance when it comes to game-day injuries, the overriding cause of many of these is due to muscular imbalance, incorrect lifting techniques (often because of using too-heavy of a weight), lack of

warm-up or poor warm-up procedures, postural alignment and faulty training. My approach isn't one that replaces medical attention for an injury that's already occurred, of course, but an attempt to progressively avoid the incidence of injury.

There are a five basic points that need to be stressed within your weight room work:

- 1) Ensure proper warm-up.
- 2) Maintain "neutral" back position during pulling movements.
- 3) Use only weight that you can handle with good range of motion.
- 4) Utilize static stretching post-workout.
- 5) Don't ignore pain and seek medical advice upon earliest onset of injury.

First, let's take a closer look at the warm-up.

### **The Man of Steel Warm-up**

Many athletes and bodybuilders consider warming-up an unnecessary waste of time. Too bad for them. Without readying your body, you're basically entering the demands of training completely unprepared and begging for an injury, not to mention sub-standard performance. What's that? You stretch before training as your "warm-up"? Sorry, but using only static stretching as your warm-up is one of the least effective manners to prepare yourself for training.

Prior to training, the Renegade athlete will use a diverse group of five drills: hip mobility drills using hurdles and bags, tumbling and body movement drills, foot patterning drills, simple weight movements, and rope skipping. Naturally, the first three sections are inappropriate and too complex to implement for the non-competitive athlete, although I have to admit, it sure would be fun to see the local gyms being inundated with members warming up with forward rolls and handstands. Too much for the old coach to dream of, so we better keep that stuff outside along with my trusty wheelbarrow (sniff, sniff).

That said, the latter two areas could easily be added to anyone's training with tremendous effectiveness. Within a standard three or four day a week lifting program, the following movements would serve as a warm-up. Now remember, these movements are to prepare us for the training and aren't part of the "real" training program itself. They're to be done light with higher reps (12 to 15) and you shouldn't even approach exhaustion. Perform in a circuit fashion with approximately 45 seconds rest between each set with roughly two total circuits encompassing about ten minutes.

## Swings (using either a dumbbell or kettlebell)

Hold a dumbbell with both hands, legs in a wide stance (1 1/2 times shoulder width). Start from a neutral back position with the buttocks back and begin the acceleration of the weight by pushing the hips forward. Show control of the weight and gradually increase range of motion such that the weight moves from waist level to above the head.

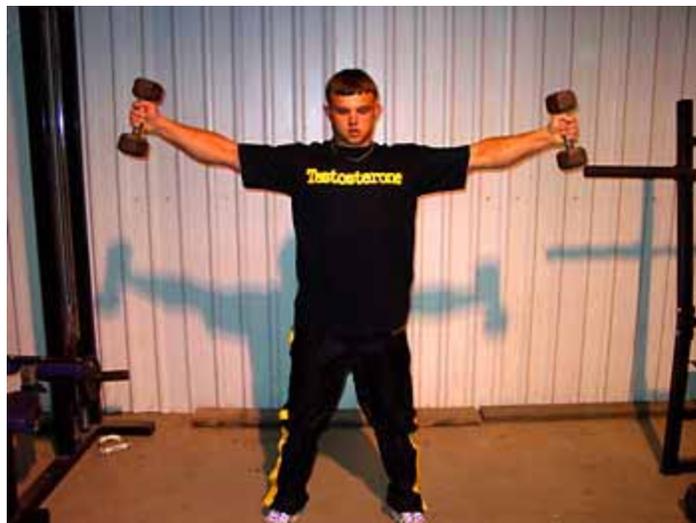




### **Iron Cross**

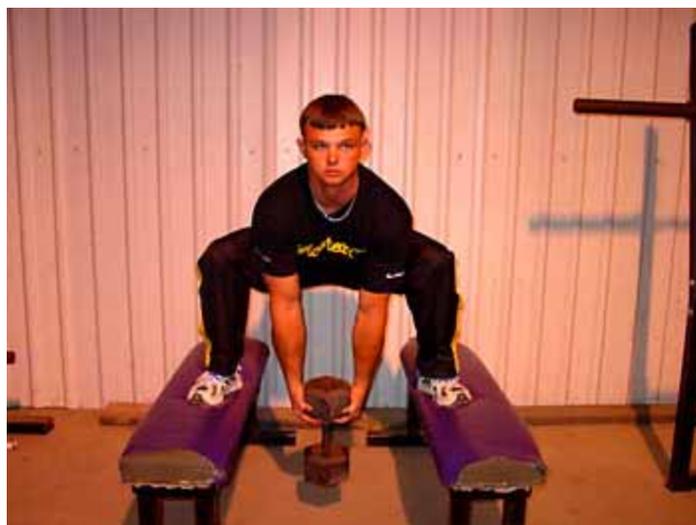
Hold two light dumbbells or plates in your hands, squat from a wide stance with the buttocks pushed back. Arms should be held straight ahead, parallel to the ground and thumbs up. As you squat up, push hips forward while simultaneously moving arms to sides in a cross position. Return to start position by moving in precise inverse fashion and keeping arms constantly parallel.





### **Renegade Squat-Pull**

You can do this one standing on two benches. However, for the purposes of a warm-up, it can easily be done on the floor. From a wide base stance with the buttocks pushed back, grab one end of a dumbbell with both hands. As you squat up, push hips forward while simultaneously performing an upright row till elbow to shoulder joint is parallel to ground. (Grip position may vary.)





## Rope Work

After completing this warm-up, move into the rope work (jumping). This can vary with your goals but a few three minute "rounds" will go a long way to ensuring you're properly warmed-up as well as making a solid contribution to your cardio needs. Once your rope skills are good enough, utilize a diverse pattern.

## Weight Room Habits

A common fault in many training environments is attempting to use a weight that's too heavy to maintain proper form. Ego is a lot stronger than common sense in some people and weights are being bounced up or cheated up in some fashion. While I appreciate that many coaches try to instill a tough attitude, exercises should never be done with poor technique. This can lead to an immediate injury or a muscular imbalance that, in turn, leads to chronic damage or poor performance down the road.

One other major problem is the reliance on machines. This is an enormous topic that is far beyond the scope of this article and one that many of the equipment companies will attempt to dispel. However, the abundant reliance on machines unquestionably eliminates the stabilizing needs required in sports and life in general, needs easily met by performing ground-based lifts. Simply put, execute your lifts with good technique regardless of weight, and don't feel a need to constantly use every chrome-plated machine in the gym.

Within each Renegade program, the strength work is broken equally into what I call *focus*, *accessory*, and *supplemental* segments. The two former areas (focus and accessory) deal typically with the particular training cycle's goals (i.e. speed-

strength) and the lifts are organized in a descending order with the most technically complex exercises first.

However, within the supplemental area, we attack with the same ruthless approach as in any section and take preventative measures to strengthen areas most at risk. This is the area I'll address here in this article. Generally, we'll employ two to three exercises of three sets each with 12 to 15 reps (unless otherwise noted) from a grouping of movements found below. Particular exercise selection varies depending on whether there's an existing weakness or whether it's purely a preventative measure.

The movements should be performed throughout the training year as part of your standard workout for the body part in question.

Now to the areas that are most at risk:

With both the elite athlete and the average fitness enthusiast, the majority of training injuries occur in two common areas: the shoulder capsule and the lower back. This has been my observation and I've confirmed it with Dr. Jim Neuwirth and Dr. Michael Hartle, chairman of the USA Powerlifting team. Therefore we'll focus much of our attention on those crucial areas.

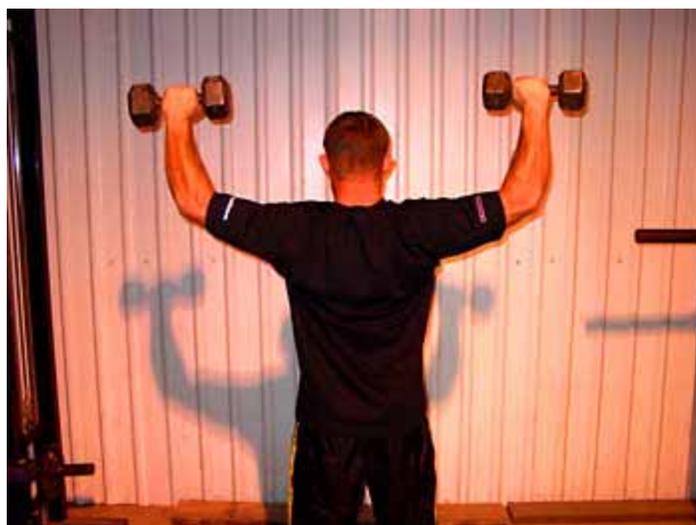
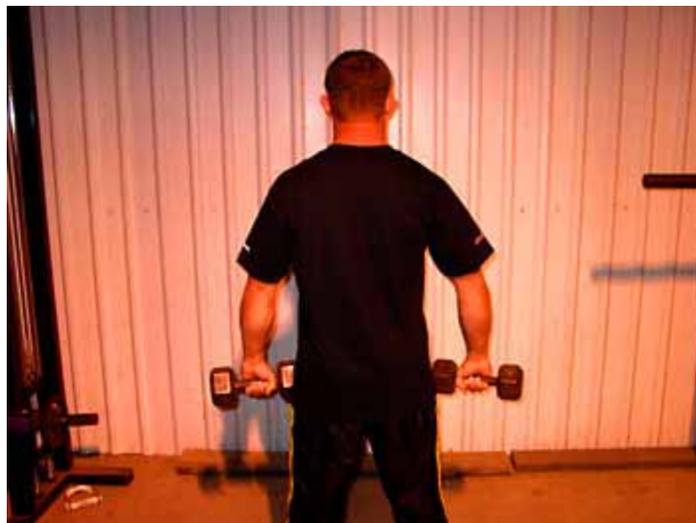
**Note:** I wish to stress that the following in no way replaces medical attention. If you suffer pain, either a fresh injury or chronic, I'd suggest seeking proper examination and diagnosis immediately.

## **Shoulder Capsule**

The most common concern here is impingement and overall weakness in the trapezius, rhomboids and subscapular region. Much of this is caused from a specific imbalance of weight room work or occupational functions. As an example, all too often training focuses strictly on the bench press without considering the impact of rear delts. My training program uses the following movements to eliminate the problem. (Recall that sets are performed with 12 to 15 reps.)

### **Cuban Press**

You can perform this one seated on a Swiss ball or standing up. Holding dumbbells in front, pinch rear delts and raise weights until shoulder to elbow is parallel to ground and elbow to wrist perpendicular.



### **Plate Raise**

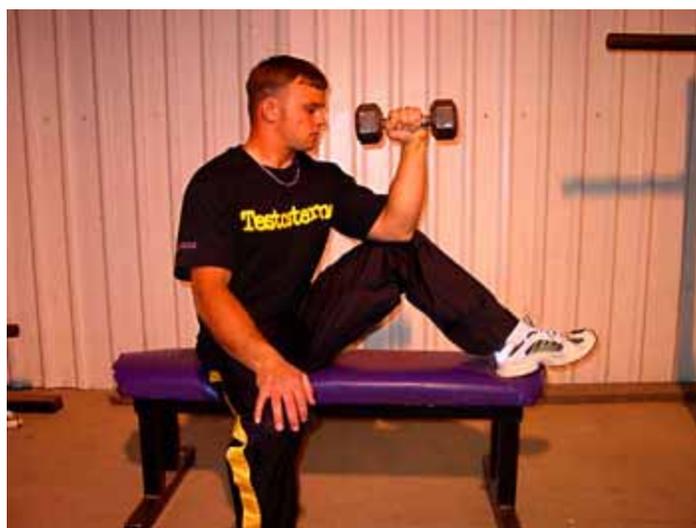
You can perform this one seated, standing or on a Swiss ball as shown here. Holding a plate at three and nine o'clock with arms outstretched, lift weight from lowest position until above eye level.





### **Internal/External Rotation**

Sitting on a bench with one leg up, rest elbow on inside of knee with dumbbell held upright. Lower to slightly below parallel and return back up.



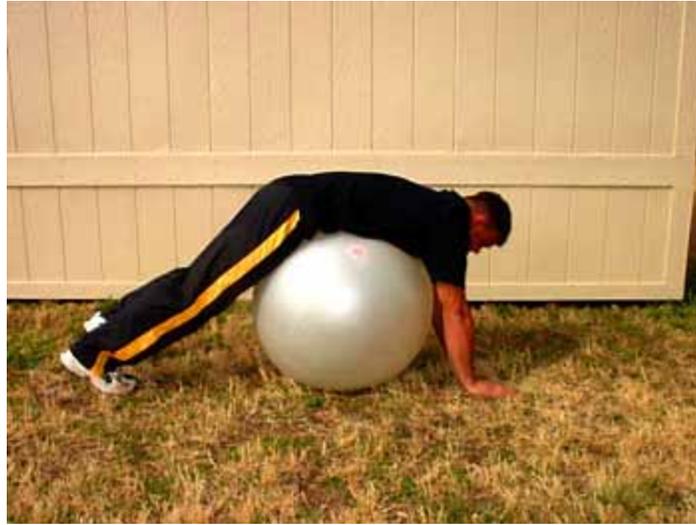


## **Lower Back**

An estimated 90% of the population suffers from lower back pain at some time. In lifters, this problem is often caused by poor mechanics, joint loading, and dysfunction of the hips. Stabilization of the lower back region along with enhanced range of motion and proper technique is key to avoiding injury in this area. The exercises below will go a long way in preventing lower back injury.

### **Scorpion Lift**

As you can see, the scorpion is very similar to a reverse hyper but performed using a Swiss Ball with an obvious low loading (bodyweight), higher repetitions, and a static hold at the top. Laying on top of the ball with hands firmly on the ground and feet resting on floor, roll forward and pull legs up so the body is aligned straight. Hold at top. Reverse movement down and repeat upwards of 25 reps.



## **Superman**

A very basic exercise that will assist in strengthening the core and can provide tremendous assistance for any level of athlete. Lying on the ground outstretched, lift arms and legs as high as possible and hold for a three to five count. Return to ground and repeat.



### **Waiter's Bow**

This is a tremendous exercise that reinforces the all-important neutral position. This position is possibly one of the most important elements in teaching young lifters and can never be overstated. Simply hold a plate across the chest with legs apart roughly shoulder width and knees slightly bent. From an upright position, bend forward until you're at 45 degrees. The movement from rotating forward comes from the hips and is quickly felt in the hamstrings.

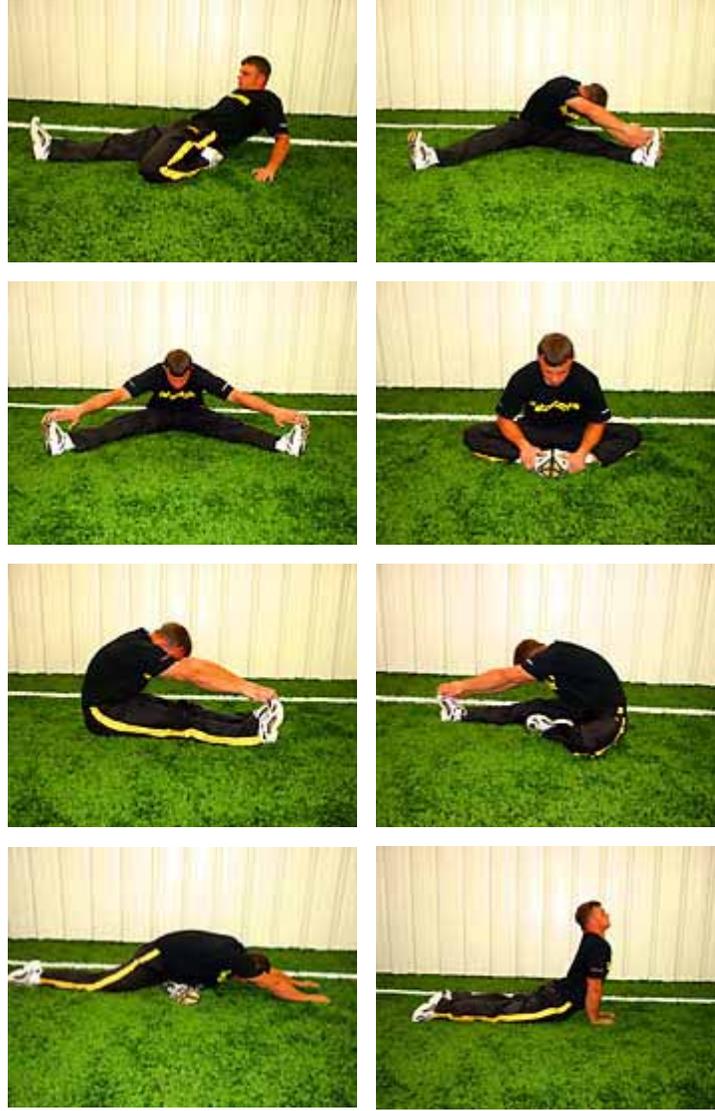


## Static Flexibility

Finally, as I've noted on many occasions, the first step in all my training philosophy is range of motion. The ability to be supple and pliable is imperative for maximum development as well as injury prevention.

While dynamic flexibility will radically enhance sport production as you develop ease and comfort of movement, static flexibility will reduce the injury occurrence by allowing greater joint movement and stability. If you dedicate yourself to improving your range of motion you'll do wonders at improving general health. Upon the completion of all training sessions, I use the following pattern of stretches with 45-second static holds. This gives you a full 18 minutes of stretching.





## Conclusion

Put this all together and in the end you'll have taken charge of your situation and will start reducing downtime in training caused from injury. You may not be bulletproof, but you'll be a man of steel in the gym and on the field! Now go bring it!