

Box Squatting

By: Louie Simmons. Westside Barbell www.westside-barbell.com

Box squatting is the most effective method to produce a first-rate squat. This is, in my opinion, the safest way to squat because you don't use as much weight as you would with a regular squat.

Let me say first that, no, they won't hurt your spine, you don't use 1000 lbs. on a 25 inch tall box, you don't rock on the box, you don't touch and go, and there is no need to do regular power squats before a meet. No knee wraps are worn nor are the straps of the suit pulled up.

By doing sets of 2 reps for at least 8 sets with short rest periods, you will get about a 200 lb. carryover to your regular squat. Two of our lifters finished their lifting cycle before a meet with 8 sets of 2 reps with 505 lbs. off a slightly below parallel box, and both squatted 700 for a meet PR One was competing in the 242s and the other as a 275. Two years before, in his first meet, our 275 pounder squatted 465 - quite an improvement!

There are many advantages to box squatting. One of the most important is recuperation. You can train more often on a box than you can doing regular squats. The original Westside boys (Culver City, CA) did them three times a week, which I feel is a bit extreme, but they paved the way for this type of training. We do them for the squat part of our workout on Fridays and occasionally on Mondays to build hip and low back power for deadlifting.

The second reason is equally important. It is generally accepted that you should keep your shins perpendicular to the floor when squatting. With box squatting, you can go past this point (that is, an imaginary line drawn from your ankle to your knee will point toward your body), which places all the stress on the major squatting muscles- hips, glutes, lower back, and hamstrings. This is a tremendous advantage.

Thirdly, you don't have to ask anyone if you were parallel. Once you establish a below parallel height, all of your squats will be just that -below parallel. I have seen it over and over. As the weights get heavier, the squats get higher. This can't happen with box squats.

If your hips are weak, use a below parallel box with a wide stance. If you need low back power, use a close stance, below parallel. If your quads are weak, work on a parallel box. If you have a sticking point about 2 inches above parallel, as is common, then work on a box that is 2 inches above parallel. Our advanced

squatters use all below parallel boxes. This builds so much power out of the hole that there will be no sticking points.

As an added bonus, box squats will build the deadlift as well by overloading the hips and lower back muscles. Your ability to explode off the floor will increase greatly. One of our 275 pounders, Jerry Obradovich, put 50 lbs. on his dead lift in 3 months by doing extra box squats during that time period, going from 672 to 722 at the 1994 APF Junior Nationals. Chuck Vogelpohl deadlifts only about once in 8 weeks yet pulls 793 in the 242s. Chuck relies on wide box squats on a low, 12-inch box and does a lot of reverse hypers@5356,359 and 6,491,607b2 and chest-supported rows.

Now, how do you do a box squat? They are performed just like regular squats. Fill your abdomen with air, and push out against your belt. Push your knees out as far as possible to the sides and with a tightly arched back, squat back, not down, until you completely sit on the box. Every muscle is kept tight while on the box with the exception of the hip flexors. By releasing and then contracting the hip flexors and arching the upper back, you will jump off the box, building tremendous starting strength. Remember to sit back and down, not straight down. Your hamstrings will be strengthened to a high degree, which is essential. Many don't know this, but the hamstrings are hip extensors. Some great squatters have large quads and some do not, but they all have large hamstrings where they tie into the glutes. Remember to sit on the box completely and flex off.

Now, how do you know how much you can full squat if you box squat all the time? Well, let's say you have squatted 600 lbs. in a meet and decided to box squat. Let's say you can do 550 off a parallel box; that's a 50-lb. carry-over. Now you are doing only box squats and you take a weight 4-6 weeks into the cycle.

I recommend that you train with 65-82% of your box record on each particular box height that you use. Change box heights every 3-4 weeks. Do not base the training weight on your full squat record! Box squats are much harder than full squats! Do 8-12 sets of 2 reps with 1 minute rest between sets. This is a tough workout! The week that you reach 82%, reduce the sets to 6. Don't train with more than 82%. You can try a max the after you train with 82%. If you are going to a meet, take a weight 2 weeks before the meet. The week before the meet use 70% for 6-8 sets.

This type of squatting is hard work, but each rep shouldn't be hard. Don't get psyched up to do your sets. We have found that 2 reps is ideal because any more may cause bicipital tendonitis and if you are doing 12 sets, you are doing 12 first reps per workout. After all, the first rep is the most important one. This will make your contest squat much better. Our most talented lifters will do best on Westside Barbell their first rep and then tire quickly whereas our lower skilled people will do better after the first rep is completed because they use the first rep as a body awareness tool. As they become more skilled, their first rep will be their best.

BOX SQUATS

A box squat is a great variable to work with on the squat. They are the best thing to do for a slight break from your heavy squat without leaving the squat all together. The pause on the box will force you use lower weights and the result over the weeks is great squat work along with a chance for the nervous system to recover. You will soon be addicted to the box squat.

I have read and found through the latest research that breaking the eccentric / concentric chain is the best way to build explosiveness out of the bottom of a squat. Using the box as a depth indicator has two distinct disadvantages. **First**, the touch and go method of box squatting is dangerous because of potential spinal compression. **Secondly**, failing to pause on the box defeats the entire purpose of doing box squats. Many lifters do them but few actually know why they work. They work because they are an effective way to break the chain I mentioned earlier without the risk of injury. The reduced risk is because the lifter's weight is supported in the box giving the lifter the opportunity to pause and then fire all muscle fiber at one time. Otherwise the lifter must keep the system turned on and can never break the chain.

A stretch reflex is completely lost with a box squat whether or not you choose to pause on the box. As soon as the lifter's rear touches the box the kinetic energy that was stored by the lifter is transferred into the box and lost to some extent.

A lifter may have the false impression they are producing a stretch reflex off the box but in fact they are simply using the box as a type of spring board.

The overwhelming benefit from a box squat is realized when the pause is implemented. I have made ridiculous gains from both box squatting and floor pressing and I attribute this progress to the break in the eccentric / concentric chain which allows the body to change from a semi-relaxed state to an abruptly forceful state improving the explosiveness of a particular muscle group.

In this day and age, it is hard to find top lifters who do not box squat. Box squats can be a good tool for teaching the squat, working the blast off the bottom. By adding bands, they can be one of the best strengthening exercises for the squat.

How to box squat

For average box squatting, a box should have the lifter go just barely below parallel. To do a box squat you simply squat down to the box as if sitting on a chair, relax the hip flexors, rock back slightly, then forward. You then fire off with the hips and with the legs contributing. Done like this, it will really help a lifter fire out of the bottom of a squat.

Box squatting for power

Louie Simmons and the Westside Barbell Club do the box squat with jump stretch bands/bungees. This is the best exercise for overall power. The bands are arranged so that they will pull somewhat at the bottom and increasingly more as the lifter rises. Since a squat gets easier as one rises, the bands pull more and the lift is worked evenly throughout the full range of motion. When the lifter sits on the box and gets ready to rise, they know that they will have to explode to push through the bands. Thus the blastoff is really worked hard. Since chains add a uniform amount of additional resistance, box squats with chains will be good for a slightly lower sticking point.

- *Box squat with bands work bottom and higher regions of the lift.
- *Box squat with chains work bottom and lower sticking point
- * Box squats without added resistance just work the bottom of lift.

Box squatting applications

Lifters with knee problems

Lifters who have problems getting low enough because of knee problems can high box, and then lower it right before meet.

Lifters with lower back problems

Lifters with lower back problems will find out that this exercise will strengthen the lower back. If you do have back problems, start with a low weight and reasonable band resistance, and slowly add weight.

For those who have problems out of the bottom or lift raw.

Box squats with chains work well because of the dead weight.

Bungees work well as they will "catch" you after you blast out of the bottom, and you know you will have to blast to get through the bungees. Maximum gains in minimum time.

Box squats with bands not only work the bottom, but the whole lift harder than regular squats.

Box Squats with Bands & Chains

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