CLASSIC POWERLIFTING CYCLE

1. The Powerlifting cycle described here will take lifters through an 8 to 15 week progression to reach a peak on competition day. The weights are planned as precisely as can be, to reach the **milestone target of 3 x 5 at absolutely 100% effort 1 – 2 weeks out from the contest** – if you improve in the strength fundamental of 3 x 5 your singles will look after themselves. Follow the written cycle with complete consistency, any problems with weights being too easy or too hard will come out in the second half of the cycle and the progression can be adjusted then. Your written cycle will be on the Club noticeboard; if you are attempting this programme by correspondence the art of predicting progression will be harder and you should keep in touch with me. The training cycle is on a single sheet, which gives the outline of the programme (see examples attached) but many of the variables involved will be learnt as you develop as an athlete.

2. **Warm up weights** are not shown, only the sets and reps and so these have to be judged on the day, e.g.

8, 5, 5  3 x 8 x 120  
means something like –
8 x 60, 5 x 85, 5 x 105, 3 x 8 x 120

and

5, 3, 2  3 x 5 x 180  
means something like –
5 x 60, 3 x 120, 2 x 155, 3 x 5 x 180

i.e. start warm ups on 60 or 70kg and have progressively smaller jumps, with last warm up 10 – 15% below the main sets’ weight.

3. **Time between each main set** becomes progressively greater as the cycle goes on, e.g.

3 x10 – 5 – 8 minutes  
3 x 8 – 8 – 10 minutes  
3 x 6 – 10 – 12 minutes  
3 x 5 – 12 – 15 minutes  
2 x 2 – 10 – 12 minutes

These times may be slightly less for smaller women or beginners and slightly more for heavier men and very advanced lifters. These breaks between sets may be longer than what you are used to, but full recovery between each set is important.

4. **Time between reps** is also a critical variable and should in general be –

3 x10 – 1 second  
3 x 8 – 1 – 2 seconds  
3 x 6 – 2 seconds  
3 x 5 – 2 – 3 seconds  
2 x 2 – 3 seconds

For the Squat and Bench Press – the time given refers to time at the top (i.e. standing upright before each squat rep, with bar at arm’s length before each rep in bench press); for the Deadlift the same pause cannot be done,
i.e. there is only a pause of a second or so at the top and a second or less at the bottom (see 5 below).

These times may also be much longer than you have done in the past, but it is important to achieve recovery, even from rep to rep – ATP can be replenished in c. 2 seconds and some neural recovery can occur in that time; a bodybuilder’s “pumping” style of rapid reps is counter productive for Powerlifting. It has been shown that the force produced in a fast-done set drops off very rapidly from rep to rep, whereas a set approached as 5 or 6 “singles” allows for maximisation of force-output, even on the last reps of the set

5. All reps are to be done explosively, i.e.

Squat - big breath at top, descend smoothly and accelerate drop to bottom to allow for rapid reversal (i.e. a controlled rebound)

Bench Press - big breath at top, descend smoothly and accelerate drop to chest to allow for rapid, tight reversals (i.e. not a bounce off the rib-cage but a controlled punch-like reversal at the point where the bar touches the chest)

Deadlift - big breath in set position before each rep (i.e. when the bar is on the floor and you are set over the bar), quickly punch the hips down and forward-drive the feet into the ground and "rebound" the bar off the floor i.e. the bar is not bounced off the floor but actually pauses dead on the floor for a second or so, the “rebound” comes from your body)

6. Assistance exercise percentages given are indicative only, as I do not know your weights on these exercises, e.g. 3 x 6 x 90% means pick a weight you can complete the sets of 6 on with what feels to you like 90% effort (i.e. hard but can be completed without risk of failure), 3 x 10 x 60% means quite easy, 3 x 6 x 100% means flat out, etc.

7. Those doing Deadlifts Off the Block [(B) marked above Deadlift weights] do either of the following

- stand on 5cm block, put bar on ground for a 2 – 3 second pause between reps and deadlift to normal lockout (this is for those with sticking point on ground)
- or stand on 10cm block, do first rep from ground but then each rep involves big breath at top and then drop the bar for quick reversal (like a squat) ½ “ above where weight discs would hit floor and then pull all the way through to normal lockout – takes practice! (this is for those with sticking point above knee)

- discuss this with me if Deadlifts Off Block are to be done

8. Light days are just as important as heavy days – training some days at a faster speed/lighter weight than the heavy days has a major stimulating effect on strength, so resist the temptation to leave them out. Note that on light days

- each rep should be done as a reasonably quick movement, but not in too exaggeratedly fast a manner
- time between reps is c. 1 second, i.e. even on the light days do not pump out continuous reps like a bodybuilder
- time between sets is c. 5 minutes
- the warm up set(s) are not shown on the programme for light days – only one set is required, at about 60kg (less for women), e.g. 5 x 60, then 3 x 5 x 100kg
- bench press is the only lift done with a different technique on the light day (i.e. narrow shoulder-width grip, elbows in, bar placed higher up chest), Squat and Deadlift are done in identical technique to heavy day (including block on Deadlift, if used)

9. If you miss reps on the last week of 3 x 5 (the only week there should be any danger of missing) don’t panic, but

- if you got 5, 5, 4 this is OK
- if you got 5, 5, 3 or worse, you must make-up the missing reps by doing another set of 5 at c. 95% effort, e.g. 5 x 200, 5 x 200, 5 x 200 got only 2, so do 5 x 190; an extra set done like this will feel like a ton but it is essential to get 15 or more reps done in total

10. The 2 x 2 sets should be a little easier than the 3 x 5 sets of the week before – for advanced lifters the 2 x 2s should actually be a lot easier – it is safe to start higher in the comp. than you did the 2 x 2s on e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 x 5</td>
<td>250kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 x 2</td>
<td>270kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contest</td>
<td>280/292 ½ /300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the 2 x 2 sets you will almost always wear the supportive gear to be worn in competition – bench shirt, squat suit and wraps, deadlift suit. Thus **the great majority of the cycle will be done without supportive equipment** – the point is to get strong and to gain additionally from the equipment, not to put the cart before the horse.

11. Nevertheless the **bench shirt** requires some adjusting to. This has to be planned for each individual and will be worked out with you, according to any changes in the size or style of shirt you intend to use, past ease or otherwise of getting gain out of the shirt, your general progress on the bench, etc. It is important though that any training with the shirt does not take away from the actual strength-building work of the cycle, it will generally be an additional process.

12. For some lifters a partially or almost completely **different cycle for the benchpress** may be applied, e.g beginners may do better with a high-volume, semi-body building programme (see “Bench Press Volume Programme”), intermediate lifters with a more intense, lower-reps per set programme (see “Bench Press Intensity Programme”). This is because a regular cycle on the Bench Press may have too many wasteful early weeks with intensity less than could be achieved, given that recovery is quicker on the bench than on the Squat and Deadlift. However more advanced lifters (c. 160kg + raw bench) are still using heavy bench weights and will usually respond best to a standard progression.

13. The programme sheet may be hard to read for the **last 2 weeks** of the cycle; it should go –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thursday (9 – 10 days before comp)</th>
<th>2 x 2 DL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday (the day after that)</td>
<td>3 x 5 light day BP &amp; SQ as per “normal”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday (5 – 6 days before comp)</td>
<td>2 x 2 BP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 x 5 DL light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 x 2 SQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday (2 – 3 days before comp)</td>
<td>3 x 5 light B &amp; SQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 x 10 situps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- contact me if this is not clear

14. **Nutrition** is a field in itself, although one riddled with pseudo-knowledge. However it is clear that an important variable is that the lifter takes in a reasonable volume (c. 30gms) of protein and also probably carbohydrate no more than an hour after completing training. For most that means bringing some sort of food source to the training venue.

15. This type of programme is **repeated 3 or 4 times a year**, with the improvement in 3 x 5 being the benchmark. Long-term progress comes from consistent training throughout all of the year, for multiple years, steadily building your underlaying strength and also developing your lifting technique and professionalism in all aspects of performance.

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