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# THE NAKED WARRIOR

MASTER THE SECRETS OF THE SUPER-STRONG—USING BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES  
ONLY

BY  
PAVEL

MASTER THE SECRETS OF THE SUPER-STRONG  
—USING BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES ONLY

PAVEL

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**DEDICATED**

**TO THE PARTY, THE DRAGONDOOR.COM STRENGTH FORUM**

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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE NAKED WARRIOR RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

- “The Naked Warrior”, or why strength train with bodyweight?
- Strength. Pure strength.
- The Naked Warrior rules of engagement
- How do lifters really train?
- How do gymnasts get a good workout with the same weight?

### “The Naked Warrior”, or why strength train with bodyweight?

Because it is always there.

Tony Blauer, one of the top defensive tactics and close-quarter combat instructors in the law enforcement and military communities, coined the expression “a Naked Warrior”. “I should be able to take care of myself even if I am naked,” says Blauer. “But it goes without saying that I will do better with an MP5, a Kevlar vest, and a good S.W.A.T. team.”

The same principle applies to strength training. You will make your best gains if you have access to quality hardware: barbells, kettlebells, pullup bars, and so on. But, unless you live the predictable life of a greenhouse plant, sooner or later you will end up in a situation in which you have no iron around

Refuse to cave in to the circumstances.

Being able to improvise something out of nothing is a skill highly valued by the Russian Special Forces. Do you know how to wash yourself with ashes from a bonfire? Can you keep your feet warm by stuffing dry grass inside your foot wraps? Can you rig up a time bomb out of a hand grenade and a cigarette?

Can you get a quality strength workout anywhere, anytime?

Now you can.

Quoting Theodore Roosevelt, “Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”

### Strength. Pure strength.

You cannot be ‘just strong’. The idiotic question, “Who is stronger, powerlifters or strongmen?” can be compared to “Who will win in a fight, a shark or a lion?” On land or in the water?

### **Strength is the ability to generate force under given conditions**

Strength can mean a lot of different things. It cannot be taken out of context.

Strength is defined as the ability to generate force *under given conditions*.



Here is a highly simplified, in the trenches, classification of strength:

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*maximal strength,*  
*explosive strength,* and  
*strength endurance.*

Russian Kyokushinkai full-contact karate fighter and instructor Oleg Ignatov gives the following examples of bodyweight drills that develop these three types of strength:

- **Pushups:** the one-arm pushup (max strength), the clapping pushup (explosive strength), and the repetition pushup (strength endurance)
- **Squats:** the one-legged squat (max strength), low-rep vertical and broad jumps (explosive strength), vertical and broad jumps for up to 50 reps (strength endurance), repetition squats (strength endurance)

The focus of *The Naked Warrior* is max strength, period.

Why?

- Because pure strength gets very little attention in popular books—obsessed as they are with the high-rep pump.
- Because enough has already been said about strength endurance.
- Because, for a long time, your explosive strength will automatically increase along with your max strength.
- Because what you look like has no bearing on what you can do.

Power to you!

## **The Naked Warrior Rules of Engagement**

If you were looking for another mindless routine of repetition pushups and situps to pump yourself up, you have come to the wrong place. *The Naked Warrior* is about strength—period.

A hard man with no access to weights cannot afford a high-rep compromise.

It is a fact: respectable strength can only be built with high-resistance, low-rep exercises that impose high levels of tension on the muscles.

Note that I said ‘resistance’, not ‘weight’. A case in point: There are a lot more double-bodyweight benchers out there than men who can chin themselves with one arm.

*The Naked Warrior* will show you how to make select bodyweight drills so challenging you will only be able to squeeze out a couple of reps. You will do this by altering the leverage and weight distribution between the limbs. If pushups are easy for you, then do them on one arm. If you are a straggler and one-armers are no problem, then elevate your feet. You get the picture. By the same token, calisthenics (or cals) can be customized to be made easier. For instance, do one-arm pushups with your hands elevated, rather than your feet.

It is an axiom in serious strength training with iron that the best gains are made by focusing on a

limited number of high-resistance, full-body exercises, such as deadlifts and snatches. The Naked Warrior program features only two anywhere-anytime drills: the one-legged squat and the one-arm pushup. These exercises are brutally hard and work the whole body. They are the bodyweight equivalents of the powerlifts.

Strength is built by tensing the muscles harder, not by exhausting them with countless reps.

High resistance is one of the two requirements of high tension. The other is mental focus on contracting the muscles harder. The tension-generating skill is the most important variable in getting stronger—much more important than muscle mass. If this were not true, Alexey Sivokon would not have benched 500 pounds at 148 pounds of bodyweight and matching height.

Since strength is a skill, training must be approached as a ‘practice’, not a ‘workout’. Thus, the Naked Warrior routine is unlike any other you have seen. You will practice every day, throughout the day; you will focus on max tension; and you will totally avoid muscle fatigue and failure. Strength gains will come fast and furious.

“I went from 5 to 10 pullups in one week,” reported 235-pound Chris Rubio, RKC, on the [dragondoor.com](http://dragondoor.com) forum. His gains are not unusual.

Another distinctive feature of the Naked Warrior program is the high-tension techniques. Simply tensing the target muscles hard is great, but you can contract them even harder—much harder—by applying ancient martial arts tension secrets. *The Naked Warrior* has systematized them into a powerful instant-strength mix.

Jeff Selleg, Valley SRT Training/Operations Officer with the Port of Seattle Police, wrote, “Pavel, thanks for the training at the ASLET [American Society of Law Enforcement Training] conference. I am completely sold on your techniques. After your three-hour seminar, I added six pullups.” How can such quick gains be possible? Through increasing the intensity of the muscular contraction.

Power to you, Naked Warrior! Anywhere. Anytime.

## **The Naked Warrior Principles**

- Strength is built by tensing the muscles harder, not by exhausting them with reps.
- High tension requires high resistance and mental focus on contracting the muscles harder.
- High resistance can be achieved without heavy weights by deliberately imposing poor leverage and unfavorable weight distribution between the limbs.
- The best strength gains are made by focusing on a limited number of high-resistance, low-rep, full-body exercises. The Naked Warrior program features only two exercises: the one-legged squat and the one-arm pushup. They are the bodyweight equivalents of the powerlifts.
- Strength is a skill. Training must be approached as a practice, not a workout. You will practice every day, throughout the day; you will focus on max tension; and you will totally avoid muscle fatigue and failure.
- The skill of tension-generation is the most important variable in getting stronger—it is much more important than the building of muscle mass.
- The martial arts high-tension techniques will make you stronger by enabling you to tense your muscles harder.

## How do lifters really train?

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A book on max strength training—and when it comes down to it, it makes no difference whether you are lifting a barbell or your own body—would not be complete without tipping a hat to the people who have made strength their only pursuit: Olympic weightlifters and powerlifters.

How do these specialists train? If you don't belong to this exclusive community, chances are that you lump together lifters and bodybuilders into the same category and presume they follow the same “do or die” reps-to-failure shtick. Nothing could be further from the truth.

A limited number of exercises, mostly the two competition lifts and their variations, done in 6 to 10 sets of 1 to 3 reps each is the classic Olympic weightlifting blueprint for strength. Powerlifters follow a similar schedule, although their reps climb up to 5 and even 6 because the powerlifts are not as technically demanding as the snatch and the C&J. Powerlifters tend to do fewer sets because the deadlifts are more exhausting than the snatches.

Weightlifters train almost daily, often twice or even three times a day. Many powerlifters still practice each lift once a week, but this practice is quickly becoming obsolete. It's hard to ignore the fact that the victorious Russian men's national powerlifting team benches up to 8 times a week.

Neither group trains to failure. Weightlifters don't do more than 3 reps even with half their max. Powerlifters are the same way. The great ones rack the bar with at least a rep or two in the bank, unless they are in a meet.

Both breeds of strength athlete know that training continually with the same intensity or volume will flatline their strength gains. So, they play the game of “two steps forward, one step back”: first pushing ahead and then backing off.

Lifters practice the generation of greater tension relentlessly. Bench press record breaker George Halbert crushes the bar to pulp. World champion powerlifter Ernie Frantz practiced tensing up his whole body throughout the day. World record squatter Dr. Judd Biasiotto visualized tensing his muscles in the perfect sequence for each lift.

Once you strip away the drama and demagoguery, strength building, whether with your body or with iron, is simple and straightforward:

**Engage** a skeleton crew of full body exercises; **perform** multiple sets of up to 5 reps—never going to failure and with plenty of rest between sets; **employ** total focus on technique and tension; and **vary** volume and intensity continuously.



## HOW LIFTERS REALLY TRAIN

- Limited number of ‘big’ exercises
- Multiple sets of up to 5 reps, never to failure and with plenty of rest between sets
- Total focus on technique and tension
- Continuous variation in volume and intensity

You are about to learn how these principles can be successfully applied to strength training with a limited, unchanging weight—yours.

## How do gymnasts get a good workout with the same weight?

*NOT* by mindlessly adding reps. “...endless pushups, sit-ups or, for the strong, perhaps pull-ups and dips,” says Christopher Sommer, a gymnastics coach from Desert Devils in Phoenix, AZ, are “great maybe for general fitness or endurance, but of little value in building real strength.”

Performing more than 6 reps per set hinders strength development, insists Arkady Vorobyev, a leading Russian sports scientist and former world champion weightlifter. Robert Roman, another top gun of Russian weightlifting, explains that muscular tension or weight builds strength, rather than fatigue or reps. He clarifies that doing more reps generates less tension than exerting a brief maximal or near-maximal effort. So, if you expect to get stronger in the bench press or the one-arm pushup by knocking off 100 pushups, you have got another thing coming. And no, there is nothing magical or mysterious about your bodyweight versus iron that suddenly changes all the laws of strength training



## **There is nothing magical or mysterious about your bodyweight versus iron that suddenly changes all the laws of strength training.**

The question is:

If we have only so many pounds of weight to work with, how can we make the exercise hard enough in 6 reps or less?

Simple:

**By redistributing your weight between your limbs, manipulating the range of motion, training in an unstable environment, varying the leverage, and minimizing bounce and momentum.**

Let's consider these strategies one at a time.

### **Redistribute your weight between your limbs**

When you do a basic floor pushup, your weight is distributed between your hands and your feet, say 50/50. Elevate your feet on a bench and you will be pushing up 70 percent of your bodyweight. Lift your feet even higher and you will get an 80/20 distribution. Go up in a handstand and you will be lifting 100 percent (or almost 100 percent—your forearms will stay put).

You get the idea. The opposite principle also holds true. Rest your hands on a desk or even a wall and you will be pushing up but a fraction of your weight.

Another example of weight redistribution is doing a two-arm pushup but shifting more weight to one arm. Keep unloading one arm more and more as you get stronger, until you are doing a legit one-arm pushup. Lifting one leg up is another option.

Helping yourself up with your hands while doing one-legged squats inside a doorway is another way to manipulate the weight distribution.



**Lift your feet even higher and you will get an 80/20 distribution.**



**Elevate your torso rather than your feet—and you will be lifting but a fraction of your bodyweight.**

## **Manipulate the range of motion**

Redistributing your weight is the primary approach to resistance variation you will use with the Naked Warrior drills, but it is not the only one. You will also be manipulating your range of motion in some drills. A butt-to-the-floor one-legged squat, as favored by the Russian Special Forces, may be in your distant future, but I am sure you can sit down on a tall bench and come up on one leg.



**I am sure you can sit down on a tall bench and come up on one leg.**

## **Train in an unstable environment**

Strength is about tension. One way to amp the tension is to use heavier weights—but that's not an

option in this program. Another way to provide a greater challenge to your muscles is to perform an exercise in an unstable environment. ~~Armed forces powerlifting champion Jack Reape has taught me~~ an interesting variation of the decline pushup: Instead of putting your feet up on a bench, park them on top of the handles of two kettlebells. The instability of the bells will force your entire body to stay tight and strong.

The one-arm/one-legged pushup featured in this book also multiplies the challenge by adding instability. So does the one-legged squat.

## Vary the leverage

Another variable you can manipulate is the leverage. The ancient Greek scientist and mathematician Archimedes bragged that he could tip the world with a lever that was sufficiently long—and he had a point. But leverage works both ways. By reducing it, an exercise can be made harder. The iron cross on the rings is not even in the same ballpark with pullups when it comes to difficulty, even though both involve lifting exactly the same amount of weight.

Practicing with an extreme lack of leverage is one of the secrets to gymnasts' super strength. "The name of the game is resistance," says Chris Sommer in the excerpt from his upcoming book *Building the Olympic Body*, posted on the articles page of [dragondoor.com](http://dragondoor.com). "A muscle contracts against resistance and, with perseverance, over time, becomes stronger. For strength to increase, the amount of resistance, or load worked against, must also increase over time. Hence the problem with bodyweight conditioning. When the resistance (the weight of the body) is fixed, how can you continue to increase strength? The answer is surprisingly simple—by decreasing the amount of leverage it is possible to exert on an exercise, the resistance of an exercise becomes increasingly greater. For example, a hanging straight leg lift is much harder than a tucked leg lift. In both exercises, the weight of your legs remains constant; however, by reducing your leverage (i.e., in this case, straightening your legs), we are able to greatly increase the resistance. By straightening the legs, we have effectively doubled the difficulty of the exercise, even though the weight of the body has remained constant."



**A tucked leg lift is much easier than a hanging straight leg lift.**



**By straightening the legs, we have effectively doubled the difficulty of the exercise.**

Here is an interesting approach to manipulating leverage. In *Pull Your Own Weight*, Rick Osbourne and Brian McCaskey recommend ‘pivot point variation’, “which refers to the age old technique of dropping your knees to the ground in order to reduce the load in a push up. With the old standard method, you have two potential pivot points:

- 1) your knees, and 2) your feet. And, strangely enough, it can be a long ways from your knees to your feet when you’re ready to make progress... simply use a small bench that can be placed under your



body at any point between your hips and your feet. When the bench is moved toward your hips, resistance is reduced. As your strength increases, the bench should gradually be moved toward your toes. Eventually, of course, the idea is to eliminate the PPV bench altogether...”

## **Say no to the bounce and momentum**

You can also increase the difficulty of bodyweight exercises by minimizing bounce and momentum. There are two ways of doing this.

The first is ‘dead starts’. Using the one-arm pushup example, you would not touch your chest to the deck and go. You will lie down and totally relax on the deck, then flex again and power back up.

The second technique is dynamic isometrics. It involves pausing for a few seconds and staying tight at the sticking points of the exercise before moving along. Going back to the one-arm pushup example, you pause for 1 to 5 seconds with your chest almost touching the deck. Pain is good!



**Pause for a few seconds and staying tight at the sticking points of the exercise before moving along.**



**After a pause of 1 to 5 seconds with your chest almost touching the deck, continue the one-arm pushup . Pain is good!**



## HOW TO CUSTOMIZE THE RESISTANCE WITHOUT CHANGING THE WEIGHT

- Redistribute your weight between your limbs
- Manipulate the range of motion
- Train in an unstable environment
- Vary the leverage
- Say no to the bounce and momentum

Christopher Sommer concludes, “With experience and creativity, it is possible to learn or design exercises that, done correctly and with the proper progressions, are so lacking in leverage that even a bodyweight levels of resistance, it is possible to build staggering amounts of strength.”



Former gymnast Brad Johnson demonstrates that the sky is the limit when using a variety of bodyweight strength exercises. *Photo courtesy Brad Johnson*

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## CHAPTER TWO

# THE NAKED WARRIOR WORKOUT

- “Grease the groove,” or how to get superstrong without a routine
- “The Pistol”: The Russian Spec Ops’ leg strengthener of choice
- The one-arm/one-leg pushup: “An exercise in total body tension”

### “Grease the groove,” or how to get superstrong without a routine

*This program was first published in MILO: A Journal for Serious Strength Athletes. I insist that you subscribe to this top-quality publication at [ironmind.com](http://ironmind.com).*

*Our communist enemies who are trying to bury us have exercise breaks instead of coffee breaks.*

—Bob Hoffman, York Barbell Club

Once, I came across this question posted on a popular strength-training website by a young Marine: “How should I train to improve my pullups?”

I was amused when I read the arcane and nonspecific advice the trooper received: “Do straight-arm pulldowns, reverse curls, avoiding the negative part of the chin-up every third workout...”

I had a radical thought:

If you want to get good at pullups, why not try to do...a lot of pullups?

Just a couple of months earlier, I had put my father-in-law, Roger Antonson, incidentally an ex-Marine, on a program that required him to do an easy 5 chins every time he went down to his basement. Each day, he would total between 25 and a 100 chinups, hardly breaking a sweat. Every month or so Roger would take a few days off and then test himself. Before you knew it, the old leatherneck could knock off 20 consecutive chins, more than he could do 40 years ago as a young jarhead!

### **Specificity + frequent practice = success**

A few months later, Roger sold his house and moved into an apartment. Being the paranoid Red that I am, I suspected that he plotted to work around the “chin every time you go to the basement” clause in his program. By Politburo decree, Comrade Antonson was issued one of those “Door Gym” pullup bars. He wisely conceded to the will of the Party and carried on with his “grease the chin-up groove” program.

My father, Vladimir, a Soviet Army officer, had me follow an identical GTG routine in my early testosterone years. My parents’ apartment had a built-in storage space above the kitchen door. (This is a Russian design—you wouldn’t understand.) Every time I left the kitchen, I would hang on to the ledge and crank out as many fingertip pullups as I could without struggling.

Consequently, my high school pullup tests were a breeze. (FYI: In Russian high schools, boys must do 12 strict palms-over pullups to ace the test, and they fail if they do anything under 8.)

According to the conventional bodybuilding wisdom, Roger and I could not possibly have gotten stronger following this program. Training a muscle more than a couple of times a week is 'overtraining'! And where is the intensity?

But we did. And so did countless Russians and many Americans after I wrote this program up a few years ago in *MILO: A Journal for Serious Strength Athletes*. Here are but a few of the many testimonials you can find on the [dragondoor.com](http://dragondoor.com) discussion site.



## SOME GTG TESTIMONIALS FROM THE [DRAGONDOOR.COM](http://dragondoor.com) FORUM

### GTG Rocks!

From: Conrad • Date/Time 2002-05-16 01:14:43

I did a week of GTG with pistols and handstand pushups. At the beginning, I could do 1 wobbly pistol with my left leg—1 to a first stair step with my right, and 2 handstand pushups. By the end of the week, I was cranking 2 with each leg and 2 HSPUs [handstand pushups] throughout the day. Today, after about a week off, I tried again and did 5 clean ass-to-ground pistols with each leg and 5 HSPUs! Thanks, Pavel and the Party, for programs that work! Now I'll have to start adding weight and ROM.

### Fastest hypertrophy ever on GTG?

From: Rocko • Date/Time 2002-09-12 18:47:54

While working to strengthen my calves to take more stress and allow myself to run properly, I've been doing GTG unweighted calf raises. In 7 days, I've gone from not being able to see anything when I flexed it to having it extend a half inch out the sides of the other muscles in my legs and seeing the whole thing like an anatomy chart, from back of knee to Achilles tendon. It shocked me today when I flexed my calves just to look and see what was going on. GTG works! :)

### I went from 5 to 10 [pullups at 235 pounds of bodyweight] in 1 week following GTG

From: Chris Rubio, RKC • Date/Time 2003-04-23 21:33:22



## **MORE GTG TESTIMONIALS**

### **8-week GTG pullup results**

From: runc2 • Date/Time 2003-04-13 13:38:05

When I started doing GTG for pullups 8 weeks ago, I could do only 1 assisted pullup. Today I maxed with 6 dead-hang pullups!

### **Two max rep PRs...**

From: Eric Bruesch • Date/Time 2003-08-27 13:08:18

Last night, I did . . . 15 one-armed pushups each arm. Two months ago, I could not do one complete rep. GTG practice is 100% responsible for the progress . .

## **How does the GTG system work?**

By literally greasing the groove for your chosen exercise.

Your technique will become so good from doing so many submaximal sets (in other words, from practicing) that once you decide to go all out, more 'nerve force' will reach your muscles because your nerves will have become superconductors.

The result? A PR (personal record), even though you will never have come close to your limit in training!

This will seem counterintuitive, if you are in the old workout mode. But it will make perfect sense, once you approach your strength training as practice.

It is critical for the program's success that you avoid muscle failure. Do not come even close to failure, whether you train for max or reps!

A good guideline is to do half the reps you could do if you put your heart into it (although there is nothing wrong with doing even fewer reps). Roger Antonson had worked up to training sets of 9 by the time he set a personal record of 20 chinups.

Since the Naked Warrior program is aimed at pure strength, do 5 reps max and select harder variations of the bodyweight exercises.

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Strength is a skill. Professor Vladimir Zatsiorsky, a Soviet strength expert who jumped ship to America from the Dark Side, has summed up this notion by saying that an athlete must “do as much work as possible while being as fresh as possible.” If you have a hard time remembering this best ever summary of effective strength training, get it tattooed on your arm.



### **“The Pistol”: The Russian Spec Ops’ leg strengthener of choice**

If you want to develop strong legs and have no resistance to work with but your bodyweight, there is only one exercise that will deliver:

The one-legged squat, which we fondly called “the pistol” in the Russian *Spetsnaz*. Just go rock bottom on one leg, holding your other nearly straight out in front, and then get up without bouncing. No sweat, right?



**With your foot flat on the floor, your heel planted, and your free leg held nearly straight out in front of you, descend under complete control until your hamstring touches your calf. “Just” go rock bottom on one leg, holding your other nearly straight out in front, and then get up without bouncing. No sweat, right?**



**Do not bounce.**



**Pause for a second and get back up. Be careful not to wrench your knee. Don't let it bow in or extend forward too much.**

Do you want to know how you rate against an everyday Russian hard guy?

According to the battery of PT tests developed by S. Lobanov and A. Chumakov, Masters of Sports of the All-Union Research Institute in Russia, 10 consecutive pistols per leg are "satisfactory," 15 are "good," and 20 are "excellent." You should be able to work up to 20 without ever doing more than 5 training. Just make them harder and harder by adding pauses, kettlebells, and so on.

Time to get down to business. With your foot flat on the floor, your heel planted, and your free leg held nearly straight out in front of you, descend under complete control until your hamstring touches your calf. Do not bounce; pause for a second and get back up. Be careful not to wrench your knee. Don't let it bow in or extend forward too much.

If you can pull off a clean pistol following these instructions (which are typical in scope, or rather lack thereof, for strength-training books), then my hat is off to you. But I think you will not. My point is this: Do fewer exercises and pay attention to details. Street fighters who have polished one or two moves always dominate black belts who know 10 ways to block a punch.

Later in this book, you will find a comprehensive step-by-step guide for taking your one-legged squats (or pistols) and one-arm pushups (the *only* exercises in the Naked Warrior program) from zero to hero—plus many cool variations that are both harder and easier than regular pistols and one-arm pushups.

**Do fewer exercises better.**

**The one-arm/one-leg pushup: "An exercise in total body tension"**



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