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Hello coach, I would like to ask, if you know more about the following topic - considering that once every serious coach has done his research on these “soviet secret methods” I suppose… I came across your “4 paths to strenght”-article, which I found to be a very fascinating read. What do I define as the soviet training programming? According to my internet research the core principles are: most lifts between 70-85%, average intensity around 80%, 5% of lifts above or at 90% train calm, it is not about how you feel, approach it as learning and work manipulate the volume, but keep the frequency and intensity the same. That means every week, every month, and every training day you vary your volume by roughly 20-30% but keep the average intensity at 80%. a lift was roughly trained 3 times per week, with a low, medium, and high volume day (20-30% difference in volume, with varying rep schemes to confuse the body) rest 4-6 min after sets reps are 2-5 reps depending on intensity, but always stay away from failure, so it is about bar speed and technqiue! The trouble begin by trying to apply: So while I understand these principles and the general philosophy behind their approach to training, I lack guidelines in how to apply these principles. Especially, regarding putting a holistic training for 4 days per week together. I can find guidelines for single lifts like the bench press (300-400 reps per months) … but I do not find any guidelines for buiding a coherent plan out of these “single lift” guidelines. I can write a plan with these principles, but just for 1 lift… As soon I add a second lift I start to ask myself questions… I mean what happens when you pick Bench press and overhead press as main lifts? Do you simply reduce the number of lifts by 50% because you have 2 pressing movements? … I ask myself…: How many lifts per day did the soviets do that? (and how many training days? They must have had at least 3 to make it “low”,“medium”,“high” volume…) Can you do supersets? Otherwise the training would take hours… (400 reps for bench per month → on a high volume week, with a high volume day… that is I guess 50-60 reps… and that for sets of 3-5 reps with 5 min rest… takes forever -especially for multiples lifts a day… + it is at 80% intensity average! What are good monthly recommendations in terms of volume for the main lifts? Is 200 deadlifts per month much? 300 squats? 400? What if I squat and deadlift on the same day? … Many questions… I know the russians had the Priplin chart! But is there a Priplin chart equivalent per month?! My main lifts are at the moment the following 6 : Zercher Squat, Stiff-Leg Deadlift, Sumo Deadlift, Chin-Ups, Bench Press, Overhead… (I could add many cool lifts). But these would be the lifts I would like to focus on, however questions 1-3 already make me realize, the soviets must have done that differently… I cant do 6 lifts like that on a training day or train 6 times per week...so I am confused. Did they only train 3 lifts? 2? And used other programming guidelines for the rest of their exercises? My goal: My goal is to train now for maxium strenght. I want to reach a 660 deadlift and a 440 bench by end of 2022! (PRs: 550 and 420). I though these soviet principle based training would give me a nice approach to follow and enough freedom intellecutally to get creative with my training, so thats why I am so fascinated by them! I see the patterns in volume and lifts per week Best wishes Konos I might adress your question, but to be honest it’s a bit outside the scope of this Q&A section and would require at least an article, if not a series of articles to even brush the topic properly. You must also need to know several things: There was NOT a Soviet system. Dr. Mel Siff addressed this in great detail in the past. You had several schools of thought in the USSR just like we have here. For example, you had the traditional Medvedyev model, which was more of a linear progression (intensity gradually increasing while volume decreased, over a long period of time). You had the Bondarchuk model which was the first form of block periodization and had dramatic changes in exercises and loading in every short block. The Vershoskahsky model which used concentrated loading, where you would only train one specific physical capacity in each block (e.g. 4 weeks strength, 4 weeks power, 4 weeks speed). And within these general ideologies, you had tons of variations from coach to coach. Periodization was different from sport to sport. Some used a very long training cycle with a gradual, linear progression and a single peak. Others used very short cycles with frequent peaking. I was trained by a weightlifting coach who used the Soviet weightlifting periodization model, but this had nothing to do with the approach used by the sprinters or throwers (for example). They did accumulate a lot of data and published “averages“ and people in the west took these as state-approved guidelines. For example, they might say that a master of sport lifter did 900-1000 lifts per microcycle during the general physical preparation period (made-up number for the sake of the example) but that was just really looking at the data from all the coaches logbooks and making an average… there was A LOT of variation between coaches and athletes. Some might do 500 lifts per microcycle others 1500. The Soviet system produced a lot of dominant athlete for 5 reasons: a) Better recruitment. Soviets did a lot of anthropometric testing and looked at genetics to select kids to assign them to sport-schools in which they would eventually be assigned to a sport. The sport they were best suited to excel in. And they had to do that sport, whether they wanted to or not. So right off the bad, TONS of kids were exposed to various sports from a VERY early age thus improving athletic potential immensely. To give you an example, at one point in the 1980s, there were 100 000 registered weightlifters (meaning that they engaged in organized weightlifting) in the USSR. The change of finding a freak with that volume is much greater than if you have 10 000 lifters. b) More drug use. Don’t get me wrong, there was drug use in the west too. BUT Eastern athletes either used more (Soviets) or were a lot more scientific and precise about the effect of each substance on training progress and recovery (East German). Here athletes basically used word of mouth to build their drug protocol. How important is the drug dosing thing? Well look at the current state of weighlifting in Russia: they use the same system as they used to, just a few years ago where they dominated weightlifitng but not they can’t win medals at the world championships or Olympics. That’s because with the many recent scandals, Russia is watched a lot more closely and has to be tested more. They now cannot use the same amount of drugs that they use to take. You’ll notice that their female lifters (or athletes other than weighlifters) are still doing good. Why? Because they don’t require as much drugs to perform and thus did not have to lower their dosage with the increase in testing. The point is that while the Soviets/Russians were NOT “all-drugs”, the system was built around being able to recover faster and handle more workload because of the drugs. c) A superior support system: if you read the book “Speed Trap” by Charlie Francis, there is a chapter where he asks Gerhard Mach (who built a dominant track and field program in Poland at the time, then was hired by Track and Field Canada to do the same in Canada) how he was able to build such a dominant program and why it didn’t work in Canada (at the time). He answered that he had full state support: the best training facilities, lots of massage therapists, physical therapists, doctors, working full-time with the athletes and the athletes provided lodging and food. At the time in Canada, the coaches had to do the massage themselves, and athletes needed to pay for physical therapy from their own pocket. Charlie explained how some of his athletes, olympic hopefuls had to share an apartment and were living on breakfast cereal. d) A better approach… at the time: to be fair, the Soviets did study the impact of training quite a bit and came up with lots of novel approaches, at the time. But all of that is being done everywhere now. The Soviet system of the time would actually be archaic compared to what the best coaches are doing now. I think that the “Soviet system” (there was not a single system) is romanticized and we think that they had high-performance secrets. The reality was a lot more pragmatic and less sexy. e) More motivation: sure, every competitive person wants to be the best. But in the USSR of the time, being an olympic gold medalist, world record holder or world champion was a way out of a miserable life. And life DID suck for the average Russian back then. When winning was a way out, a way to live a better life and assure a better quality of life for your family, not only do you want to win, you NEED to win. Those who have not been in that situation cannot understand how much hungrier and more motivated it makes you. 3 Likes But if you still want to use the “Soviet secrets” (there is no such thing, we are decades ahead of where they were) for powerlifting progression you can either look up Boris Sheiko’s work or the book Power to the People: Professional edition (NOT the original Power to the People) by Pavel. And it might even work. I mean, it is still good programing and there might be a placebo effect from believing that the program is something magical. And if it motivates you more to follow a “Soviet plan” then you will train harder which will lead to better results. 1 Like Kono: I know the russians had the Priplin chart! But is there a Priplin chart equivalent per month?! The Prilepin table is ONE “recommendation” in ONE Russian book by ONE Soviet coach/statistician. It was NOT applied universally. I even doubt that many soviet coaches at the time even knew about it. Furthermore, it was designed based on stats from olympic lifters, not powerlifters. The snatch, clean, jerk and related exercises should not use the same loading parameters as squats, deadlifts and benches. Futhermore, one thing that you get from a lot of translated Soviet texts (e.g. The Training of the Weighlifter or Managing the Training of Weighlifters) is that volume recommendation varies depending on the level of the athletes… WHICH ESSENTALLY GOES AGAINST THE PRILEPIN TABLE which recommends a single set of parameters for all level of athletes… and it does so because it is NOT a guideline, but an average from all the data accumulated. 1 Like Kono: however questions 1-3 already make me realize, the soviets must have done that differently… I cant do 6 lifts like that on a training day or train 6 times per week...so I am confused. Did they only train 3 lifts? 2? And used other programming guidelines for the rest of their exercises? There was NO Soviet powerlifting system for the simple reason that there was no powerlifting in the Soviet Union. The organized, state-sponsored sport was weightlifting (olympic lifting). I’m not saying that there was nobody training for “powerlifting” but there were no interest because there was no money and no support. The state invested in sports and athletes that could be used as a propaganda tool for the Communist party. Which meant olympic sports as these are the sports in which you compete against other nations and can thus prove the superiority of your nation. Nowadays, because powerlifting is more popular than weighlifting, you have many good Russian lifters (or lifters from former Soviet republics) and, more importantly, coaches who come from weightlifting and have adapted weighlifting training to powerlifting. The most notable being Boris Sheiko. And you can easily find programs and books by him online to see what it looks like. But you are correct, the system is based on doing lots of volume. But remember that at the time of the Soviet Union, athletes were state-sponsored. Meaning that training was their full-time job. That makes a HUGE difference in how much volume and frequency you can tolerate. Obviously, someone who has to work for a living cannot apply the system… sure they can do it with a lower volume/frequency but the whole intensity/volume relationship is based on accumulating a certain amount of work. If you can’t do the volume and recover from it, then you cannot apply the system and simply lowering the volume will not work. 2 Likes PLUS, if the Russian system was better than every other system, it stands to reason that they would dominate raw powerlifting. Which they are not as there are 6 of the top 30 raw powerlifters in the world that are from Russia. The US has a lot more. 2 Likes @Christian_Thibaudeau I don’t really care about “Soviet secrets” one way or the other, but just wanted to say your knowledge and pursuant analysis are incredible. 1 Like Not gonna lie, this is a topic that is a particular interest of mine. This is why I said that giving a proper answer would require a series of answers. I come from weightlifting and back when I started lifting, there was still this mystical aura around Russian training and my good friend actually competed against some of the top soviet lifters and saw many more in action so I was the recipient of many Soviet lifter lore and legendary feats of strength. Because of that I began researching their methods very early on. In fact, the Soviet influence can be seen in many of my old articles as I was still fairly new to the game and under the spell of the mythical Soviet “system”. But the more knowledgeable I became about training in general and in the system used in many countries, the less impressed or subjugated I became with the Soviet “system”. In a way, it is the same thing we see with China now: unlimited state funding, super-advanced selection process, making athletes “professionals” as early as 12 years old, and huge incentives to do well. And the Chinese system goes even deeper because of more advanced means of genetic testing. For example, you can predict body type but also muscle fiber dominance and even small things like the UGT2B17 polymorphism variation. This genetic mutation (highly present in Asian populations) dramatically (up do 20 folds) reduces testosterone excretion. This means that you can actually select athletes who will be able to inject testosterone right up to the competition without testing positive! 3 Likes Christian_Thibaudeau: In a way, it is the same thing we see with China now: unlimited state funding, super-advanced selection process, making athletes “professionals” as early as 12 years old, and huge incentives to do well. Weird how the fewer things you do, the better you are at each. As if we all only have so much capacity… Anyway, love the writings! I love how you do more than just report; there’s an in-depth analysis borne of both your research and experience. It makes every topic an opportunity to learn. 1 Like Hello CT, thank you very much for you detailed and thought-out responses! I realize my questions go beyond the scope of any forum discussion and were based on “wrong” assumptions or a “wrong” perspective. So besides the factual information I also leared that it is important to put things: into a broader context and analysed/solve the broader context / all factors for a solution What spiked my curiosity about “their” (now I know there were many schools of thought, so my “their” is highly general) system is that (in the online articles I have read) it was presented as highly empirical. I was wondering myself - what happens if you had access to all training logs around the world, maybe even with background information, and then search in the data for the success patterns? I realize in your “4 paths to strengtht” article you have given a basic categorization model and then I though the “soviet system” solved for one “school of thought” the details by finding these success patterns… But as you described it seemed the information was too specific to professional athletes paid by the goverment and specfic to certain sports (for weights: Olympic Weightlifting), as well as lots of average calculation… + archaric compared to the current state of art I never really followed a training system and always trained by feel, all the “programming” talk was suspicous to me - especially the prices to sell it to me so you as a true expert coach - does such programming or “magic” “patterns” do exist and make a difference? We assume that all the factors for success are met: a good coach, effort, recovery, will to win, good exercise selection, … just the training plan or underlying pattern/periodization would be different. The information about the gen testing and testosterne thing is completley new to me Amazing what is going on in professional sports these days! Thanks for the book suggestions, I actually know this work by Pavel, it also sparked my interest to read more articles. This thread has been legit fascinating. Hope if you ever get the chance in your busy schedule you do a series of articles, or better still a more comprehensive book/ebook which covers this kind of thing. Would happily pay for such a work, as I’m sure would many others. 1 Like Kono: coach - does such programming or “magic” “patterns” do exist and make a difference? No, they don’t. At least not in the sense of having a specific training schedule that lead to shocking results. Now, there exist some training methods that can deliver very rapid gains over a short period of time but nothing that will deliver shocking results over and over and over. The body has a limited amount of strength or size it can add per unit of time. It varies depending on experience level, genetic factors and nutrition. But you can’t exceed that rate of gain regardless of the approach you use. You CAN very briefly get a slightly higher rate of improvement with the use of certain methods, but it is not sustainable and normally comes at a cost. HOWEVER, it is possible to get what seems like a sped-up rate of strength gain if you switch to a training style that addresses your main issue(s). For example: One of the various neurological factors involved in strength production (intra/intermuscular coordination, muscle fiber recruitment, fibers firing rate) Muscle mass A lagging muscle group Technical efficiency Inhibitory protective mechanisms So for example, if you are someone who always used the max effort method to get stronger, and you switch to the Russian approach which uses more “strength-skill” work, you can get neurological improvements and improvement in technical efficiency. So you can have a faster rate of progression than before. But it’s not because the program is magic but because it addressed your main problem. So it’s more a matter of understanding what your limitation is and then figuring out the best approach to fix it. That’s why I don’t have a system either. I understand how various methods and styles of training impact the nervous system and muscles and know which approach to use to fix certain issues. With clients I also always work by blocks, meaning that I design a block (4 weeks normally) to address a specific issue with everything I got and, ideally, in the next block we focus on a new problem area (provided that we fixed the issue). 3 Likes H1ghIntensity: Hope if you ever get the chance in your busy schedule you do a series of articles, or better still a more comprehensive book/ebook which covers this kind of thing. Would happily pay for such a work, as I’m sure would many others. Probably, I think it’s an interesting topic Thank you coach! I understand it now way better - the goal is always to fix the weakness / missing link, a problem oriented thinking - and this will “dictate” the approach/system. Christian_Thibaudeau: More drug use. Don’t get me wrong, there was drug use in the west too. BUT Eastern athletes either used more (Soviets) or were a lot more scientific and precise about the effect of each substance on training progress and recovery (East German). Here athletes basically used word of mouth to build their drug protocol lot of excuseswith drugs for eastern wining ,about everywhere and everytime in the past Christian_Thibaudeau: PLUS, if the Russian system was better than every other system, it stands to reason that they would dominate raw powerlifting. Which they are not as there are 6 of the top 30 raw powerlifters in the world that are from Russia. The US has a lot more. you are wrong… sovie’st athlete not allowed to compete in US l ong,long years Are you making your own points, or you’re just here to disagree? What does competing in the U.S. have to do with worldwide powerlifting rankings? what mean "worldwide powerlifting rankings " ?! 90% of powerlifting meetings are US based. events. no international atheletes , my friend TrainForPain: disagree disagree is point of veiw anyway i’ll stop my reply Page 2 I think we’re all happy to see you reply, it would just be more constructive if you offered a counterpoint. It’s kind of like the meeting where you have the guy that just says no plan will work, without offering the solution that will work; we need that extra step to go on. 1 Like I assume Christian looked at something like this for his data: Powerlifting Rankings Here is a quick read if you are interested in how the Russian’s designed their training back in the days. The paper is called The Russian Approach to Planning a Weightlifting Program [Preview Below] and is from 1995. So what was considered new then is already 17 years old by now. Still interesting to see how they did their exercise grouping based on the varying effects on the human body etc. Download: Available on Google Docs (choose ‘File’ – ‘Make a copy’ or ‘Download as’) Below are some excerpts from it. Exercise Grouping The model presented here (Tables 2 and 3 below) is that of the national weightlifting team of the former Soviet Union. To reach their highest potential, Soviet weightlifters must also include supplemental exercises such as squats, power snatches, and power cleans. We combine different types of snatch and clean and jerk exercises in order to obtain the optimum results in the competitive lifts. These types of exercises are classified into five groups (although some coaches put squats and pulls in one group): Classic snatch; Power snatch; Classic snatches from different starting positions; Power snatches from different starting positions. Classic clean; Power clean; Classic cleans from different starting positions; Power cleans from different starting positions. Classic snatch pulls; Classic clean pulls; Classic snatch pulls from different starting positions; Classic clean pulls from different starting positions; Bend-overs (good mornings with a barbell behind the neck). Back squats; Front squats; Splits (lunges). Classic jerk; Push-jerk; Push-press; Arm and shoulder exercises (press behind head, military press, etc.). The first four groups emphasize overload in the lower body while the fifth group emphasizes overload in the upper body. To avoid overtraining, one should combine the first four groups with the last group. This training structure is based on just one group of exercises per workout, as seen in the following example: Monday: 1st and 4th groups Tuesday: 5th group Wednesday: 2nd and 4th groups Thursday: 5th group Friday: 1st, 3rd, and 4th groups Saturday: 2nd and 5th groups Alternating high intensity workouts with medium and low intensity workouts will help the weightlifter to recover properly and will prepare him or her for the next workout. According to this distribution, we plan and predict our intermediate goals. Table 2: Example of Macrocycle Training, 5 Phases: Hypertrophy, Transistion to Basic Strength, Basic strength, Strength & Power, Peaking Table 3: Example of the Workouts in each Phase Preview Often, many US Strength coaches are unaware of the history of the Soviet System, and, hence, the foundation of modern weightlifting training. For example, look in any NSCA articles citations and non-western sources are a rare occurrence. In effect, the purpose of this post is to provide a brief history of the Soviet System and to make strength practitioners and western researchers aware of this body of knowledge. The modern Russian Weightlifting System was founded by Arkady Nikitich Vorobyov (born 1924 -) and Alexey Medvedev Sidorovich (1927-2003). As you read on, Vorobyov and Medvedev took two different perspectives- a classic case of good cop - bad cop. Arkady Vorobyov was a weightlifter and a remarkable scientist. Simply put, he was a very successful weightlifter. He won Olympic golds in 1956 and 1960 and was World champion four times (1954, 1955, 1957, 1958). He also won silver in 1959 and bronze in 1961. Vorobyov was also three times European champion (1954, 1955, 1958), while taking silver in 1959 and bronze in 1961. He also set 21 middle-heavyweight world records – nine in snatch, three in clean and jerk, two in press, and seven in the total. Vorobvov's book and photos of Vorobvov, Source: Dr Alfredo Herrera Just as stunning as his sports career was his high level of scientific achievement. During Vorobyov's his sports career, he graduated from the USSR Medical Institute and defended a dissertation for the Candidate of Science degree, afterwards, in 1962. In 1970, he defended a dissertation for the Doctor of Medical Science degree at the Institute of Aviation and Space Medicine in Moscow. Since 1977, Vorobyov was the Rector of the Moscow Oblast Institute of Physical Culture and Sports. In 1995, was elected to the International Weightlifting Federation Hall of Fame. So, you may be wondering, "Why did he get a degree in Medicine at the Aviation and Space Institute?" Answer: The Soviets applied Olympic weightlifting research to astronauts training to survive the harsh conditions of space flight. Medvedev the Lifter and Coach Source: Dr Alfredo Herrera Alexey Medvedev Sidorovich (1927-2003) was also a weightlifter and scientist. In 1957 and 1958, Medvedev wons the world title in the heavyweight category. Alexander Medvedev was the first Soviet Weightlifter, and third man ever, to total 500 kg in the Triathlon of the snatch, clean and press, and clean and jerk. By trade, Medvedev was a very accomplished carpenter. In 1962, Medvedev became the coach of the national team of the USSR in weightlifting. In 1964, for the preparation of 3 Olympic champions (A. Vahonina, R. Plufelderand , I. Jabotinsky), Alexander Medvedev worked as head of the weightlifting at the Russian State University of physical culture, sport and tourism. Under his leadership, the Department was prolific in preparing weightlifting specialists, not only for Russia, but also from other Communist countries at the time, such as: Cuba, China, Poland, Bulgaria, DPRK. Medvedev Likewise, Medvedev was invited to many countries. He traveled to China many times, lecturing at the Beijing University of physical culture. His work in China received the title of Honorary Professor of Beijing University of physical education. Even as late as the early 2000's, he provided practical assistance to China's weightlifting squad. Most notably, China won gold in every weight class that their women's team entered in 2000 and was, likewise, dominant in their men's classes. Medvedev and Vorobvov laid out the scientific groundwork for the Soviet System. The two men had different philosophic views of science. Additionally, in the 1950's he came to the USA to study the American system. He became good friends with American weightlifting legend Tommy Kono. Vorobvov focused more on biochemical research on recovery. This preference was due to his work on the Soviet space program. Medvedev's research was empirically based on the training of weightlifters. His focus was foremost HIGH VOLUME. By observations and experimentation, he found that high volume training lead to better results without injuries. Together, the body of research from Medvedev and Vorobvov, and their colleagues, formed the modern Soviet System. From Dr Alfredo Herrera of Risto Sports www.ristosports.com Dr. Alfredo Herrera, formerly of Cuba, was a key scientist who worked with Medvedev. Herrera worked side by side with Medvedev-- to the extent that Medvedev quoted Herrera in his landmark text on the training of weightlifters. Needless to say, they both had long scientific debates in the Russian sauna. Dr. Herrera’s doctoral thesis's scientific results were applied to the National Russian Team and the Russian Army Dynamo. In short, the Soviet System or the "Russian System" was developed on rigorous scientific studies. ** ie, when I mean rigorous, I literally mean that the results were even applied to the training of Cosmonauts (Soviet Astronauts), so please do not take my words lightly** The Soviet System was not something that was created overnight. So, be very weary of snake oil salesman who sell weightlifting certifications claiming to make you the next Ilya Ilin or Alexeev (-- e.g. anyone who has not been trained in the system, only been lifting a few years, and just pastes some photos of Olympic Gold medalists on their websites, as if , by some miracle of internet osmosis, they will magically become as credible as the Olympic gold medalist that they never met. Thank you for reading my mini-rant =). If you would like to get a good, credible foundation in the system and an understanding of how Soviet Programs were written, then go to the Soviet System I Certification given by Risto Sports, of which Dr. Herrera is Technical Director. Risto Sports' goal is to spread the truth of the Soviet System and to help develop weightlifting competencies in the Western World. Risto Sports is holding certifications at their headquarters October 27, 2012 outside of Boston/Portsmouth/Portland and in Anchorage, Alaska on October 14, 2012. Register here for October 27 at the Risto Sports Headquarters: Register here for Alaska Fitness Expo weekend Seminar, October 14: Whether you are a beginner gym-goer or an elite athlete, the goal is always to get stronger — fast. Whenever you talk about getting bigger, stronger, and faster, the conversation ultimately pivots toward the Russians and their training methods. It is no different for this article. Let’s be honest: hitting a training plateau is inevitable, especially for advanced lifters. New diets, supplements, and conventional training programs might also not be enough to break through an overhead ceiling. This is where the Russian conjugate method shines. While it’s often dismissed as a relic from the Soviet Union, it’s, in fact, a bizarre method of building strength that first intrigued me and then convinced me of its potency with exceptional results. In this article, I decode everything you need to know about this program, including its history and how to incorporate it into your workout for the best results. So sit tight and read on to build strength the hardcore way. Introduction — Russian Conjugate Method The Russian conjugate method was developed by Soviet sports scientists to help their Olympic athletes bag medals for their fatherland. This strength training method combines maximal lifts, dynamic efforts, and targeted accessory work to build raw power, explosiveness, breakthrough strength, and muscle plateaus. Photo via Instagram @albegov_ruslan Historical Context: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Strength Contrary to what most people think, the Cold War (1947-91) wasn’t just about nukes and spies; it was about gaining global dominance on every stage, including the weightlifting platform. Given its versatile nature, you could think of the Russian conjugate method as a Swiss Army knife of strength training. It combined max effort, dynamic effort, and hypertrophy into one comprehensive program. Yuri Verkhoshansky (the “Father of Plyometrics”) and Anatoli Bondarchuk (coach of multiple Olympic champions) were the brains behind the Russian conjugate method. These guys utilized the most cutting-edge research and their own experience lifting weights to build this method. The Russian conjugate method involves periodization, peaking for competition, and pushing the human body to its limits to improve in every field. Soviet athletes were shattering records, dominating every international competition they entered. Just when everything was looking good for the sports teams, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the conjugate method vanished into the shadows. Read also: Introduction to Conjugate Training. Why The Russian Conjugate Method Failed? Yuri Verkhoshansky Here are some reasons why this training method got sidelined: Language Barrier The language barrier was arguably the biggest reason why this method fell out of favor. Most of the original research and training manuals were published in Russian and were inaccessible to most Western coaches and athletes. The thing is, only a few people actually knew about this training protocol, even when the Soviet athletes were dominating competitions. Talk about an iron curtain. Rise of Other Training Philosophies While the conjugate method diluted, Western training philosophies took off. That’s not all. At about the same time, bodybuilding, with its emphasis on aesthetics, and powerlifting, with its focus on raw strength, gained popularity. Unlike the conjugate method, these new training regimens and their principles were easier to understand and implement. Full disclosure: the conjugate method didn’t vanish entirely. It was still practiced on a small scale in Eastern Europe by a few strength enthusiasts. However, it is now experiencing a resurgence, backed by science, decades of results, and a keen community. Principles of the Conjugate Method Most training programs focus on one aspect of strength at a time; the Russian conjugate method does not follow this approach. It involves maximal strength, dynamic effort, and hypertrophy training all at once. The three-pronged approach ensures maximal output and results. Here is what each of these approaches entails: Maximal Strength: Lift as heavy as possible and push your limits. Dynamic Effort: Speed and explosiveness are key here. It’s especially important for Olympic weightlifters. Hypertrophy: Focuses on building muscle tissues and improving physique aesthetics. While it might sound like a lot, the conjugate method workout structure simplifies everything. Workout Structure — Russian Conjugate Method Ever heard of organized chaos? That’s how I could describe this training method. The Russian conjugate method is a carefully organized system that cycles through different phases to ensure variety and avoid plateaus. Here is a gist of the program: Microcycles These are usually one-week blocks where you focus on specific training qualities. For instance, you perform heavy bench presses in the first week to build strength and do faster, lighter plyometric work in the second week to build explosive strength. Mesocycles Mesocycles usually last for a few weeks to a couple of months. In this, you group microcycles with similar goals to ensure maximum output block before moving on to the next mesocycle. Macrocycles These can last a year or even longer in some specific cases. It groups multiple mesocycles to achieve your training objectives. Periodization: The Art of Peaking To me, periodization is the most interesting aspect of a training program. For the uninitiated, it involves progressive cycling of various aspects of a training program during a specific period. This is also how competitive athletes manage to peak for a contest just at the right time. It’s the strategic manipulation of training intensity and volume over time. In the Russian conjugate method, you could start a mesocycle with high volume and moderate intensity to build a base of strength and muscle. However, as you progress, the volume decreases while the intensity goes up, allowing you to peak for maximal strength or dynamic effort. One of the best parts about this systematic approach is that it keeps your body guessing and prevents you from hitting an overhead ceiling. You are always pushing yourself in the gym but in a controlled and responsible way. Remember, the conjugate method is not set in stone. You must design and adapt the training program according to your unique needs. Learn to listen to your body to maximize your results and limit injury risk. Key Exercises in the Russian Conjugate Method These are the most basic lifts in this program: Deadlifts: Picking something heavy off the floor and putting it back down is incredibly badass. Deadlifts are essential for building total-body strength. Bench Press: Incorporate different variations (incline, decline, close-grip) to ensure overall development. Squats: This full-body exercise promotes overall growth. Front squats, back squats, and box squats are all part of this program. Olympic Lifts: You cannot forget this program was developed for Olympic weightlifters. Snatch and clean & jerk are fundamental exercises in this program. These lifts are also incredibly effective for building explosive power and athleticism. Putting it into Practice: Sample 8-Week Conjugate Training Plan We now come to the meat and potatoes of this article — the Russian conjugate method training programming. The eight-week plan below incorporates the principles of maximal effort work, dynamic effort work, and hypertrophy to create a well-rounded lifter. Monday: Maximal Effort Lower Body Exercise: Back Squat (or Front Squat if preferred) Sets/Reps: 5 sets of 3 repetitions Intensity: 85-95% of 1-repetition maximum (1RM) Accessory Work: Romanian Deadlifts, Glute Bridges (3 sets of 8-12 reps) Tuesday: Dynamic Effort Upper Body Exercise: Bench Press (or Overhead Press) Sets/Reps: 6 sets of 2 repetitions Intensity: 50-60% of 1RM, focus on explosive movement Accessory Work: Pull-Ups, Dumbbell Rows (3 sets of 10-15 reps) Thursday: Maximal Effort Upper Body Exercise: Deadlift (Conventional or Sumo) Sets/Reps: 5 sets of 1 repetition Intensity: 90-100% of 1RM Accessory Work: Barbell Curls, Triceps Extensions (3 sets of 8-12 reps) Friday: Dynamic Effort Lower Body Exercise: Box Jumps or Jump Squats Sets/Reps: 5 sets of 3 repetitions Intensity: Maximal effort, focus on explosiveness Accessory Work: Leg Press, Hamstring Curls (3 sets of 10-15 reps) Progression Over Eight Weeks Now, you must consistently challenge yourself to make consistent progress. Here is how to do it on this program: Weeks 1-2: Use the first two weeks to establish a baseline. Focus on drilling the movement mechanics and use weights that you but allow the proper technique. Weeks 3-4: Gradually increase the weight on maximal effort days by 2.5-5 percent each week, maintaining the rep ranges prescribed above. On dynamic days, focus on increasing bar speed. Weeks 5-6: Increase weight, potentially shifting to five sets of two reps on maximal days. On dynamic days, add resistance bands or chains for a unique resistance profile. Weeks 7-8: The final two weeks are where you go all out. Attempt new personal records (PRs) on maximal days and maintain explosiveness on dynamic days. I highly recommend that beginners work with a professional to design personalized training programs for optimal efficiency and results. My Experiment: Results and Reflections Doing Bench Press As a personal trainer with over 17 years of lifting experience, I wanted to try the Russian conjugate method for myself. I had my own doubts initially, as juggling max effort, dynamic effort, and hypertrophy work all in a single program sounded like too much work to me. Furthermore, it isn’t a plug-and-play type of program. You must design it as per your experience level and unique goals. That said, about six weeks in, it all clicked for me, and my body adjusted to the mesocycles and the different lifting days. All my major lifts improved, and my bench press, which is one of my weakest lifts, jumped a massive 15 pounds. I also added 20 pounds to my deadlift. That’s not all; this program made my muscles dense and more defined. Results of the Program Here is the improvement in the three big lifts: Lift Before (8 weeks) After (8 weeks) Gain Squat 315 pounds 350 pounds +35 pounds Bench Press 225 pounds 240 pounds +15 pounds Deadlift 390 pounds 410 pounds +20 pounds This is how my body composition changed: Measurement Before After Change Lean Mass 180 pounds 184 pounds +4 pounds Body Fat 17.5% -15.5% -2% The mindset shift is one of the most downplayed benefits of the conjugate method. Each workout feels like an adventure as you switch between different objectives. The variety keeps you on your toes, and the constant challenge is very motivating. The Resurgence: Why the Conjugate Method is Making a Comeback This is how the Russian conjugate method is different from the conventional training methods: Variety: The human body is designed to be incredibly adaptive. The constantly evolving conjugate method provides enough constant stimuli to ensure consistent progress. Strength and Hypertrophy: Most training programs treat strength and hypertrophy as separate entities, but not the conjugate protocol. It focuses on building brute strength and muscle size, giving you the best of both worlds. Addresses Weaknesses: This method incorporates accessory exercises to target weaknesses and build a balanced physique. Injury Prevention: Since we are constantly varying the workouts, the risk of overuse injuries is limited. Mental Stimulation: On the conjugate method, you cannot expect to show up to the gym and make up your workout on the fly. To see meaningful progress, you must come in with a plan to keep things fresh and engaging. Conclusion The Russian conjugate method is among the most effective but forgotten Soviet lifting techniques that are making a comeback. It isn’t just about making gains but rediscovering the joy of lifting. I highly recommend this program to people who want to step out of their comfort zone and challenge themselves in each workout. If you have any questions about the conjugate method, drop them in the comments below, and I’ll be happy to help! Next read: Facebook Twitter Reddit Flipboard LinkedIn Pinterest Skip to content In the world of strength and conditioning, one of the areas where there is a ton of mystique and discussion around genius applications being applied is the Soviet strength system of sports performance.At the time of the Soviet Union, it is believable the system tested everything under the sun. We need to start by trying to understand the system and look at what coaches might fall under the umbrella of the Soviet Union system from around 1965 until the late ’80s. I also want to go into the exact Soviet principles and talk about my training under an incredibly successful Soviet coach, who was able to answer every single question I was able to provide him.The Soviet Union, especially during the Cold War, was seen as the archnemesis of the United States from a historical perspective. The nationalism behind the Soviet Union was directly reflected in the nationalism of the United States. We were basically in this war of all fronts: who could get to space the fastest, get to the moon the fastest, and who could win the most gold medals. The idea was to not have direct military conflict, though we still had military conflicts, that is for another blog.Understanding that the Soviet Union and the USA were in this battle of making everything as competitive as possible is important. Then, from my personal experience with my strength and throws coach, Dr. Anatoly Bundarchuk, who is arguably one of the greatest Soviet coaches of all time, taught me that every single state of the Soviet Union had coaches. All the coaches would get together once or twice a year to meet with coaches like Dr. B. Dr. B might get all the little Soviet or state coaches who were coaching throws (hammer, discus, shot) to meet at a conference and share information with Dr. B. He would then take all that information to create a system based upon all the experiences and contributions of the coaches. He would weigh and value the coaches based on their athletes’ performances at the national and international levels. Ironically, the Soviet system of sports performance was incredibly democratic. We have to start with this backstory to understand how things worked.Similar things were done for wrestlers, runners, and every other sport under the sun. The information was sent throughout the year to a central information hub. Coaches would contribute information about athletes’ eating habits, lifts, and other information of that nature. The deciphering of the information of specific athletes helped the Soviet system utilize the top results to provide a framework for other Soviet coaches.In the current situation, we can look at some of the coaches who talked about Soviet training, contributed around Soviet training, were Soviet trainers, or were/are internet frauds that claim they were in specific systems but never were.Let’s start with Verkoshansky. Verkoshansky wrote SuperTraining. When I took SuperTraining to Dr. B, he called Verkoshansky a white coat. To Dr. B, a white coat is always in a lab and is never training athletes, never learning the application of the research. In chapter 4, Verkoshansky mis-cites Dr. B. In my copy of SuperTraining, Dr. B scribbles all over chapter 4 to correct the errors.Verkoshansky wrote the book with Mel Siff.Next is Pavel, the kettlebell guy, who at least has some interesting stories. He put out some really solid articles during the JavaScript days of the internet.Then there is R.A. Roman, who was essentially one of the main coaches in their weightlifting system. A lot of the information we can pull from now is from the weightlifting world because the Soviets shared quite a bit of information. There are people in Michigan, I believe it is Sportivity Press, who has translated a lot of the texts so that we can dive in and learn a lot. R.A. Roman has a great quote that goes something like this: “There is a difference between moving heavy weight and moving heavy weight quickly.” That is essentially the whole premise behind weightlifting.Yessis is a person who focuses on translations, a classically educated American who spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union learning. He helped translate at least one of Dr. B’s books if memory serves me correctly.That brings us to Dr. B. I think he is the one who has brought the most information to the west. Ironically, Vladimir Zacciorski is another very large influence on strength and conditioning who taught at PSU. Zacciorski was a gymnast from the Soviet Union. So when I came back to PA from training with Dr. B, Dr. B gave me a script that he wanted me to deliver to Zacciorski. After emailing Zacciorski, I was able to get his address and give Vladimir the script. Zacciorski has the best book as an intro to strength and conditioning.Finally, my favorite, Vorobyev, came out with a weightlifting book from the late ‘60s. I believe the book is very applicable to today’s training that leads to creating strength freaks in power-based sports. I think he might be the most underrated influence as well. Vorobyev had a huge influence on all the previously mentioned coaches. A lot of his work was with Yuri Gagarin, the first person who flew into space.The Soviet system is really unique in how they utilized all these different scientists to arrive at what they arrived at. But now there is a massive amount of confusion behind the Soviet system of training. So my whole goal now is to go into what I learned directly from Dr. B and then how I applied that in today’s world of training athletes to get to the Olympics, play in the NFL, and make world teams.First, training under Dr. B, I was a shot putter. I was mediocre at best but got to train with Olympic medalists. A workout with Dr. B was unlike any experience I ever had. I first had to take my throws. Typically it was 24-30 throws. Then we would go into the weight room. I thought we were going to go into the weight room and just get really strong. One thing that was crazy is that we might go into the weight room and have to do 2x5 power cleans at 120k. After we might do a V-up for a trunk movement of 2x15. Then he might have us do a ¼ back squat for 2x5 at 130k. The fourth exercise and this workout isn’t an exact replica but very similar, would be a pad bench of 2x5 at 145k. The fifth exercise would be a reverse hyper for 2x12. And then the sixth and final exercise would be 2x5 dips.The interesting part is we would throw every day then do the above workout in the morning. Then we would come back in the afternoon and do the exact same workout. We would come back the next day and do the exact same workout in the morning and the afternoon. And then we would do it again the next day as well! Occasionally we would have a different workout in the afternoon and alternate back and forth for long periods of time. There were other sequences we would follow as well. The whole point was to have the loading lower with intensity.The Soviet system is notorious for doing triples and quads. That is where the volume tends to be higher under the Soviet system but the intensity isn’t as high as it could be. So the example above, the workout can get done pretty quickly. But over the span of three to five weeks, the tonnage really builds up over time.