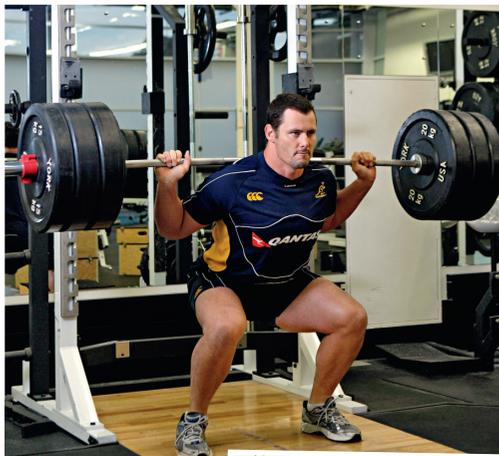


MAN ALIVE!

THE WORK-OUT

The exercises here are the best for making a bloke a better prop: bigger, more explosive, stable and dynamic. They can be adapted for your needs and used as part of other workouts. But, as Baxter says, with heavier weights, it's especially important to get them right. "If you're carrying heavy weights in an upright position above your centre of gravity, the risk of injury is higher. The big danger is putting your back out, and you can also do your knees in the squat, or your ankles." If you're not sure, get instruction, and spotters.



SQUAT

"The squat is a key exercise and gives you good quad and hammy strength, the main drivers in scrummaging, line-outs, running with the ball, any contacts, we use those muscle groups. Your weight is on your heels, back is straight, head neutral and chest out. If you're going for pure strength, then heavy as you can with small reps. Try three reps at 90 per cent of your maximum weight. If you're trying to get bulk do sets of eight. If it's for endurance, drop the weight down. I need all of those at some point during the season."



BENCH PRESS

"Start with your arms about shoulder-width apart, where you'd comfortably bring your arms down if you were to lie on the bench without any weight. Cross-grip (narrower) will increase the triceps component and the inside middle of your pecs; wide grip has more of a bicep component, and the outside of the pecs. You've got to have your back and head in a neutral position. If you're having to involve other muscle groups then you're probably lifting too heavy. Use just your arms and pecs, not the hammies or anything else."



THE CALVES

"With weak calves, you wouldn't be able to maintain pressure in the scrums or when you're trying to direct pressure through the opposition. Strong calves are also vital for line-out lifting and general running. If you've never done anything with calves, just start with the calf raises, then build into the plyometrics. Then do the two together, because you need to be warm for plyometrics."



CALF RAISE

"If you haven't done it before, start off with no weight. The calf is more an endurance muscle, so you'd probably start with sets of eight and hope to get to sets of 15. The volume is what you're looking for rather than top-end strength. You need to keep your leg in neutral – not rolling either side of your foot – and getting as much range as you can: at least below horizontal and up on your toes. Work it to mild fatigue."

PLYOMETRICS

"You do plyometrics for the explosive element – when you're taking off for a sprint, or line-out lifting. The muscle gets stronger and is able to react quickly. The reason it's so hard is because you're using your full body weight on one leg as you jump (forward-back and then side to side). Do three sets of eight as fast as you can control it. You don't want to be doing it so fast it's out of control and you roll your ankle."

MAN-UP FOR THE 1RM

How to set one-repetition weight records in the gym

"Our exercises are based around what one rep maximum (1RM) of that exercise would be, so if we're doing bench press, and you can do four at a weight, you can extrapolate what your 1RM maximum should be. If you're doing an endurance session they work out 60 per cent of your one-rep max and you'll do that. (The Waratahs' gym record board shows that prop Matt Dunning can bench press 185kg, squat 232.5kg and deadlift 240kg.)"

"You can't do a maximum weight every session; I do it in cycles, with an endurance cycle, an explosive cycle and a strength cycle. Maxing out would be once every four to five weeks. You put good weight on most sessions, but not so much weight you can only get one rep out each day. So let's say you're doing three sets of eight. Hopefully on that last set of eight you're battling to get out the last two reps. If you're going to get to 1RM, you need to build your body up to that weight."

"When you want to do 1RM, you've got to do a full body warm-up, so sit on the bike for five minutes. Maybe do a couple of sets of push-ups, but make sure you're not fatiguing. Say you are going for a 1RM of 120kg, you'd put 60kg on and do five to six reps of that, then put 80kg on and do two or three of that. Put on 110kg and do one, then go for the 120kg, so you build up to it."

