

5/3/1 vs. SMS

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Somewhere between Arnold, ESPN hosting Strong Man competitions, and the steroid scandal, the fact that the weight room is a tool to facilitate movement was forgotten. And with an increasing number of coaches implementing Jim Wendler's 5/3/1 into their athletes' training programs, it doesn't look like this will be remembered any time soon.

Jim Wendler's 5/3/1 is considered by many to be one of the best training programs for getting stronger on the market today, and I completely agree. Time and again I have seen its success in getting both competitive athletes and every day lifters stronger than they ever thought they'd be able to in such a short period of time. I am, however, concerned that 5/3/1 may be being used inappropriately for most athletes. In light of this, I would argue that S.E.L.F. Made Simple (SMS) would be a better alternative for most athletes because the program allows the athletes to build a strong foundation by incorporating joint integrity work, it has more of a "core" focus, and it is less demanding on the athletes hormonally, allowing them to effectively train for other areas of their sport.

First, let's recognize what 5/3/1 is and what it is not and then do the same for SMS. Finally, we'll compare the two programs head to head. To start, 5/3/1 is a powerlifting program in its most elemental state. This means that it is designed to get athletes (and yes, powerlifters are athletes) as strong as possible. It is designed to be incredibly simple to follow, which is great, and it is designed to get continuous results over the course of many months. It is also written such that whoever performs the program can alter the supplemental lifts in order to allow their main lifts (back squat, flat bench, deadlift, and standing military) to be as heavy as possible. This is one thing that SMS doesn't allow for (I'll explain why later) but that I really like about 5/3/1. There are, however, some things that 5/3/1 lacks that are vital to an athlete's development and performance.

The first thing 5/3/1 is missing is any type of joint integrity work, whether it be for the hips, knees, ankles, or shoulders. Joint integrity work keeps athletes healthy and pain free and is vital for an athlete's well being because it prevents injury and when you are injured you cannot perform as well as when you are healthy. The second thing 5/3/1 is missing is daily core work, and by daily I mean every day you train with the program. For this article, I'm considering the "core" to be the rectus abdominus, internal and external obliques, lumbar and thoracic spine, psoas, and the lumbo-pelvic hip complex, including the hip flexors, adductors, abductors, and gluteals. Power, i.e., strength times speed, is the name of the game for the vast majority of sports, and the core, particularly the hips, is where power lives. An athlete's core is arguably the most important area that needs to be trained, so quite frankly it is beyond me why this wouldn't be hit every training session.

Finally, the last thing 5/3/1 is missing, in my opinion, is a realization that skilled athletes are exactly that, *skilled* athletes. This means they need to also have some type of movement training and skill training that should, in most cases, be a higher priority than their strength training. (Just for clarification, being a "skilled athlete" is not limited to those athletes who use some type of ball, instrument, or tool during their competition. The term "skilled athlete" includes any athlete who has to move and control their body,

even track sprinters, because as Martin Rooney points out, running and sprinting are skills and they must be practiced year-round.) The problem with 5/3/1 when trying to implement it into a skilled athlete's training program is that it requires the athlete to rep until failure with their heaviest lifts four times every week. Hormonally, this leaves the athlete a wreck and not only exhausts them for their other training sessions, but also puts the athlete at great risk for injury. Now, some may say that Wendler is actually asking for technical failure, meaning when the lifter's form breaks down, not total or muscular failure, which would be when they are no longer able to complete a full repetition. This may be true, but I would argue that the vast majority of people who are lifting don't have proper form to begin with, so how does someone judge when incorrect form fails?

Let me stop this comparison now and reiterate an important point: 5/3/1 is a really, really good training program for people who are looking to get stronger. So, these "deficiencies", or whatever you want to call them, that I am pointing out are no fault of the program's and no fault of Wendler's. It is, however, the fault of the coaches who implement this program into their teams' training regimens. Wendler wrote a program for people, specifically powerlifters, to get as strong as possible, not for every athlete to maximize his or her potential on the field of competition, which, along with injury prevention, is really what the purpose of training is.

Now let me tell you a little bit about the SMS training series. This series of training programs was written by myself with the goal of getting as strong as I could without sacrificing my ability to move, i.e., putting on too much mass or being completely drained from the lifts. Most of the basic principles of 5/3/1 are still there—the continual progression from phase to phase, the heavy main lifts and higher-rep supplement lifts, and the percentage-based progression within a single mesocycle. However, instead of writing in a set of reps to failure at the end of all the main lifts, I have another set written in of a pre-determined rep number. Also, in regards to the supplement lifts, instead of having you do 50 reps of each exercise like 5/3/1 calls for, SMS dictates the exact number of sets and reps you will do. When the reps for your main lifts are lower (1-3) the reps for your supplement lifts are in the 6-12 range, and when the main reps are higher (4-6) the supplement reps are in the 8-15 range. Also, like 5/3/1, every fourth week of SMS is a deload week followed by a new program so the athletes are able to stay fresh with their strength training.

Addressing the "deficiencies" that I identified with 5/3/1, the SMS series implements a general, ground-based warm-up that targets the hips, knees, ankles, and shoulders before every lift followed by a specific warm-up to target the muscles that will be the prime movers in that day's main lift. These specific warm-ups range from different squat variations to box jumps to medicine ball work. The medicine ball work serves as a way to strengthen one's grip in addition to being a warm-up, which for skilled athletes is very important. There is also core work written in at the end of every day, with all of the muscles in the core being worked over the course of one week. Equally as important, there are exercises to isolate hip flexion, extension, abduction, and adduction each week as well. Finally, like I stated above, the SMS training series does not call for the athlete to take the final set of the main lifts to failure, technical or total, each day, which allows the athlete to stay fresh so they can have other productive training sessions as well.

The SMS training series is by no means perfect. In fact, there are many problems I could see people having with it. The most common problem I could see people having with it is that the volume still may be too high for a lot of skilled athletes (think soccer and

basketball players). In response to this, I would say to cut out the second pair of supplement exercises each day. Unlike 5/3/1, which only has one pair of supplement exercises for each day, SMS has two, with each pair having fewer sets than the one pair in 5/3/1. However, if the volume were too high, I would say to get rid of one of these pairs of exercises. SMS1 is more along the lines of 5/3/1 in this sense, but once you get to SMS2 you'll see what I'm talking about.

A second problem I could see people having is that, starting with SMS2, there are a lot of triceps and biceps isolation exercises, and by a lot I mean four to five total sets per week. First of all, these exercises can be easily removed from the program—just don't do them. Day 4 of SMS2 contains a lot of these sets, so if you are worried about that or don't want to do them, then don't and just use the fourth day as more of a recovery day after you hit your standing military presses. However, I would like to point out that confidence is a HUGE contributor to athletic performance, so if you can see your hard work paying off in the form of bigger arms, you may be more confident when heading into battle.

Finally, a third problem I could see is that the SMS series isn't as individualized as 5/3/1, meaning that the supplement lifts for each session are chosen for you, as appose to 5/3/1 where you choose your own supplement lifts to best allow you to increase the weight of your main lifts. I'll respond to this by saying that the vast majority of people don't know what lifts to perform to get the results they are looking for, so while 5/3/1 is an excellent choice for a more knowledgeable powerlifter, for the baseball player who is a freshman in high school, giving them free reign in the weight room is not a good idea. The SMS training series structures the supplement exercises to ensure that a balanced approach is taken to strengthening the body for athletic movement.

In light of the information just presented, it seems to me that the program you should choose for your training depends on your goals of your strength training sessions. As I stated above, 5/3/1 is one of the best programs out there for purely increasing strength, but coaches need to realize that being the strongest athlete does not make you the best sportsman or sportswoman. You need to choose a program that is conducive to the goals of your athletes and your program within the realm of the individual sport itself. *5/3/1 For Football* has now been released, and while this is a great step for many football programs, once again, does it make sense to implement this training into a lacrosse or soccer player's program? You wouldn't give a powerlifter a basketball player's training program and expect them to become the best powerlifter they can be, so why would you give a basketball player a powerlifter's program and expect that it will make them the best basketball player they can be?

Get big or die tryin'.

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