

***The Power Circuit***  
***Maximizing strength and power while minimizing training time***  
**By Christian Thibaudeau**

Circuit training is often frowned upon by serious athletes and strength enthusiasts. They tend to put it in the same box as nautilus machines, pink headbands and Richard Simmons.

However circuit training doesn't have to be so sissy! In fact it can actually be quite hardcore. In fact, it can even be one of the most productive a serious athlete could train!

**What is circuit training?**

Circuit training refers to a method of dividing the training workload *vertically* instead of *horizontally*. What's the difference between those two methods?

*Horizontal training:* This is the common method of workload distribution; you have a certain number sets of various exercises to perform. You complete all the sets for one exercise before moving on to the next. The amount of rest between sets will vary depending on the training objective.

*Vertical training:* Instead of performing all the sets of an exercise before moving on to the next, you perform one set of each exercise, in succession. When you have done one set of each exercise you are said to have completed one circuit. You will repeat the circuit until you have reached the planned volume. Once again, the rest intervals between exercises will depend on your training objective.

**What are the benefits of vertical training?**

**1. Performing each set of an exercise with less specific/localized fatigue.** If you train horizontally and have 1:30 minutes of rest between each set and that each set lasts 30 seconds you only have 2 minutes before performing a set of the same exercise. However if you do a circuit of 5 exercises with the same 1:30 of rest and 30 seconds of exercise you will now have 10 minutes of rest between two sets of an exercise. This will allow the muscles involved in each exercise to perform optimally every time. It will also allow the nervous system to be fresher at each set, which will translate in better motor unit innervation and thus better strength, power and size gains. Now, it's true that there will still be some fatigue. After all you are still performing a set every 2 minutes, but the fatigue specific to each exercise will be lower. So you have a situation in which the specific fatigue is low and the general fatigue is relatively high, as a result you will get the maximum out of every set while still getting a general conditioning effect.

**2. More fun in the gym:** When you have a lot of sets of each exercise to do it can get boring. Moving from one exercise to the next is a refreshing change. You actually appear to do much less work while doing as much, if not more, work.

3. **General conditioning effect:** To get this benefit you must take short rest intervals between each exercise. This will effectively condition your body: improving both your strength-endurance and cardiovascular-endurance while providing a significant fat loss stimulus.

4. **More variation:** Simply by changing the order of exercises you create a new workout. This way it's quite possible to never do the same workout twice. Enter motivation and renewed progress!

### **Why is circuit training frowned upon if it's so good?**

Simply because circuit training is associated with:

- a) Light weights
- b) Machines
- c) Beginners

It really isn't the case. And by accepting the popular dogma you may very well be missing the boat!

So what can be done? Let's dispel the myths! Here is a power circuit that is sure to give you strength, power, size and conditioning all while having lots of fun.

### **The Thibaudeau Power Circuit**

This circuit is an example of the application of vertical training for an athlete or an individual looking for maximum strength and power gains in as little time as possible.

#### *Loading parameters*

The circuit is composed of six exercises; the rest period between each exercise is 60 seconds. The circuit is repeated anywhere from 3 to 8 times (more on that later).

Exercise	Repetitions	Load	Rest after exercise
Romanian deadlift	6	80-85%	60 seconds
Bench press	6	80-85%	60 seconds
Power snatch	4	75-80%	60 seconds
Push jerk	4	75-80%	60 seconds
Jump squat	10	10-15% max squat	60 seconds
Plyo push ups	10	Bodyweight	60 seconds

## *The exercises*

### 1. Romanian deadlift



The biggest difference between a Romanian deadlift and other deadlifts is that the starting position is the other deadlifts' completed position: standing fully upright. From that position you will lower the bar with a knee flexion and trunk flexion then bring it back up for a complete rep.

**Start position:** Feet are hip width, toes are pointing straight forward. The hand grip is narrow (approximately shoulder width). Legs are very slightly bent and the torso is fully extended. Back is tightly arched. Shoulders are back (beach position). Arms are straight, traps are stretched. Head is looking forward.

**Lowering:** Lower the bar until it's 2-3" below the knees. The knees only bend slightly more than in the starting position, the back becomes parallel to the ground and the hips are brought back. Back stays tight. The arms stay long.

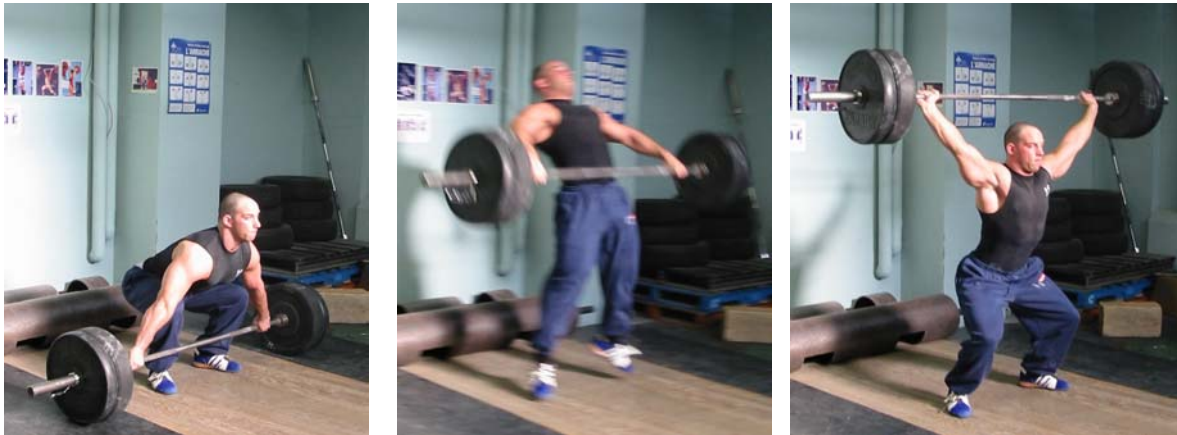
**Pull:** Bring the bar back up the reverse way you lowered it: mostly through trunk extension with a slight extension of the knees. Back stays tight. The arms stay long. The lift is completed when you are standing up completely.

### 2. Bench press



I trust that there is no need to explain what a bench press is!

### 3. Power snatch



The power snatch is a fantastic back builder. Simply put everything in your backside get some work! The lower back is heavily involved (isometric and dynamic actions), so are the rhomboids, lats and middle portion of the traps (isometric action) as well as the upper traps (dynamic action).

#### **Starting position:**

1. Feet are hip width, toes are turned slightly outward
2. Legs are flexed at the knees (around 90-100 degrees)
3. Trunk is flexed, back is tightly arched
4. Shoulders are in front of the bar
5. Arms are straight
6. Traps are stretched
7. Head is looking forward

#### **Pull:**

1. From the ground to the knees the lifting is controlled, the back angle stays the same, the bar is lifted only via leg extension.
2. Once the bar is above the knees, explode upward with a powerful leg and back extension
3. The bar should be kept close to the body at all times
4. The traps contract forcefully to further accelerate the bar
5. Basically, what we are looking for is for the body to look like a bow (hips forward, back and legs extended)

#### **Catch:**

1. Catch the bar in a half squat position
2. Catch the bar with the arms locked, do not press the weight
3. Keep the traps tight to help hold the bar

\* Note: If you are having problems with the power snatch from the floor you can use the “easier” variation of the lift: the power snatch from blocks:



**Starting position:**

1. Feet are hip width, toes are turned slightly outward
2. Legs are flexed at the knees slightly (around 130-140 degrees)
3. Trunk is flexed, back is tightly arched
4. Shoulders are in front of the bar
5. Arms are straight
6. Traps are stretched
7. Head is looking forward

**Pull:**

1. Explode upward with a powerful leg and back extension
2. The bar should be kept close to the body at all times
3. The traps contract forcefully to further accelerate the bar
4. Basically, what we are looking for is for the body to look like a bow (hips forward, back and legs extended)

**Catch:**

1. Catch the bar with a *slight* knee flexion (do not catch it with straight legs, learn to squat under it)
2. Catch the bar with the arms locked, do not press the weight
3. Keep the traps tight to help hold the bar

#### 4. Push jerk



##### **Starting position:**

1. Take the bar from the rack
2. Place it on your clavicle and shoulders
3. The bar is held with a clean grip or an intermediate grip
4. Hold the bar with the full hand, not just the fingertips
5. The elbows are pointed forward and down, not just down
6. The body is straight and tight

##### **The dip:**

1. Lower your body in a straight line (imagine that your back is sliding on a wall)
2. The dip is controlled, but not too slow
3. You dip into a quarter squat, no more

##### **The explosion:**

1. When you complete the dip quickly reverse your movement and explode upward!
2. You should go for a very hard push with the legs (so that the bar will leave your shoulders at the top)
3. Just as you reach the upright position, press your hands up as fast as possible
4. Try to “throw” the bar upwards, not press it

##### **The catch:**

1. Catch the bar with a *slight* squat under the bar
2. The trunk remains tight
3. The arms are immediately locked (you receive the bar with locked arms, no pressing of the weight)

## 5. Jump squat



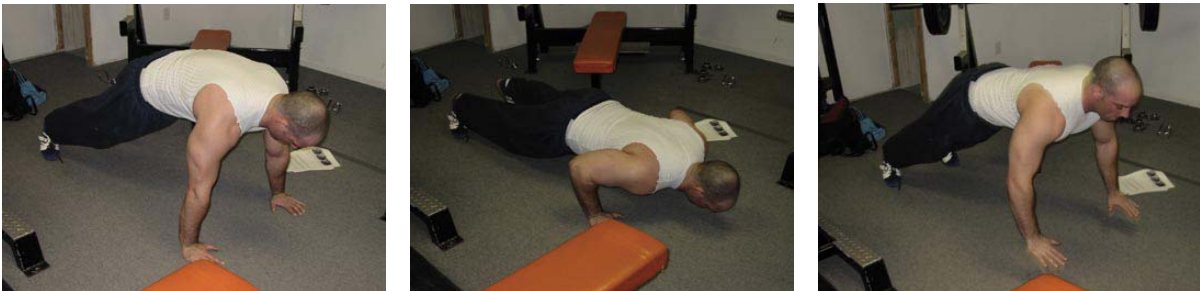
### **Starting position:**

1. Standing up with the bar on the back of your shoulders.

### **Execution:**

1. Dip into a quarter squat and explode upward
2. Land on the ground, flex your knees to absorb the shock

## 6. Plyo push ups



To do this drill properly, immediately upon landing on the ground you should immediately project yourself back up. Imagine that the ground is hot lava.

### *Training volume (number of circuits)*

I suggest the following 4 weeks cycle.

**Week 1:** Repeat the circuit 4 times

**Week 2:** Repeat the circuit 8 times

**Week 3:** Repeat the circuit 5 times

**Week 4:** Repeat the circuit 3 times with 5-10% more weight (each exercise except push ups)

This workout can either be included into a more complete routine (it is then done once a week) or it can also be performed on it's own, repeating the workout 3 times per week.

### **Conclusion**

There you have it! Completing this workout will take you anywhere from 25 minutes (3 circuits) to 70 minutes (8 circuits) to complete. The average training time being approximately 40 minutes per session. And it will give you unparalleled gains in whole-body power. You will also get stronger, more muscular, leaner and better conditioned.

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### **About the author**

**Christian Thibaudeau** is a strength and conditioning coach who works with a wide range of elite athletes. He has successfully trained athletes requiring a wide array of physical qualities ranging from strength and power (football players, Olympic lifters, strongmen competitors) and important energetic capacities (hockey players) to proprioception and stabilization/balance (figure skaters). He's also a competitive Olympic weightlifter and a football coach. Christian is completing his M.Sc. degree in exercise science and has been a research assistant in that field for the past two years. You can reach Coach Thibaudeau at [the\\_beast@t-mag.com](mailto:the_beast@t-mag.com) or [the\\_beast@mailvault.com](mailto:the_beast@mailvault.com)

