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## Leg Exercises

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### SQUATS

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To build mass and strength in the legs, especially the thighs. Full Squats are one of the traditional mass-building exercises for the entire lower body but are primarily for developing all four heads of the quadriceps.

**EXECUTION:** (1) With the barbell on a rack, step under it so that it rests across the back of your shoulders, hold on to the bar to balance it, raise up to lift it off the rack, and step away. The movement can be done with your feet flat on the floor or your heels resting on a low block for support. (2) Keeping your head up and back straight, bend your knees and lower yourself until your thighs are just lower than parallel to the floor. From this point, push yourself back up to the starting position.

It is important to go below parallel in this movement, especially when you are just learning the exercise, so that you develop strength along the entire range of motion. If you don't go low enough in the beginning, you could injure yourself later when using heavier weight. Foot position to some extent determines which area of the thighs you work the most while doing Squats: A wider stance works the inside of the thighs to a greater degree, while a narrower stance tends to work the outside more; toes turned out hits the inside of the thighs. The basic stance for greatest power is usually feet shoulder-width apart, with toes turned just slightly out.





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## HEAVY SQUATS

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Your Squat technique will vary a lot depending on your physical proportions. Because of my height, whenever I do Heavy Squats I am forced to bend forward quite far, bringing my lower back very strongly into the exercise. Ideally, you should do Squats with your back as straight as possible. Bodybuilders like Franco Columbu and Tom Platz can do this easily with the rear end and bar in about the same line when coming down with the weight, instead of the way I do it, bar way forward and rear end stuck out toward the back. I always include a lot of Front Squats in my routine in order to make certain I emphasize the quadriceps.



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## HALF SQUATS

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop extra mass and power in the thighs.

**EXECUTION:** This exercise is done the same way as regular Squats except you go only halfway down, which will enable you to use more weight.

*Tom Platz*



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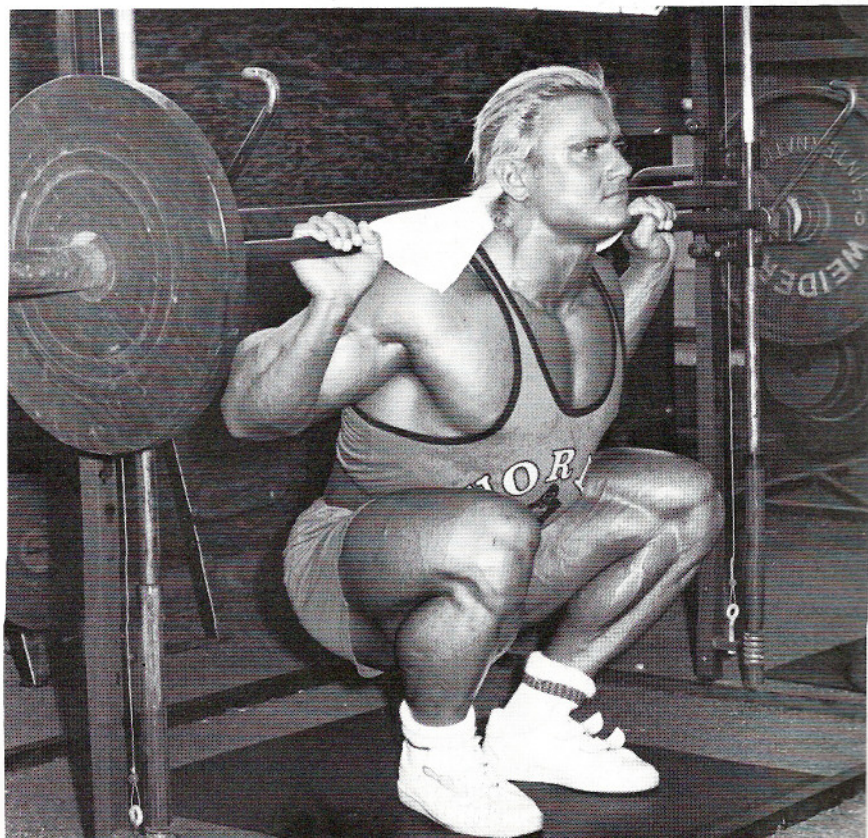
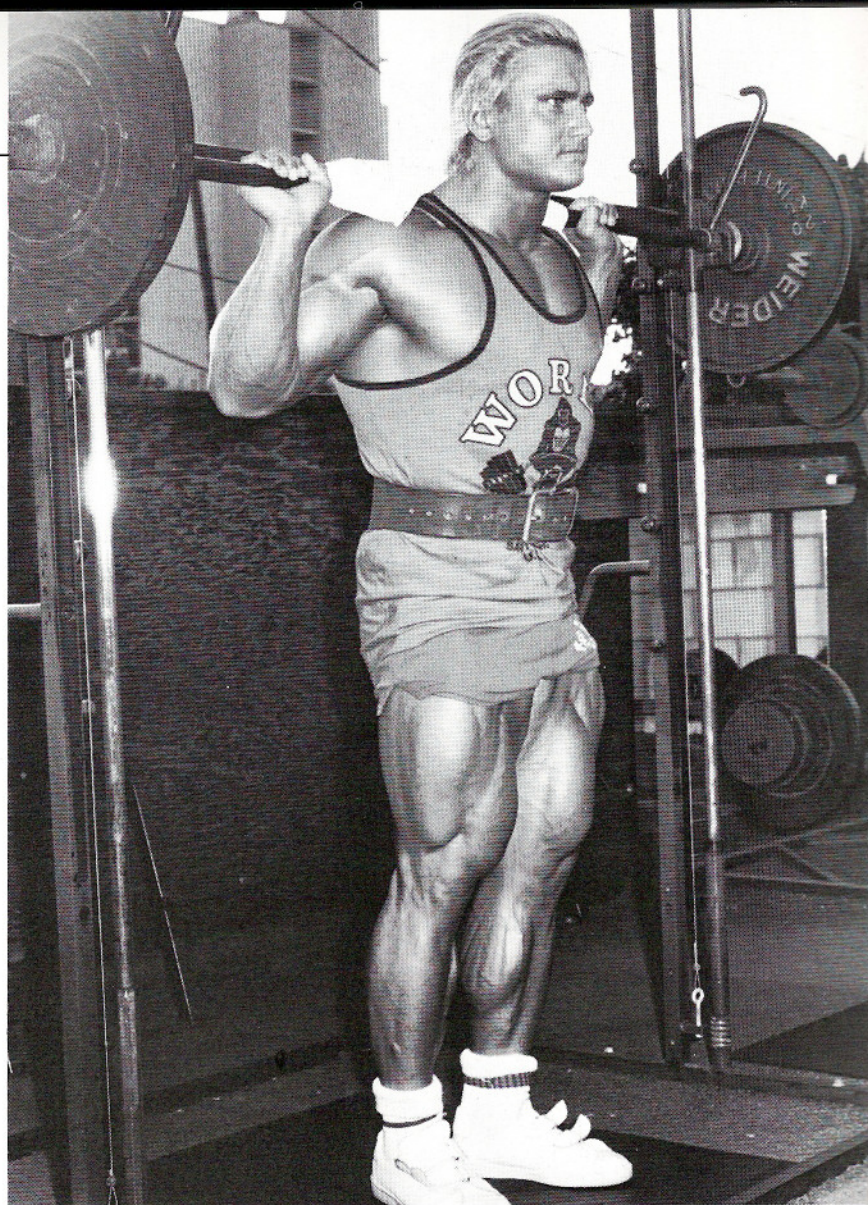
## MACHINE SQUATS

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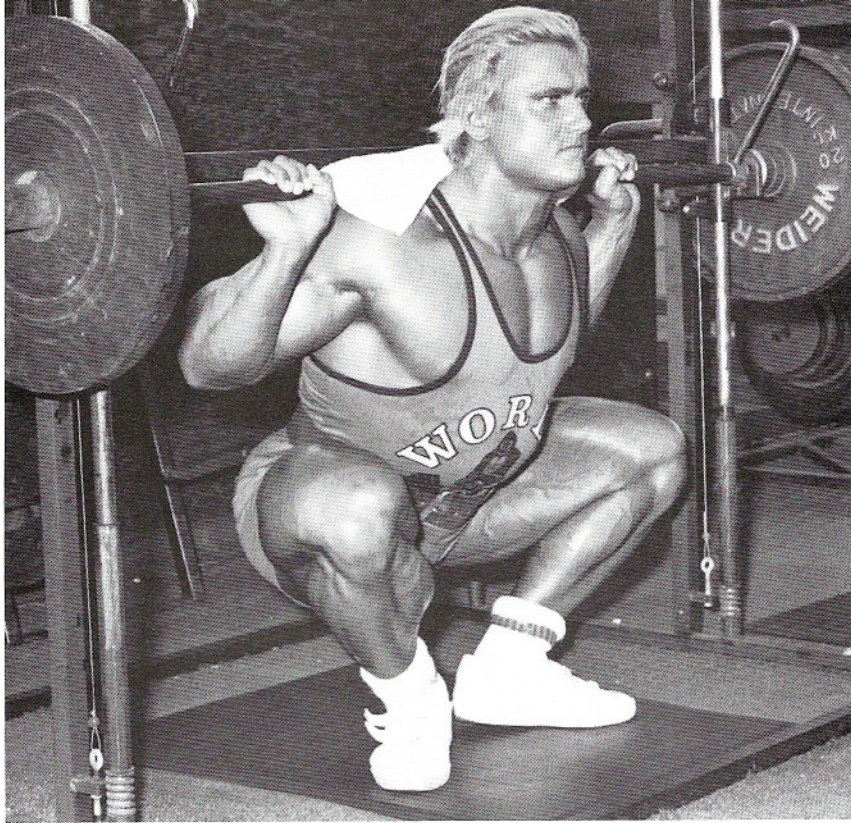
**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop the quadriceps. When you do Squats on a machine, you can work the thighs intensely while putting less strain on other areas such as the knees and lower back. There are a number of machines designed to approximate the Squat movement. They use a variety of techniques to create resistance, including weights, friction, and even air compression. Personally, I have always preferred doing Machine Squats on a Smith machine.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Place your shoulders under the bar and come up to a standing position. Position your feet to obtain the desired effects from the exercise (see page 495). (2) Bend your knees and squat down until your thighs are lower than parallel, then press back up to the starting position.

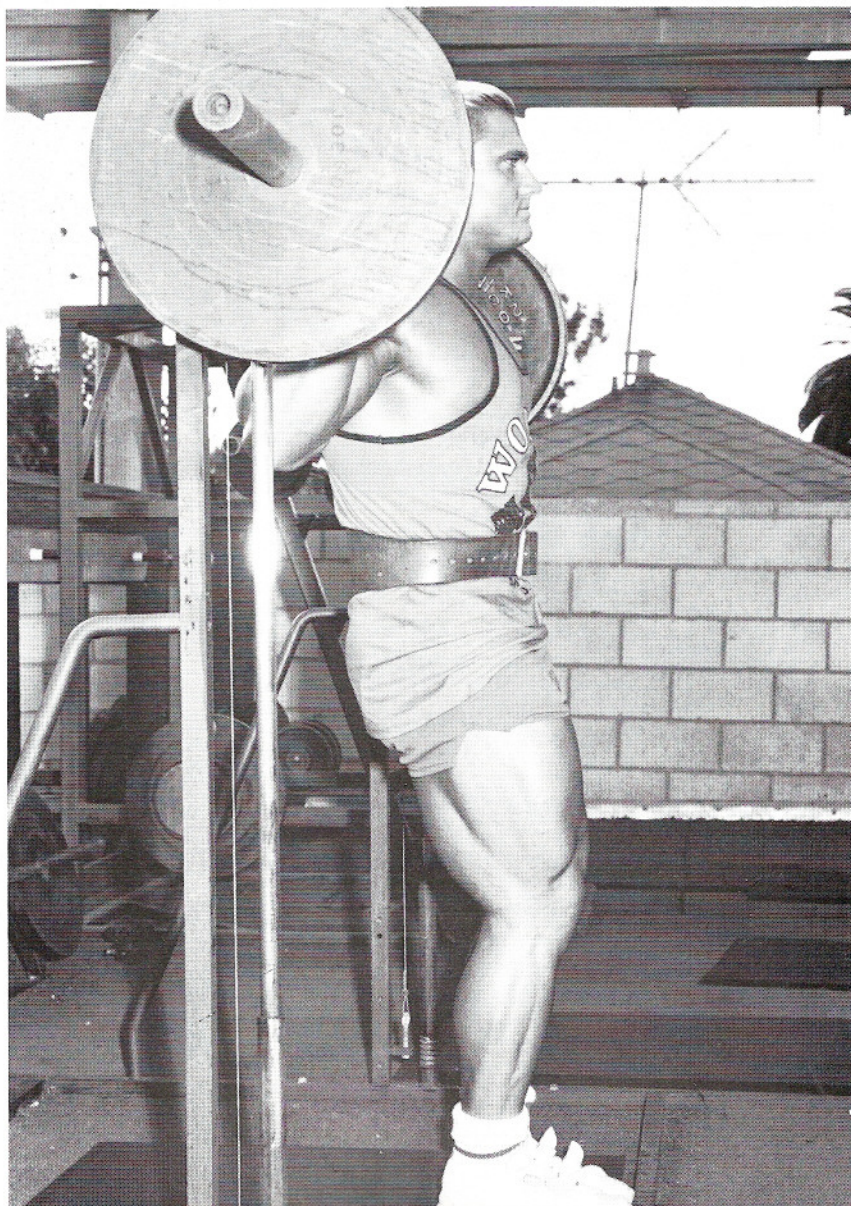
Turning your toes out helps develop the inside of the thighs. Balancing a barbell in this position could be difficult, but the machine makes it easy. Standing with your feet moved forward helps isolate the quadriceps, especially the lower area near the knee, and minimizes strain to the lower back since you don't need to bend forward at all.







*Machine Squat—  
toes out*



*Machine Squat—feet  
forward*





*Wrapping the knees when you do Heavy Squats raises the hydrostatic pressure within the joint and helps to prevent joint or ligament injury.*





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## FRONT SQUATS

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To work the legs, with special emphasis on the thighs. Front Squats develop the outside sweep of the quadriceps.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Step up to the rack, bring your arms up under the bar, keeping the elbows high, cross your arms and grasp the bar with your hands to control it. Then lift the weight off the rack. Step back and separate your feet for balance (I find this exercise easier to do if I rest my heels on a low block to improve balance). (2) Bend your knees and, keeping your head up and your back straight, lower yourself until your thighs are below parallel to the floor. Push yourself back up to the starting position. Do this exercise slowly and strictly, making sure you keep your back straight. If possible, do all Squats in front of a mirror so you can check that you are keeping your back straight.







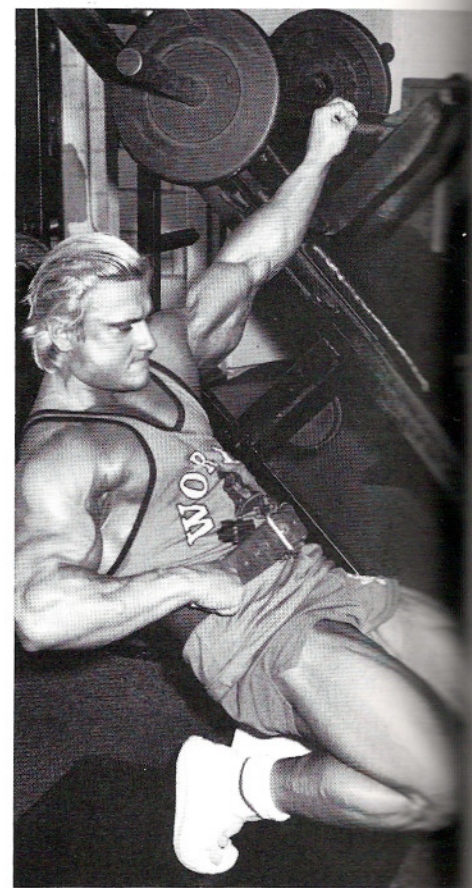
*Front Half Squats are done in the same manner as Front Squats except you go only halfway down.*



## SISSY SQUATS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To isolate the lower quadriceps. Although this movement is called a Squat it is very close to a Leg Extension in the way it affects the legs. You will feel a lot of stress right down to where the quadriceps insert into the knee.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Stand upright, feet a few inches apart, holding on to a bench or something else for support. (2) Bend your knees, raise up on your toes, and slowly lower yourself toward the floor, letting your pelvis and knees go forward while your head and shoulders tilt backward. (3) Continue down as low as possible, until your buttocks practically touch your heels. Stretch the thigh muscles and hold for a moment, then straighten your legs and come back up into a standing position. Flex your thigh muscles hard at the top of the movement for maximum cuts and development.





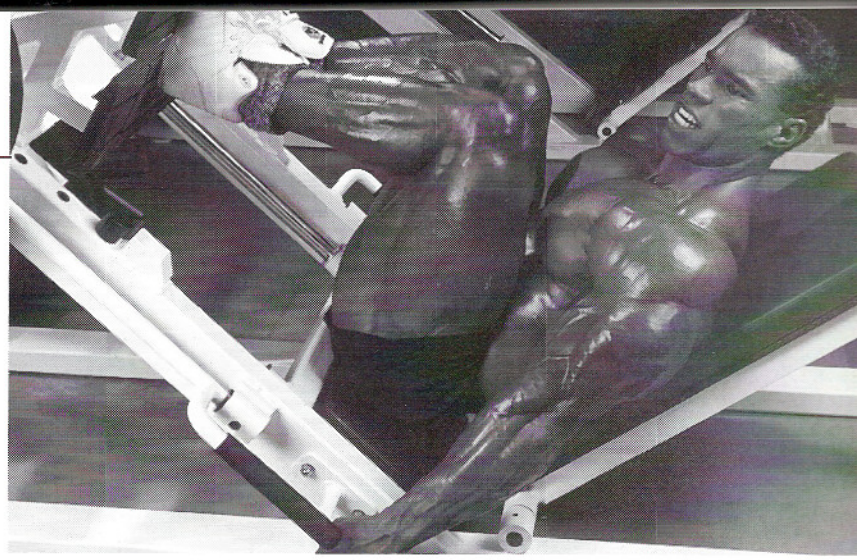
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## LEG PRESSES

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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To build the mass of the thighs. If Squats have a disadvantage, it's the pressure they put on the lower back. Doing Leg Presses is a way around this that allows you to work the legs with very heavy weight.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Using a Leg Press machine, position yourself under the machine and place your feet together against the crosspiece. Bend your knees and lower the weight as far as possible, bringing your knees toward your shoulders. (2) Press the weight back up again until your legs are fully extended. Don't get in the habit of pushing on your knees to help your legs press upward, or of crossing your arms across your chest and limiting your range of motion.



*Kevin Levrone*

## LEG PRESS VARIATIONS

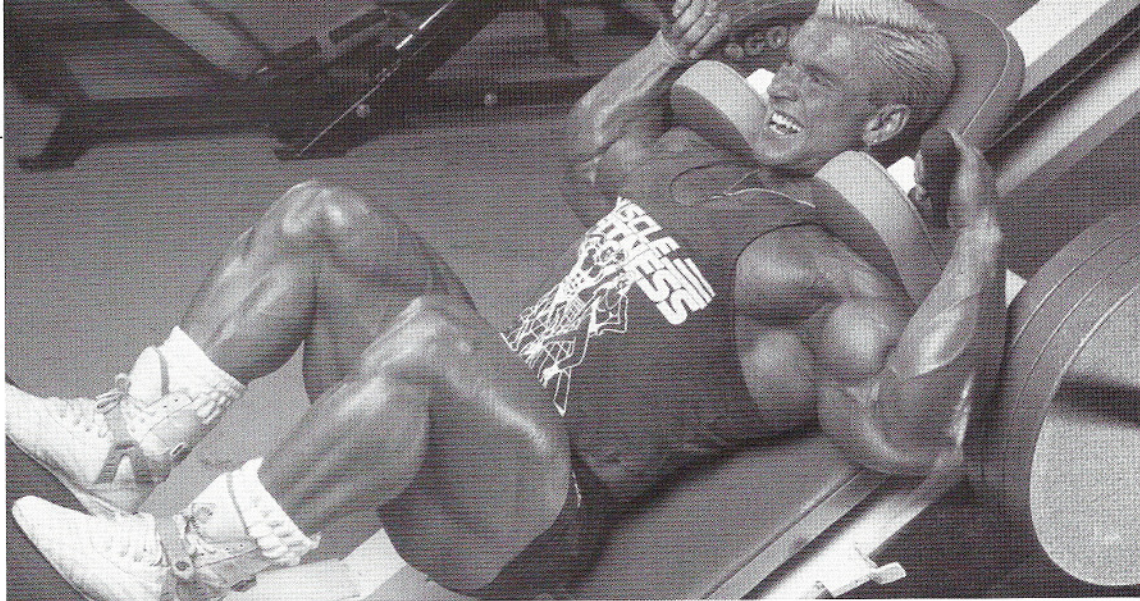
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There are a number of other machines on which you can do the Leg Press movement. Some of these move along an angled track, others along a horizontal. No matter which type of machine is used, the exercise should be done in a similar manner, with the knees coming back as closely as possible to the shoulders.



*Tom Platz does the Incline Leg Press—  
toes-apart position.*

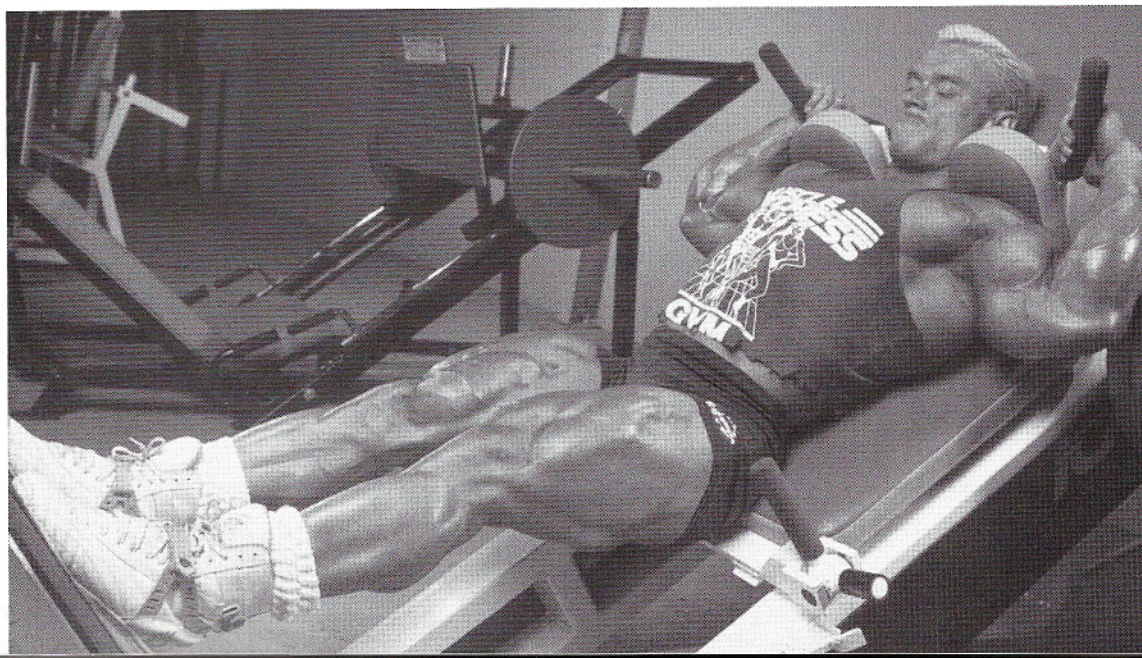




## HACK SQUATS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop the lower area of the thigh. Hack Squats are a good movement for working the lower range of the pressing motion.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Depending on the design of the machine you use, either hook your shoulders under the padded bars or take hold of the handles. Your feet should be together, toes pointed slightly out. (2) Press downward with your legs and lift the mechanism, stopping when your legs are fully extended. This keeps constant tension on the legs. Bend your knees and lower yourself all the way down. Your legs should end up bent at a much more acute angle than when you do Squats. In all your repetitions, keep working this lower range of motion by going all the way down. (3) For some of your last repetitions, lower yourself in the normal way, but as you press back up, arch your back and bring your hips away from the machine without locking your legs out. This will emphasize the separation between the leg biceps and the quadriceps, which makes the thighs look huge when you do a side chest shot.



*Lee Priest*



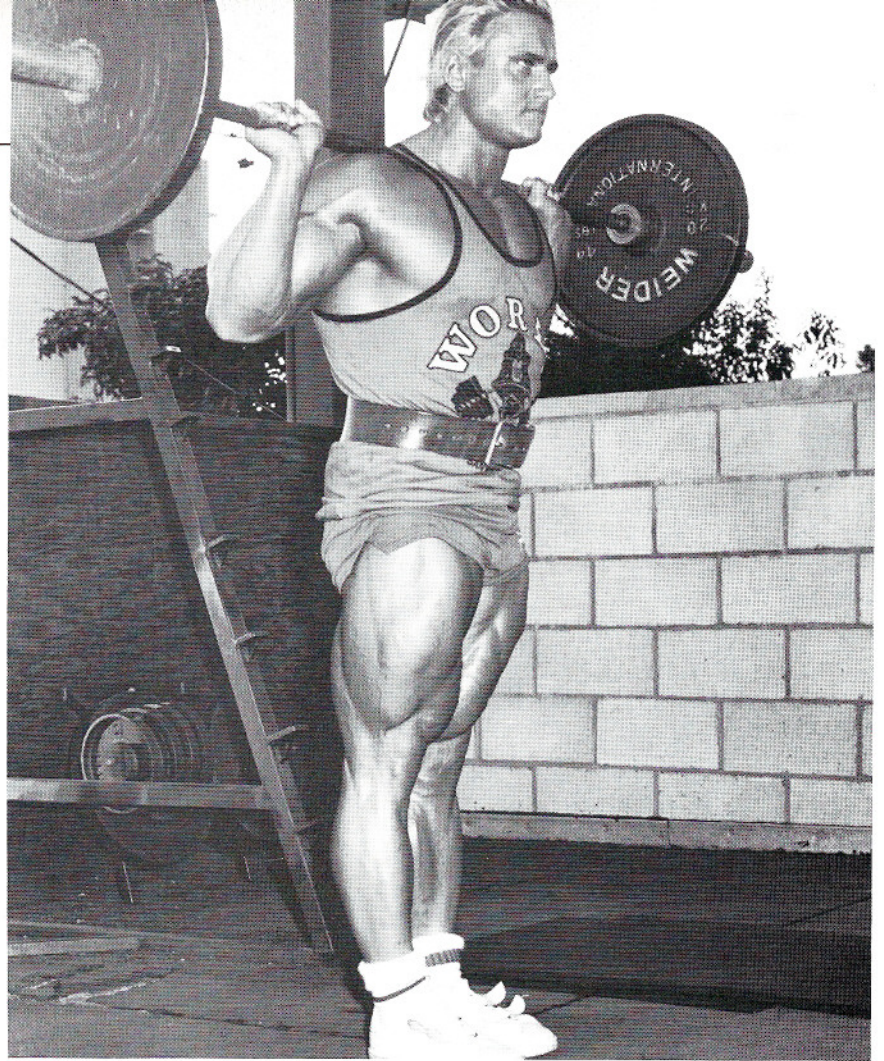
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## LUNGES

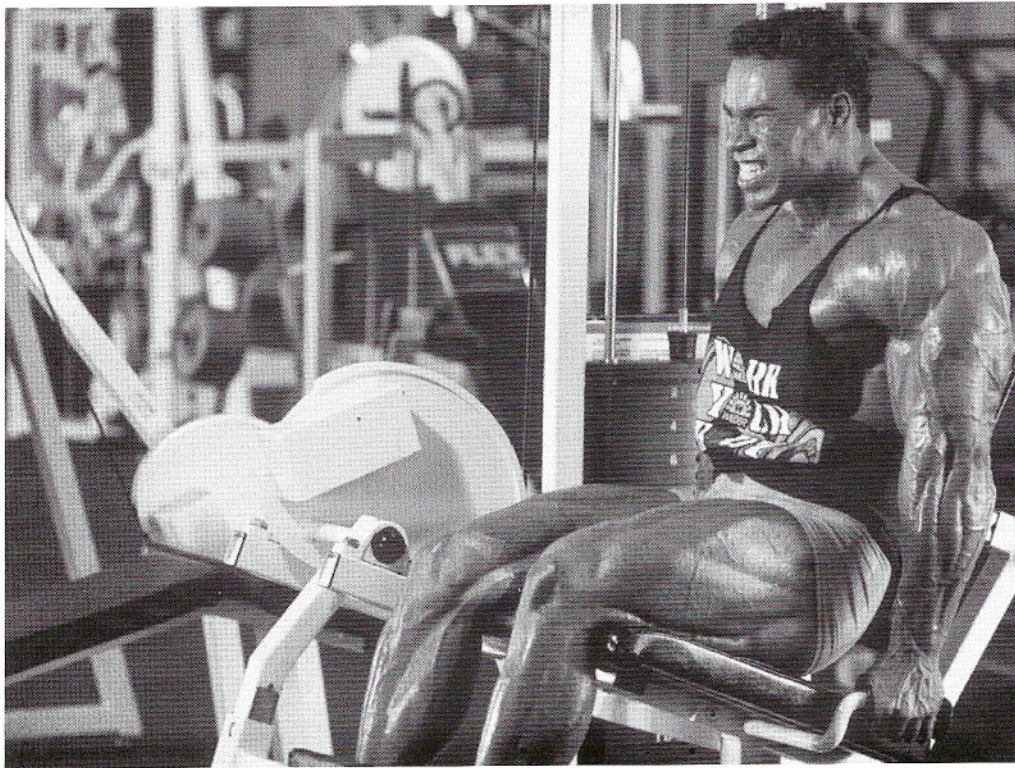
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**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop the front of the thighs and glutes.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Holding a barbell across the back of your shoulders, stand upright with your feet together. (2) Keeping your head up, back straight, and chest thrust out, take a step forward, bend your knees, and bring your trailing knee almost to the floor. The step should be long enough so that the trailing leg is almost straight. Push yourself back up to the starting position with one strong and decisive movement, bringing your feet together, then step forward with the other foot and repeat the movement. You can do all your repetitions with one leg, then switch and repeat with the other, or you can alternate legs throughout the set.







## LEG EXTENSIONS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To define and shape the front of the thigh. Leg Extensions are great for getting really deep definition in the thighs without losing size, and especially for developing the area around the knees.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Using one of the various Leg Extension machines, sit in the seat and hook your feet under the padded bar. (2) Extend your legs out to the maximum, making sure you remain sitting flat on the machine (don't let yourself lift off and cheat up the weight). Extend your legs as far as possible until they are locked out to achieve maximum contraction of the quadriceps, then lower the weight slowly until your feet are no farther back than the knees and the thighs are fully stretched out. To make sure you always extend your legs fully enough, have your training partner hold out a hand on a level where your feet will kick it at the top of the extension.

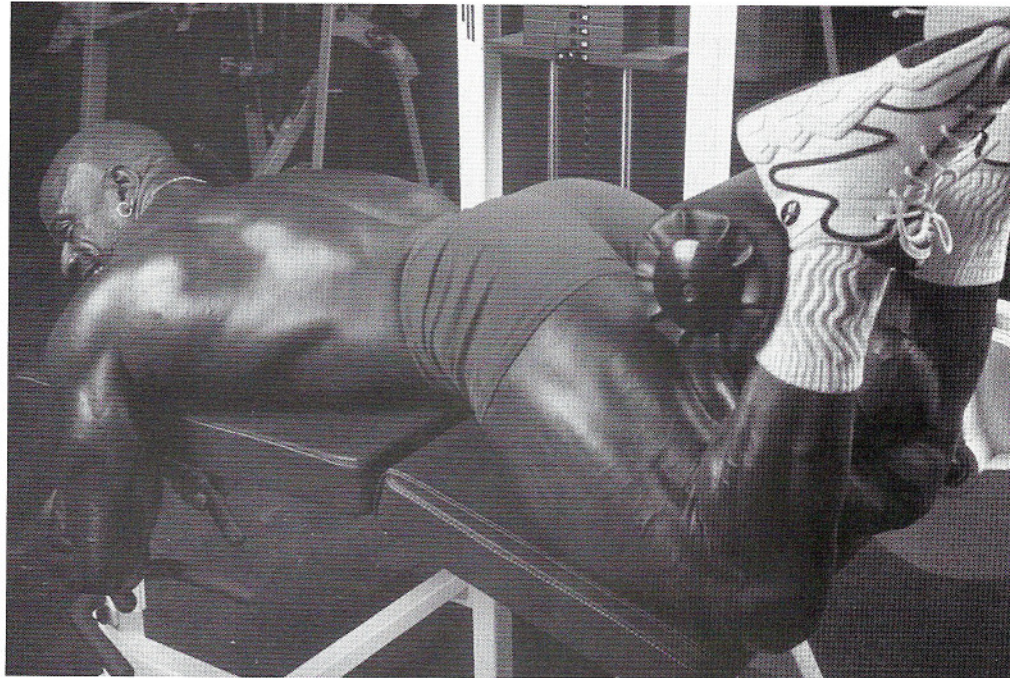
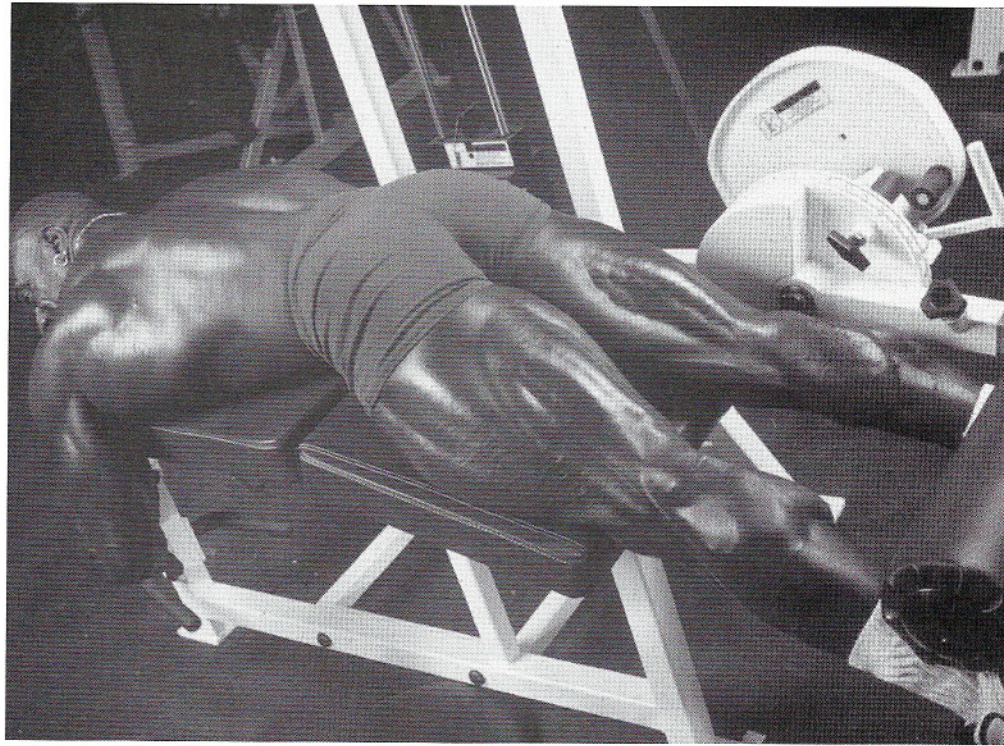




## LEG CURLS

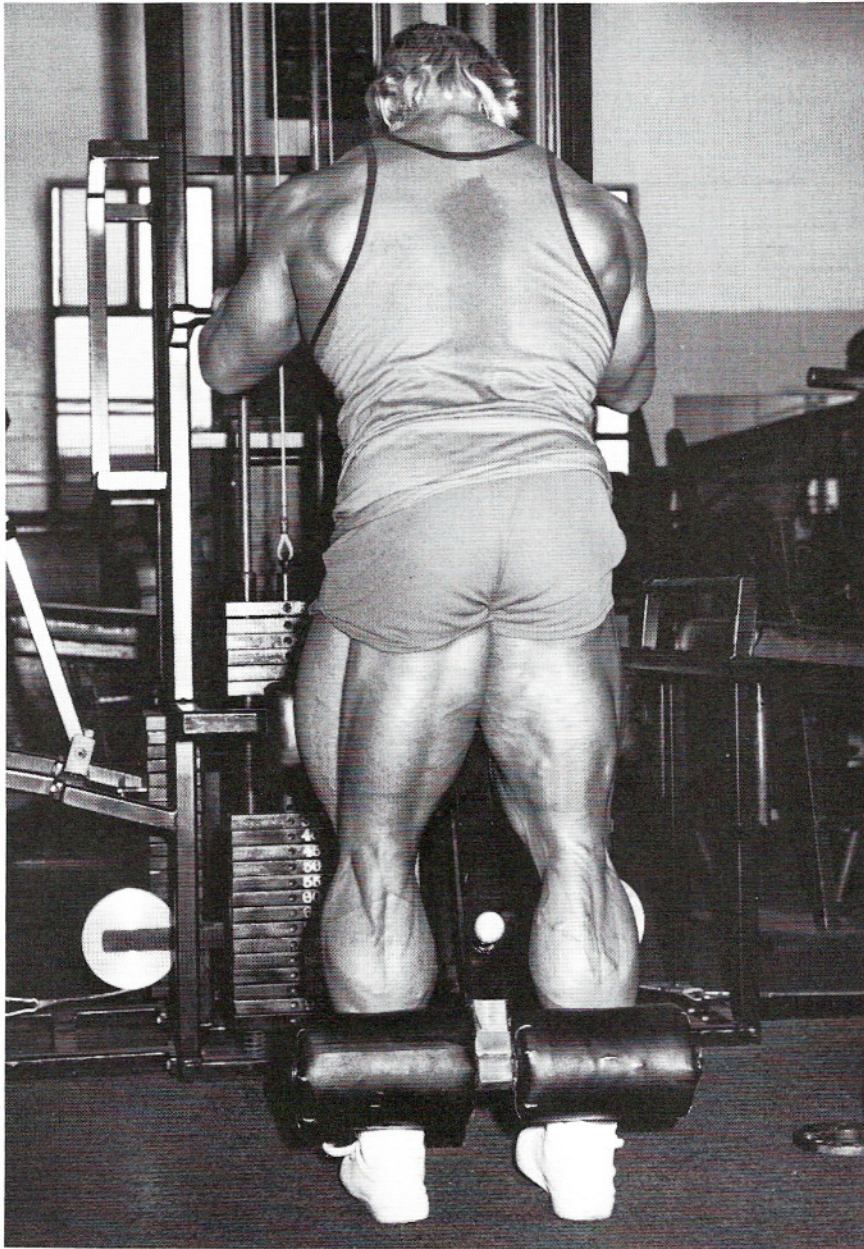
**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop the hamstrings (rear of thigh).

**EXECUTION:** (1) Lie facedown on a Leg Curl machine and hook your heels under the lever mechanism. Your legs should be stretched out straight. (2) Keeping flat on the bench, curl your legs up as far as possible, until the leg biceps are fully contracted. Release and lower the weight slowly back to the starting position. Hold on to the handles or the bench itself to keep yourself from lifting up off the bench. This exercise should be done strictly and through the fullest range of motion possible. I have found that supporting myself on my elbows helps keep the lower part of my body more firmly on the bench.



*Willie Stallings*

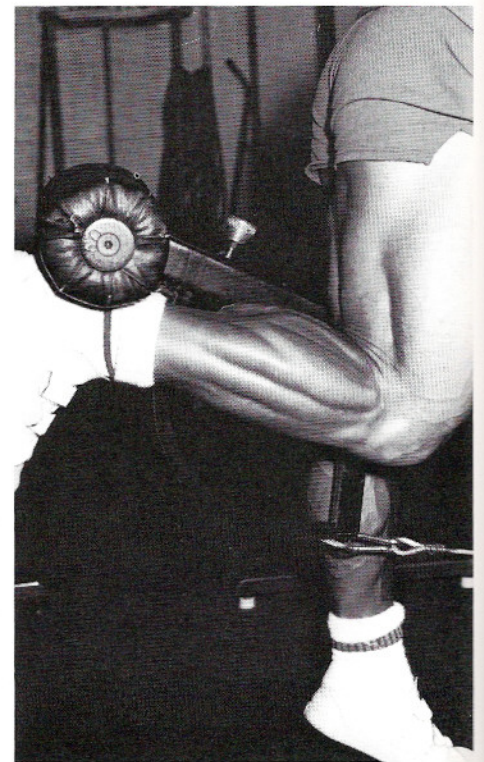




## STANDING LEG CURLS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To develop the leg biceps. Using a Standing Curl machine, you can train one leg at a time and further isolate the leg biceps.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Stand against the machine and hook one leg behind the lever mechanism. (2) Hold yourself steady and curl the leg up as high as possible. Release and lower the weight back to the starting position. Do your set with one leg, then repeat the exercise using the other leg. Be certain to keep the movement slow and strict.





## STRAIGHT-LEG DEADLIFTS

**PURPOSE OF EXERCISE:** To work the hamstrings. Also works glutes and lower back.

**EXECUTION:** (1) Take hold of a barbell as for Deadlifts and come up to a standing position. (2) Keep your legs nearly locked and bend forward from the waist, your back straight, until your torso is about parallel to the floor, the bar hanging at arm's length below you. Straighten up again, pull your shoulders back, and arch your spine to get the spinal erectors of the lower back to contract completely. Without your legs to help you as in regular Deadlifts, you will use much less weight doing this exercise. If you use Olympic weights, it is best to stand on a block or a bench so that you can lower the weight to the maximum extent without the large end plates touching the floor as long as your back doesn't begin to round.

