

Limping Into December, Part II
Twelve weeks of pain
by Ian King

PUBLISHED 11-05-99 10:00

In case you've just stumbled onto this site, put some ice on your head while I do a quick recap of what's happening here. Australian Wunder Coach Ian King has devised a 12-week leg program that's among the most unique — and the most effective — that I've ever experienced. The first five workouts were posted in "Limping Into October" [Part I](#) and [Part II](#), "Limping Into November" [Part I](#) and [Part II](#), and "Limping Into December" [Part I](#). The first two parts of each workout were meant to be alternated for a period of three weeks, after which you'd progress to Parts I and II of the next three-week phase. Got it?

This particular workout is Part II of the third stage of the workout. These two workouts will take us through weeks 6 to 9, after which we'll publish the last two parts of the workout (remember, it's a 12-week program).

For many, following this program will be the first time that you will have given equal attention to what I call *hip-dominant* exercises as you have to *quad-dominant* exercises. To help clarify these terms, I consider deadlifts and squats to be heads of their respective family trees (the deadlift being a hip dominant movement, and the squat being a quad dominant movement). If this approach is new to you, the results should be interesting.

If you haven't already seen or experienced the benefits of this approach, I'll take 30 seconds to explain some of them. The obvious benefit is the development of hip and back musculature and strength in a balanced manner with the quads. But there's a lesser known, but no less important, benefit from doing exercises such as the deadlift and its variations — the stresses that they present to the muscles of the *upper back*.

One of the "diseases" of the average bodybuilding approach, as I see it, is the development of imbalances between the anterior and posterior muscles of the upper trunk and extremities. Put simply, doing a lot more pushing than pulling (not that sort of pulling!) results in muscular imbalances. The pecs get a bigger share of the workload than the back. The result, after many years of training, is an imbalance in this horizontal plane that may produce the following:

- a visual appearance of being hunched over or rounded in the upper back
- a less than optimally developed upper back
- an apparent cease to gains in chest strength
- an increase in the incidence of neck, shoulder, elbow, and forearm injuries

Quite a benefit...*not!* Why does this occur? Part of the reason is that, generally, one's attention is focused more on what one sees when looking in the mirror — that is, the front of the body. It's often only when you find yourself in the change room at the local men's clothing store that you have the benefit of seeing the posterior aspect (your back) via the opposing positioned mirrors. But wait (as the salesperson might say), there's more!

How much can you bench? How much can you row? Are they equal? Invariably, the answer is that you can bench more. So automatically, you're applying unbalanced load stimuli to

these opposing muscle groups. Furthermore, do you row as often as you bench? Do you do as many sets of row as you bench? If the answer is no, how can you expect balance?

This is where the deadlift and related lifts come in. They provide a loading stimulus that's usually equal to, or sometimes greater than, the load presented in benching. This goes a long way in ensuring muscle balance.

The benefit is optimized, of course, if there's focus on scapula retraction and depression (holding the shoulder blades down and back) during the deadlift. Posturally, this is a feature that distinguishes most weightlifters and powerlifters from most bodybuilders, a benefit that most people don't realize. Anyhow, it should be clear that I'm big on balance, and it's definitely something that I've managed to incorporate in this 12-week leg program.

Enough chat, it's time to train. Here's the routine:

Conventional, medium-grip, bent-knee deadlifts

Before I get into any specifics, I strongly recommend that you do a warm-up prior to this workout and all lower body workouts, preferably consisting of the following:

- General activity to raise joint temperature in the lower body (10-20 minutes on the stationary bike should do fine)
- Stretching the lower body for a minimum of 20-30 minutes
- Performing the specific joint warm-up drills outlined last week in [Part I](#) (unresisted leg extensions and assisted squats)



The deadlift to be employed in this phase is the same as that outlined in the last two-part phase, with the exception of the arm grip. I'd like you to use a medium grip this time, which is just outside the shoulders (we used the wide-grip deadlift in the last program). This grip change supports the increase of load that you'll be experiencing here.

Use a progressive warm-up, first doing a set of ten (approximately 30% of the load that you plan on using for your first real "work set") followed by a set of eight (approximately 60% of the first work set) and finishing up with a set of five (approximately 80% of the first work set).

Now, select a work-set load that creates a high degree of fatigue yet allows excellent technique for five reps with a 201 speed of movement. Rest for three to four minutes. Because you're using a rest period that's longer than what you might ordinarily use, it's important to use a towel on the shoulders so that you can maintain body temperature. It also serves as a sort of psychological arousal technique when you remove it prior to the next set.



The next work set is just one rep using a load that's about a 2-3RM (you could do two or three reps on this weight, if you so chose), same speed and rest period. Return to a load that's slightly heavier than the first work set of five. For example, if you're using less than 100 kg (220 pounds), add about 2.5-5 kg (5-10 pounds); if you're using 100-200 kg (220-440 pounds), add about 5-10 kg (10-25 pounds); and if you're using over 200 kg, add 10-20 kg (25-50 pounds).

The fourth work set will then be a repeat of the one-rep set, using a weight slightly heavier than the first single-rep set (you can use the same guidelines listed above to determine the jumps from the first set to the second set of both the fives and the ones). Walk around for, say, 30 seconds or so to assist recovery, then sit down until it's time to do the next set. Refer to [Part I](#) from last week for a discussion on belts.

Next week, when you do this routine again, you'll need to increase the load on all work sets. You may find that the weight you used for this workout's *second* work set of five reps and one rep becomes your *first* work set weight in the second week. Make similar increments for the third week of this stage.



Deadlifts off blocks, start position just under knees

These are limited-range deadlifts, allowing you to expose yourself to supramaximal loading (that is, relative to your off-ground strength).

Place a box underneath each side of the barbell so that the height of the bar is just under the knees, or from what's otherwise known as the "hang below" position. Use a load somewhere in the vicinity of 20-30% greater than what you would use for a full-range set with the same number of reps. Do five reps at a 211 tempo, each rep from a resting start.



For those interested in increasing their explosive power, focus on accelerating (or at least trying to do so) during the second pull, i.e. from above the knees to lockout. You may find the start position of this exercise unusual, in which case you need to be conservative in your load selection, at least until you come to terms with it.

Clean pulls or high-rep deadlift sets

Here's a "forks in the road" where I allow athletes with different training goals to choose alternate exercises. For instance, if you're more interested in power, do the clean pulls, but if you're more interested in hypertrophy, use the high-rep set.



Clean pulls: used wide-grip *snatch pulls* in the previous phase. The clean pull is much the same, only we use the same grip as the deadlift above (comfortably outside the knees). Again, this narrower grip allows you to use a heavier weight. Pick a weight that's about or just below the weight of the first work set of five-rep deadlifts.



The aim of this lift is to go slow in the first pull (to just above the knees), then accelerate to the toes as fast as possible, minimizing the role of the elbow flexors. Finish on the toes with the upper traps fully contracted. At the end of the first pull (when the bar is just above the knees), you should have the same trunk angle as in the start position off the ground. Place a premium on the acceleration of the second pull. Do just one set of five reps.

High-rep deadlift sets: These sets, much like the high-rep squats performed in the last phase, present an incredible window of opportunity to perform a greater amount of work than usual due to the sequencing of this set after the maximal loading set.



Pick a weight that will allow between 10-20 reps at your "normal" speed (311 tempo). This will probably be a weight somewhere between your second-to-last and last warm-up set. Whatever you use, you'll be able to do more reps at this stage of the workout than if you had attempted the same weight for your first work set (due to increased neural firing and reduced inhibition). Again, stop if your technique breaks down.

You also have the alternative of performing this set continuously or using intermittent, short pauses (taking two or three breaths between each set). For those who wish to totally deplete their fiber pool, this is an excellent compliment to the earlier sets, thus giving you the "best of both worlds."

Speed shrugs from above knees or medium-grip, stiff-legged deadlifts

Here's another fork in the road — speed shrugs from above knees for those primarily interested in explosive power; medium-grip, stiff-legged deadlifts for those more interested in hypertrophy.



Speed shrugs from above knees: Reduce the load to about the weight of the second warm-up set. Take a medium grip and stand up with the bar. Keeping a flat back, lower the bar down to just above the knees (known in lifting as the "hang above" position). Immediately accelerate upward, aiming to finish as high on the toes and with as forceful a contraction of the upper traps as possible. This is an excellent lift for the upper back, traps, and calves!



Try to do six reps in a warm-up (with a load of about 75% of what you expect to use in the work set) and a work set of about six to eight reps. If your speed or pull height decreases, terminate the set.



Medium-grip, stiff-legged deadlifts: Take a medium grip (about shoulder width) and begin the set standing. In the start position, the knees should be slightly bent and remain exactly at that joint angle during the lift. Lower the bar down by bending at the hips, not at the knees.

You might remember that the wide-grip, chest-up, stiff-legged deadlift (or Romanian deadlift) was used in earlier phases. The grip and technique of the medium-grip, stiff-legged deadlift, however, allows for an increase in load.

Look for five reps in the warm-up (with a load of about 75% of what you expect to use in the work set) and a work set of about eight to ten reps at a 301 tempo.



Hurdle jumps or King deadlifts

The final fork in the road — for power, do hurdle jumps; for hypertrophy, do King deadlifts.



Hurdle jumps: available, excellent. If not, you'll need to use some benches or similar items to jump over.

The aim is to use something with a height that challenges you while allowing a quick and short eccentric contraction upon landing while staying in contact with the ground for an extremely short amount of time.





Use a warm-up set of ten ground contacts and, where possible and appropriate, raise the jump height to challenge you in the work set of ten ground contacts. Remember, the emphasis should be on the speed of the movement, not the height of the box. And if you have any lower limb injury, that makes you a poor candidate for any jumping movements — don't do this option!

King deadlifts: The technique for these has been well documented in previous issues, but in case you've forgotten, here's a refresher.

This is a single-leg, bent-knee deadlift — one of my very own creations! Stand on one leg (starting with the weak side) and bend the other leg up until the lower leg is parallel to the ground. Place your hands on the hips or by your side. The aim is to bend the knee



of the supporting leg until the knee of the non-supporting leg is brushing the ground.



You're allowed to flex (bend) forward at the waist as much as you want, and doing so will increase the gluteal involvement. Keep the working knee aligned neutrally throughout the movement. Take three seconds to lower, a one-second pause at each end, and two seconds to lift. No warm-up set is needed.

When you can do more than 15-20 reps full range, consider either or both of the following options — place dumbbells in each hand, or stand on the edge of a low block or box so that the working side range can be increased over that which is available when standing on the floor.

Here's a synopsis of the exercises outlined in this program:

Conventional, medium-grip, bent-knee deadlifts

Warm-up sets — 1x10 at 30%, 1x8 at 60%, 1x5 at 80%

Work sets — 1x5, 1x1, 1x5, 1x1

Speed — 201

Deadlifts off blocks, start position just under knees

Work sets — 1x5

Speed — 211

Clean pulls
Work sets — 1x5
Speed — 10 (as quickly as possible)

High-rep deadlift sets
Work sets — 1x10-20
Speed — 311

Speed shrugs from above knees
Warm-up sets — 1x6 at 75%
Work sets — 1x6-8
Speed — 10 (as quickly as possible)

Medium-grip, stiff-legged deadlifts
Warm-up sets — 1x5 at 75%
Work sets — 1x8-10
Speed — 301

Hurdle jumps
Work sets — 2x10
Speed — 10 (as quickly as possible)

King deadlifts
Work sets — 1x(as many reps as possible)
Speed — 312

Note: The loads for the warm-up sets are expressed as a percentage of the first work-set load.

Okay, by now you should be noticing some big-time changes in your legs, but there's still another phase left. Stay tuned for the next and last installment, "Limping Into the Next Millennium!"