

Reasoning Behind The Candito 9 Week Squat Program

By Jonnie Candito

Goal And Context Of Program

The concept for this program was derived from the 6 week advanced bench program I released. Unlike the bench program, this did not come from a place of frustration with my own training. My squat right before starting this was lower than it has been in years going into this but that was simply due to just coming back from injuries rather than programming stalls, the latter of which I find far more frustrating. Also, given the timetable of when I am releasing this program you the reader will have to wait to see the results of my own training on it revealed through weekly videos. All I can say is the progress so far is quite incredible.

I want to reemphasize the the purpose behind all of these advanced single lift programs. At some point progressing in all 3 lifts either becomes incredibly taxing mentally or simply results in little progress across the board. This is particularly true if you have limited time to dedicate to lifting weights in addition to being a lifetime natural lifter. Now does this mean you have to focus on specializing one lift at a time? Certainly not. The last advanced program will have all 3 at once still. It is just an approach I use with success due to it fitting the needs of a varied annual plan and to be flat out more fun. With this style, unless peaking for a meet, there is never a complete offseason break on all lifts concurrently. Also, at all times it is likely that clear progress is being made due to condensed periods of progress on a given lift.

Programming Philosophy Unique To The Squat

I already established that this program has a very similar structure to the bench program with the same themes. Therefore, it'd be a bit redundant for me to go over the overlap of reasoning between the two (why submaximal low reps coupled with very high rep accessories, purpose of high frequency phase, etc.). Instead I'll cut straight to the unique factors of the squat program. This is in comparison to all of the advanced programs as well, so including the general concepts I have yet to release regarding the deadlift and all 3 lift program.

Longest Single Lift Program - The reasoning behind this is simple. Comes down to 3 points:

1. The squat makes up significantly more of one's total than the bench press.
2. The squat helps increase the deadlift more so than visa versa.
3. The squat is more skill based and capable of handling higher volume than the deadlift.

This is not to mention the fact that it is my personal belief that the squat is the single greatest strength builder. For general strength, the bench and deadlift are easily replaceable, but I have yet to find a substitute for an empty squat rack awaiting your companionship.

Higher Intensity During High Frequency Phase - When I mention intensity, I am specifically talking about loading, the percentage of 1 rep max. Also for the sake of compartmentalization, I am only discussing the high frequency phase and the competition squat (not primary accessories).

The risk of developing shoulder issues by both focusing solely on the bench press and pushing the weight too heavy is well understood by serious lifters. Of course the squat carries a risk, but assuming your technique is adequate I find it can be pushed far harder. It is far more common to hear of world class olympic weightlifters squatting to a daily max than high level powerlifters successfully do the same on the bench press. Here is some interesting evidence suggesting shoulder issues tend to be more common among powerlifters with low incidence of knee issues:

<http://www.strengthandconditioningresearch.com/2014/07/08/injury-strength-sports/>.

With this being said, it is never a good rationale to do something simply because you can. It also should have a distinct advantage. I believe this to be the case with pushing intensity a bit harder simply because transference from submaximal high volume work to a true max is lower than it is with the bench press. It is extremely common to bench a 10 rep PR and know you can hit a new PR for a 1 rep max. However with the squat, you can hit a 10 rep max, yet anything near 90% still could feel horrible. Proper bracing, efficient/consistent walkout, and precise descent under to catch stretch reflex at the same position/pace regardless of load, all are skills that can diminish at a certain intensity threshold if not practiced. Even regarding the deadlift I was able to pull my lifetime PR without any consistent training prior. Specificity of loading is critical to all lifts, I am just saying that I believe it is especially the case for the squat in comparison to the other 2 lifts.

Finally, a point that will overlap with the next bolded subtitle coming up is that there simply is a great discrepancy between the effectiveness of a competition style squat in comparison to accessories. For the bench press you can use the incline barbell bench, flat dumbbell bench, barbell overhead press, close grip, wide grip, you get my point, the list goes on. All of these lifts provide a very different stimulus yet immediately improve your bench. Many of them are also arguably better general strength builders than your competition style bench (depending on each individual's technique of course). In both the deadlift and bench press, the more efficient the technique, typically the worse the training effect for strength given limited ROM in addition to possibly tolerating positions that may be an accepted risk. Whereas the squat cannot be cheated if proper depth is achieved. Efficient squat technique makes you stronger. With the squat, you have to keep the primary accessories limited to see significant carryover.

Higher Specificity Of Primary Accessories - Assuming you have read the "Guide to Accessories" in the Excel document, you will notice that the primary accessories not only are very similar to the competition squat, but also to be done with the exact same equipment/stance/bar position as the competition style squat as well. If you are squatting belted this whole cycle, every single pin squat must be belted. That is actually one of the main

reasons I included the pin squat. It is not only to overload hip and knee extension through a partial range of motion, but also to practice deliberate bracing of your core against your belt.

As alluded to earlier, the competition squat itself is such a great strength builder itself that you likely don't need to rely on primary accessories to the same extent. That is why the volume is quite low on the primary accessories while allowing for aggressive progression. This can be incredibly useful because often with the squat lifters tend to lift far too light for far too long before peaking. By immediately pushing yourself with the pin squat and paused squat, that rusty period (poor wording I know) of easing into controlling decent weight will be attacked and destroyed. Also I have found pause squat volume needs to be limited as an advanced lifter as it starts to conflict with squatting explosively. This is why there are no pause squats beyond the first 2 weeks yet pin squats do reappear during the high volume stage. Overall this decrease in primary accessory volume in the initial 2 week period continues the theme of higher specificity as increased loading is more specific to a one rep max.

Lastly, even though not technically a primary accessory, the peak set of 15-20 reps on the good morning and front squat/high bar is included as a slight shift in specificity beyond the bench program. It is simply replacing one of the 3 x 20 isolation spots with a movement that is as equally specific to the squat as the primary accessories in the bench program are to the bench press. They are then removed for week 3 only because the squat itself is hard enough percentage wise to be a notable challenge, a place where the bench program doesn't quite reach beyond the fatigued singles. You may have noticed that many of these differences aren't huge, but these subtleties add up.

10 x 3 At Split Intensities (During Volume Phase) - Probably the most fun aspect of the program in my opinion is the 2nd week of the volume phase, which is the 5th week of the program as a whole. A unique aspect in relation to the bench program is that it involved backoff sets split with two different loads used for back to back 5 x 3s. Backoff sets are nothing new but the context of it in this program will make it a fun transition going from a flat 10 x 3 to a more dynamic setup for a fun challenge while keeping volume high. Remember the squat needs slightly higher intensity. Up to possibly 65 total weekly reps with some significantly with some reaching 87.5-90%. High volume phase elongated by a week in comparison to the bench program. This shifts the program more towards the competition style lift beyond just being a longer program since high frequency phase with primary accessory emphasis was not elongated proportionally.

Elongated Max Strength Phase - This is a major key to how I see the squat as different than many who pick sides with training styles. I don't believe high frequency needs to be held onto for dear life, nor do I believe high volume needs to be emphasized so often. Fatigue is an aspect of specificity. If you are training while always fatigued, that is often beneficial, but it isn't as specific as singles or triples done while nearly 100% recovered. Also upping the frequency just slightly to 3x a week with an added speed day allows for a rhythm to be hit again polishing the skill of squatting without enough volume to accumulate significant fatigue. For some reason

it seems many training styles either pick high intensity with low volume on the competition lift, or high volume throughout while counting on a deload to taper into maximum performance without many fully recovered sessions prior.

This last phase is in stark contrast to the bench program as my philosophy is the opposite. Detraining is a bigger issue, skill at high percentages less critical as established earlier, lifters often peak too early due to premature volume dropoff. On the opposite end my philosophy on the deadlift is more similar to taking this last phase of high recovery with high intensity and starting it even sooner. So the squat program is a middle ground in many ways with the most even distribution of the 3 phases.

It is also worth mentioning that the primary accessories present early in the program help with controlling the barbell. Pin squats help bracing and finding a stable rack position. Pause squats of course help with control in the hole. However, an early emphasis of control is replaced with the idea of reinforcing speed in these last 3 weeks. That is why the light singles are there. Too many pause squats can be detrimental beyond a certain point. Control first, aggressive sport practice second.

Checkpoints - This is a tool integrated within the program that I am most proud of. I have always had the standard rules of decreasing training max by 2.5-5% if reps are missed but never integrated checkpoints to increase likelihood that this never occurs beforehand. The goal max integration in the bench program already served as a tool to adjust expectations midway through the program, so combining the same goal max premise with the checkpoints only helps further. This serves for both motivation to perform well on the 2 checkpoints, but more importantly allows a healthy confident mindset knowing if you are on the right path. I also took the time to not just make them seem like a fancy concept, but also to make them practical down to the details.

Checkpoint #1: The reasoning behind it being at the end of week one for the last pause squat is to get a sense of how you are adjusting to the frequency and fatigue. The range given is fairly large at 7.5% to avoid micromanaging. The purpose is to only be a safety net if there is no doubt you need help and to adjust if your pause squat would otherwise turn out to be the heaviest set of the entire 3 weeks. Also there are two different reset auto-calculations to adjust for the fact that pause squat strength will vary based on the individual. It will reset to make your 3 rep paused squat 82.5% of your max if it is currently below the 80% bottom threshold. If above 87.5% then it will reset to 85%. The reason behind 87.5% being the top threshold specifically is to ensure that the 90% unpaused sets in the next two weeks are an adequate leap for a fatigued peak. I don't know a single person who gets less than 2.5% from removing a pause.

The reset number is not simply at the threshold points because I do believe 85% is the most accurate for most, then 82.5% is for those who likely don't practice pause squats as much. The point is to offer enough cushion of inaction to make sure it's worth adjusting.

Checkpoint #2: The 5 rep max on week 6 is the perfect time to adjust the goal max because it is the first low volume workout with just 1 peak set in which you are fully recovered for. It also is spaced well since you can still adjust your goal max after the first 3 week period and the program of course ends in 9 weeks. So a final checkpoint on week 6 fits right in the middle.

Since we are a bit later on in the program with a true 5 rep max we can shrink the range a bit to 5%. 87.5% is what the 5 rep max is recalculated to. I find most people greatly underestimate how high of a percentage can be hit on a true max rep set, particularly on squats when you can take extended breaks in between reps, so I believe 87.5% is a good estimation. That said, since this is based off your goal max you will know that if you hit 87.5% you are already set to nail that goal, and if breaking into 90% then you are really in for a great outcome by week 9.

Inclusion Of “Or” Instead Of All Ranges For Loading Options - This is a very nuanced point but might as well clarify why I did this. In the bench program, there were all ranges when two options were presented. The reason I use “Or” for many workouts in this program is due to the fact that predicting performance on the squat is much harder than the bench press. Typically on the bench press you can tell what will be the appropriate weight down to the nearest 5 pound increment. The squat on the other end often depends so heavily on state of excitement that either going heavy or light is often the best way to avoid overthinking.

Note that there still are times where “To” is used to signify a range of weights you can use, but that is only the case when it is clear that your limits will possibly be pushed in addition to a large gap between the two numbers.

Fatigue Is Specific

This is less of an in depth explanation and more of a reminder. If you are doing this program you will want to adjust your squat form. If you squat narrow, slightly widening will start to feel better. If you squat wide it will be tempting to bring it in a bit. Don't do that. Adaptation is specific to an exercise as we all likely know, but a point many miss (myself included in the past) is that a short term adaptation is fatigue. When the volume decreases at the end you will be glad you stuck to it and reap the benefits of not overthinking yourself out of a huge PR.

Spread The Word

You have read it this far so I'm assuming you help my channel in some way. I'd like to thank you for that and end saying if you enjoy the program to please link people directly to my site - <http://www.canditotraininghq.com/free-strength-programs/>. Also keep in mind that there is an option to donate what you find the program to be worth to you. I keep all my programs 100% free for a reason (well several, but we don't need to go into my life philosophy I'm here to write about squats) so don't sweat it if you don't have the money freed up at the moment.

If you watch my videos and follow me on any form of social media you are already supporting me so I'd like to end by saying thank you. All of you spreading these programs has enabled me to impact more people than I ever could've imagined. That's enough talking feelings, now go squat, or if an off day imagine squatting. You're never alone when the squat rack is your friend.