



Episode 45 Transcript

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Getting Uplifted through Lifting with Meg Squats

Nick Collias: Hey, everyone. Welcome to *The Bodybuilding.com Podcast*. This is a seriously strong, strong edition of this podcast. I'm [Nick Collias](#), I'm always here. She's [Heather Eastman](#), she's usually here, most of the time, except for those old episodes.

Heather Eastman: The originals, yeah. OG. Not old school, OG.

Nick: Meg Squats is pretty much always here these days. Not in our podcast, but she hangs out here with us these days.

Meg Squats: No, I keep showing up, but I'm fine with it. Boise is very nice.

Nick: Yeah, we're fine to have you here. She is, in no particular order, a record setting powerlifter, the creator of the [Meg Squats YouTube channel](#), the 2018 Bodybuilding.com Spokesmodel Search women's winner, and the star ... You like the word star, don't you?

Meg Squats: Sure, I'll take it.

Nick: The word is star, she's the star of the new program on Bodybuilding.com All Access, "[Uplifted: Build Muscle and Strength with Meg Squats](#)," an 8-week program that we're about to release about the time this comes out.

Meg Squats: It's coming soon.

Nick: Yeah. Thanks for coming and talking with us, great to have you here.

Meg Squats: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Nick: Now, we have a lot to talk about with you, but before we dive deep into the new stuff, I wanted to talk with you a little about what got you here to Boise for those who don't really know you that well because, yeah, you've had your YouTube channel for about three years, but looking at some of the early ones, as I was today ...

Meg Squats: Yeah, sorry about that.

Nick: That's definitely somebody who had lifted for a while before that. Like, they had interesting titles. It's like, "Female Push Press PR" or something like that. That was one of them, right?

Meg Squats: I got real creative with those titles of those videos.

Nick: "Female Deadlift 300 Pounds." But those were serious lifts back then too, that was not where you started three years ago.

Meg Squats: Right, yeah. I guess I've been lifting for maybe four and a half years, so I was into it. I had drank the Kool-Aid at that point, but I was still learning. I still had a lot to learn, and I'm still, to this day, learning something new every day, so it seems, and I was posting just for the sole purpose of saying, "Hey, here's the lift. That's all there is. That's all you get." So that was all I posted was ...

Nick: Just a little bit of public accountability somehow.

Meg Squats: Exactly, some accountability and also, at that time, even though it's not that long ago, at that time, there really weren't that many women sharing those videos, at least not on YouTube. I think at that point there was ChelseaLifts, who was doing a lot of powerlifting-style training. She was doing vlog style videos, and so I looked to her as inspiration. And then aside from her, there was a lot of these bikini girls who were doing more bodybuilding-style training, more aesthetics training, and still training really hard and still sharing their progress, but they were doing this, "Not only here's my lift, but also here's some information about me and who I am." So yeah, at first it started off just, "Here's the lift, see you later."

Nick: Yeah, some of them are like 30 seconds long.

Meg Squats: Oh, yeah.

Nick: Here it is, you know?

Meg Squats: Yeah.

Nick: But obviously, there was something that spoke to you very early on with powerlifting-style training, heavy weights, barbells, things like that.

Meg Squats: Yeah. Yeah, I learned to lift in a gym that the bottom floor was a CrossFit gym, so I started there on that bottom floor, and then the second floor was more weights, but not CrossFit, so bigger people. So, [CrossFit](#) kinda gave me the intro to what training was and barbell training, but at a

more beginner level, more just kinda getting my feet wet there, and then when I traveled upstairs and graduated from CrossFit, I made friends. My strong, strong friends if you will. They were the original strong, strong friends and I would train every day with a group of powerlifters. There were some just general lifters who were into powerlifting, but not so serious about competing, a couple serious competitors, and we would just train and hang out and have a good time, and that's how the idea of my strong, strong friends really began in that gym. It's Balance Gym in Washington D.C. A ton of really, really great lifters still train there too.

Nick: So what spoke to you about the second floor instead of the first floor though? Like, a lot of people, first floor is enough.

Meg Squats: Yeah, yeah.

Nick: What was it about the second floor that you're like, "All right, this is my place."

Meg Squats: CrossFit was really fun, but in that space and in the CrossFit format, I could only be there for one hour. And I could show up early and warm up, but I could be there for one hour and I could only do the program that someone else had written for me and that was for everyone else. And I really enjoyed the lifting portion of those classes, so the first part where we get to lift heavy, and then the second part where we have to run around and do crazy stuff. It was still fun, but I was more passionate and more interested in the heavy lifting.

Meg Squats: So that was all they were doing on the second floor, so I said, "I'll just go up here and check this out." And there was a while where I did both, and then I tried to do ... I did a bikini show, like a bodybuilding bikini show.

Nick: While you were hanging out on the second floor?

Meg Squats: Yeah.

Nick: Lifting heavy and doing the bikini show? Interesting.

Meg Squats: Yeah, well, I think everyone at that gym was really accepting of what anybody wanted to do. They were like, "Oh, you're just lifting. We're all doing the same movements, so whatever you wanna do, Meg, maybe you're a little crazy," which I definitely was at that time, and still am. But yeah, everyone was still supportive of what I wanted to do, and so that transition from leaving CrossFit and trying the bodybuilding side of things kind of got me up there. And then after that show, I kind of rebounded where I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do after the show because I ended up gaining some weight back, but it ended up being I just wanted to squat and I just wanted to hang out with and be social and hang out with friends and lift in between hanging out.

Nick: So you weren't really like Meg Squats, calling yourself that at that point by any means?

Meg Squats: Well, whenever I finished the bodybuilding show, and then the only thing I wanted to do was squat, so that was the only movement that I did before I actually got into [powerlifting](#). So, I ran a Bulgarian-style squat program where all I did was a lot of squats. I ran [Smolov](#).

Nick: Sure, that's a legendary squat program-

Meg Squats: Yeah, a classic.

Nick: That pushes you to your absolute limit.

Meg Squats: Yeah, it was really tough, but luckily, at the time, I was gaining some body weight from bouncing back from the show, and that was discouraging in ways, but also I was like, "Oh, but I'm getting really strong, so I'm just gonna try and lean into this strength-building phase of my life." And yeah, I was just squatting. I didn't do any other movements during that time. I didn't do anything else, just squats.

Nick: Squat and eat?

Meg Squats: Mm-hmm (affirmative), I definitely ate a lot.

Nick: That's interesting though. Do you feel like doing the bikini show, I mean, not knowing how crazy you dialed down or anything like that, do you feel like that just primed your body for, "All right, time to put on some serious muscle"?

Meg Squats: I think ...

Nick: Or did it give you something else?

Meg Squats: I think it set me back a little bit because I wish ... I was really focused on that goal and I think when you get in that mindset and you make the decision confidently to decide to do a bodybuilding show ... I mean, I'm sure a lot of the people that you guys interview ...

Nick: Sure, Heather's done one, herself.

Meg Squats: They're just ... Yeah. So there's just this switch that you turn on and it's like, "I'm doing this, hyper-focused, this is my goal."

Heather: Yes.

Meg Squats: I wish I could have saved that focus and passion that I had to do the show for later on in life when I had more understanding of nutrition, more discipline, more just long-term ... longer time in the gym, just more opportunity to build muscle before I went gung-ho into cutting. I think that set me back a little bit. Luckily, I was able to lean on strength to kind of get me out of feeling sad about gaining weight, but yeah, I wish ... And I have a friend now who's preparing for a bodybuilding show and she's just been powerlifting and training heavy for seven years now. And so, she's just in this really interesting place where she was kinda burnt out on powerlifting, but now she's fired up and she has that ... I can see that switch in her head where her life is just so much more regimented than it ever has been even with powerlifting training, so it's a completely different life.

Nick: Yeah, but there is kind of a grass is always greener.

Meg Squats: Oh, of course.

Nick: Like, I'm amazed, some of the top powerlifters that I've read and talked to, they get hurt, then they go to bodybuilding, and then they're like, "Oh god, I wanna go back to strength, finally get to eat

the pizza again."

Meg Squats: Right, yeah. And I think there's ups and downs of both, sometimes training really heavy and pushing yourself, especially if you're pushing yourself to be a very competitive powerlifter, sometimes it means you do have to sacrifice your joint health and your overall health, same with bodybuilding in the same way. So they're different kinds of suck, I guess. They both suck in their own ways.

Heather: One thing about bodybuilding that always appealed to me is it's an extreme sport and people don't really think of that because you don't think of it as like, "Oh, you're lifting as heavy as you possibly can or you're running as far as you possibly can," but you're really pushing your body to the most aesthetic extreme that you possibly can.

Nick: Regardless of how you feel.

Heather: Regardless of how you feel, and that's true of marathon runners, it's true of strongmen, powerlifters. Everyone's just trying to chase that kind of impossible ideal and I think that's kind of the common thread of all these different sports that we're talking about that people kinda dance around is that, "How far can I push it? How far can I push it?"

Heather: And it's interesting 'cause I noticed on your Facebook that you're kinda talking about you've got a friend that's a bodybuilder, so you're always kinda comparing your workouts with her workouts and then you said, "I'd really like to compare nutrition," because I think you're absolutely right. A lot of these young competitors, they come in and they don't really know what they're doing, they're just kinda following what someone else did, which kinda works, but everyone has to ...

Nick: Maybe really won't work when it comes down to it, yeah. Eating in particular.

Heather: Since you touched on that, what would you say, if you could go back to yourself that trained for that competition, what do you know now that you kind of were like, "Okay, this is what I should've done," and how has lifting and powerlifting really helped you fine tune your nutrition?

Meg Squats: Yeah, I would probably tell myself to just don't do the show, and not because I hated it or hated the process, it's just that I mentally wasn't ready and I didn't understand how to take baby steps. I was just like, "Let's do this. We're gonna go for it and whatever it takes to achieve this goal is what I'm gonna do." But maybe mentally I thought I was there, but physically, I don't think my body was ready to diet down at the speed that I was dieting down, and I don't think my body was really had had enough muscle really to be exactly what I wanted to be. I thought I looked great, but the second I could have a plate of brownies, I took that advantage.

Meg Squats: And so, I just wasn't ready to restrict food in that way, and for me, that was the hardest part was the food restriction, and then the goal of the show being over, and then I had no post-meet plan or post-competition plan. And so, I wish I would have just saved that opportunity to compete in bodybuilding at a later time when I was more experienced because I don't think it is a beginner-friendly sport at all. I think it's something that we should take a little more seriously because ... And I mean, that was my own ignorance too, especially with the popularity of bikini coming up and those girls look awesome. And at a really high level, those girls are jacked, but at a more regional level, it seems that they just haven't been training for a really long time, so I think it seems like a really approachable thing for any woman to see that body and think, "Wow, if I just lose some body fat,

then I can look like that."

Nick: That body's in there, right.

Meg Squats: Right, right.

Nick: But you need more muscle.

Meg Squats: Yeah, and I think you just need more time in the gym to understand nutrition, how your body responds to nutrition and what works best for you, and I wish I would've given myself the opportunity to really get in tune with what my body could do instead of just learning a few new things and learning how to count my macros, and then jump right into a show. I think that was my mistake.

Nick: Okay. So then after that, you do Smolov, which there's a short list of women who I've heard of who have done that. Were you following anybody else who was like, "All right, this is it," or is it something that you just kind of happened across? How did you end up on Smolov of all things?

Meg Squats: I had a good friend who was at the gym with me and he was a really great lifter and he was a competitive powerlifter, and he guided me and kind of explained the options, and I think I just picked whichever program sounded coolest. I'm like, "Smolov? Sounds Russian."

Nick: Sounds like a bottle of vodka.

Meg Squats: "Sounds Bulgarian, I'll take it." So, I just chose randomly a program, and I knew that it was known for being really tough and I did a tiny bit of research. Obviously, at this point in my life, I was not really looking too far in advance in my decision-making process, but I chose Smolov because I knew that I really only wanted to squat, so I kind of had a few options there. And it was a really high-volume squat program, so I knew that I'd still get some work done and hopefully I would still be able to make some progress and some gains and still move my body, because when I gained weight, I just wasn't physically comfortable with that weight gain, and that was the only movement that felt comfortable. Like, deadlifts felt weird, I couldn't go back to CrossFit because I felt jiggly in places that I just wasn't comfortable feeling jiggly, so that was the only thing I could do or wanted to do.

Nick: So, you did that, you finished it, and then when did powerlifting, that one-rep-max kind of strength start to come on your radar as like, "Okay, maybe that's where I wanna go."

Meg Squats: Yeah, I started after building that base. So Smolov, you're essentially building up a huge work capacity, so I did that and then moved on to ... I guess that is more so, my next thing that I worked on is more so a Bulgarian-style squat program where the volume is much lower, but the intensity is high.

Nick: Frequency is probably pretty high, too.

Meg Squats: Yeah, yeah. Frequency is every day, so it's called PR Everyday program. So I essentially went to the gym and I had this whole volume of training that I had never done before with the squat, and so I went into the gym and the goal was to try to continue to peak my squat because I wasn't really pushing the intensity and I wasn't really pushing the [one-rep max](#), but I had a lot of work done. So, I started to just go in and attempt either a one through a ten-rep max. So every day,

that was all I did.

Nick: Just rep maxs all the time.

Meg Squats: It was just [PR](#), so you really just worked. You kind of felt how you were feeling and took notes to see, okay ... I remember if I wasn't feeling great, I would go for a two-rep max because it wasn't a one, so it wasn't gonna be as intense, but I could go a little lower and then just try two reps and see how I felt.

Nick: And usually same variation? Not like I'm switching it up, Westside-style, doing PRs in different moves?

Meg Squats: No, no, same squat. Squat only.

Nick: Back squat, not to a box.

Meg Squats: Yeah, and I peaked that for probably a period of three or four weeks, so it kept going just because I had such a good base behind running that. So I kept going into the gym, and I think the guide was whenever I stopped progressing and whenever I noticed, "Okay, no more PRs are getting squeezed out of this program," that's when I moved onto something else and I started with a more intentional powerlifting program.

Nick: Okay, so one-rep max strength was on your radar at that point, but competition as well? Like, "You know what? I'm getting pretty good at squatting. Maybe I should actually kind of go do it in front of some people."

Meg Squats: Yeah, I didn't realize that I was strong until my friend started posting videos of me on the Internet. So I think he shared me on r/powerlifting on Reddit.

Nick: So this was a while ago still.

Meg Squats: This was a while ago, yeah. And then a lot of people commented, like the post did well, and I was like, "Are people actually interested in this?" And my friend, Gabe, he was like, "Uh, yeah! There's not too many people like you who are doing it, period, and then they're definitely not sharing it." 'Cause they're out there, but they weren't posting it ... It wasn't common to post your squat PRs on Instagram at this time. So that's when I was like, "Oh, people wanna watch this," and then I started posting my own videos. I didn't want him to get all the credit for my work.

Nick: Yeah, of course, yeah. So all you've done is pretty much squat up to this point, and you're like, "All right, maybe I'll do a powerlifting meet. Time to pick up a barbell off the floor."

Meg Squats: Yeah, yeah.

Nick: Did you find, "Oh, wow, that's a lot easier," or was it like, "Oh, no, it's every bit as hard as I remember"?

Meg Squats: I think it took me ... 'Cause I still had done some of those movements in CrossFit and I didn't really bench much, but I had some understanding of how to do that. And yeah, it was just slowly progressing and working in ... I think I ran a program called [GZCL](#) where Cody Lefever is the

author of that program.

Nick: Oh, he's an old Bodybuilding.com author.

Meg Squats: Yeah, he's the man. So [Cody Lefever](#) is the author of that program and he kind of creates an opportunity for you to create your own template, sort of, in GZCL. And so, he made videos about this and had a \$1 eBook that he put out, and so I used that to start to understand how to program for myself and ran his program for a little while when I was just getting started incorporating all three movements and more accessories and diversifying my program.

And at that time, I was training for a little bit and there was the USAPL American Open was coming to Washington D.C., which is where I lived and where I trained with all my friends, and everyone was doing it. So everyone was doing it and I'm like, "Okay, I guess I'll do it, too," and that was my first meet, I think in 2014. December 2014, maybe 2013. And yeah, ever since that meet, it's just been, "Okay, this is my sport. I can be an athlete again."

Nick: Sure. What do you feel like really resonated with you about that that bodybuilding didn't? Like you're there, like, "Okay, this is it." Obviously, yeah, you enjoyed it. Were you like on the platform, you're like, "This is what I always wanted," something like that?

Meg Squats: Yeah, I think with bodybuilding, you're training in the gym and your training is completely different than the actual competition. It's nothing alike ... I guess you practice posing, but I enjoyed the training portion of it. And so, then when I got in my suit and I got my tan on, that was like all ready, that day is so exhausting, too. I was just so burnt out and I was like, "Ah, man, I gotta go up in front of these people. Can't I just lift in front of them? That'd be better."

So, I think having my training and being able to show this is what I've worked on. Not only is the weight heavy, but also I've been working on technically coming to the platform with technically sound lifts, and there's many ways to present your lifts on the platform. So yeah, I think that disconnect was something I didn't quite enjoy. I didn't enjoy being on stage for bodybuilding and bikini, but I did love being on the platform.

Nick: Did you get those white lights?

Meg Squats: Yeah. Well, my first meet was a little rough, I won't lie.

Nick: I think a lot of people here, I heard that. Yeah.

Meg Squats: Yeah, so, and it's hard. Competing is a skill, definitely. But yeah, I just liked being able to do my thing, whereas I don't think the posing part of it and the glamorous side of bodybuilding ... It seems glamorous when you see everyone on stage, but ...

Heather: It's not glamorous.

Meg Squats: It's not.

Heather: It's really not.

Meg Squats: It's kinda gross. It's really weird.

Heather: If you've ever been backstage at a bodybuilding show, it's just ... Yeah, it's disgusting.

Meg Squats: Yeah. Powerlifting has their own side of grossness, but I think that's pretty evident with what you're watching anyway.

Heather: Well, I think what I really took away from meeting you in the Spokesmodel Search and then following you on the Instagram is that, yes, you do powerlifting, but you also kind of embrace your body and you embrace kind of taking pictures of it, and appreciating and showing off your body, and being like, "Hey, this is cool. I have muscle, I have legs," and you always kind of call out people for filters and for trying to change their image to make it look like everyone else's. And to me, that's what kind of helped differentiate you from a lot of the female powerlifters that I was seeing is that you're not getting down on yourself for gaining weight. You actually had a post recently where you said, "I think everyone should have to do a photo shoot after a gain cycle or a bulk cycle," or something like. So tell me a little bit about how that kind of evolved, 'cause that seems almost like a leftover from the bodybuilding desire that kind of filtered its way into ...

Meg Squats: Yeah, because I guess I didn't enjoy being on stage, but I do enjoy the pride that comes with, "Oh, look at me, I'm strong. Not everyone looks like this." And I wasn't born like this, I worked for what I do have. And I don't try to call anyone out for using filters or for altering their image, but I do try to, at least not specifically, 'cause I understand and I can relate with the insecurities to make you want to, and the pressure that everybody wants to look perfect.

Nick: Yeah, body composition is just deeply ingrained in why many, many women go to the gym. It's tough to escape.

Meg Squats: Yeah. And I totally understand that, but I do want to be someone who encourages people to think about, yeah, that's there. You can do that and you can make yourself look beautiful in that way, or you can also be neutral about how you think you look. It can be something that we don't think about as much, or we can be proud of it. But really, I do want to kind of open up the discussion around filtering and around altering our bodies to look like something they're actually not in person. It's a tricky conversation because I'm saying this and I have freaking eyelashes on my face and my hair is not naturally red. There are many things about me ...

Nick: (gasps)

Meg Squats: Yeah.

Nick: Not natty.

Meg Squats: Surprise, not natty.

Nick: That's the name on the box, says Not Natty Red.

Meg Squats: But there are many things about me that I've altered, so it's difficult to really pinpoint exactly how I feel and it can get lost in translation, but I do want to also just be myself on the Internet and be open with, okay ... 'Cause I did take a stand and I said, "I don't wanna PhotoShop any of my pictures and I don't wanna put any filters on my face when I'm on my stories, and I want you to see me at my best, and I want you to also see me when I just don't give a shit of how I look, or actually

how I woke up like this." Like, I didn't wake up like this, and when you actually see what that means ...

Nick: Occasionally on one of your videos, it's like, "Here I am, we're eating breakfast, my strong, strong friends."

Meg Squats: Right, because that's not ... If I'm to present myself and encourage people to appreciate or at least not beat themselves up for how their body looks or to just be someone who's proud of her body without maybe being the most lean or without being a bodybuilder or bikini competitor, but still live my life and finish a bulk, but have a bikini shoot because I am kind of proud and it is kind of cool, instead of finishing a bulk and giving into my weakness and giving into, "I don't look that great, or I don't look as good as I used to." Where I try my best, and it's difficult to do, but I try my best to just be neutral about how I really feel and just say if I wanted to do a bikini shoot, I'm just doing it because I wanna do it, not because I wanna do it because I look great today, where it's just like just do it today. That's fine.

Nick: Do you feel like doing so much work on YouTube kind of might help you do that a little? Because somebody who is on Instagram all the time, Instagram is where everybody's perfect. Here it is, it's the photo. Here it is, it's the three-second thing of me doing my wonderful press handstand with a six-pack just raging out there. But YouTube and a slightly longer format, yeah, it's you and it's video and there's just more going on.

Meg Squats: And perfection is insanely boring, and I've tried my hardest to be perfect and I've tried to look, like, a certain way. And it's not like I don't try anymore, but it's just, I guess, I understand now that even with being an athlete, if I were to be a perfect athlete, then what would I have to share with anyone who cared to watch? I mean, I have my favorite athletes and they're my favorite because they're so amazing at their sport, but there's a disconnect between what I can learn from them and what I can learn from someone who I feel like has been in my shoes.

And for me to just even pretend that, yeah, I've got it all figured out because I feel completely confident in my body, so I just share it with the world, that's not the case at all. I'm still insecure and I have my moments of weakness and people ask me questions and, usually, I'm like, "Look, it's like a rollercoaster, man. Sometimes I have great days and sometimes I have terrible days where I'm not that confident or I'm not able to shut out what other people are saying. It really just depends." And so, it's not like this sexy answer of, "I have it all figured out," but ...

Nick: But it feels different. Like, you talking about yourself after your bodybuilding show versus somebody who can post a video that says, "I gained 20 pounds and I love it." That seems like a very different place and it seems like you had to do a lot of work to get from that place to that place.

Meg Squats: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was wrecked when I originally gained, I think I gained 30 pounds when I first started my show, and now I'm back at the body weight where I so much hated my body. And it's a combination of understanding myself more, understanding that whatever weight gain I do experience is not the end of the world, and also adjusting my goals and understanding that my value does not end with how I look and my value is not based around my body, really, at least how my body looks.

So I think that is a tough space to be when you are so focused in bodybuilding because your final product is your bod, and then when that show ends and maybe the focus changes and you need to

take an off season, that's something that's really tough to go through. With powerlifting and with branching out and exploring other sides of the gym and other sides of lifting or competitive lifting, I placed value on my strength and I placed value on, "Okay, I don't have the perfect body, but guess what? None of my YouTube subscribers do, so if I were perfect and I had it all figured out, why would they even follow my journey?"

So yeah, and that took years, and like I said, I have my days where I look in the mirror and I'm like, "Why'd I bulk for so long?" You know? And that still happens because it's not like you become enlightened and all of a sudden you love everything about yourself 'cause that would also make me even more of a narcissist. So yeah, I mean, it took me many years, but I think I can credit that to placing my focus and my energy on the things that I could control and placing my focus and also understanding that I bring a lot more to the table than just how I look and just my body, and my friends and my family and people in relationships with me, they really don't value how my body looks.

So it had to just come to me understanding that, and I think young women grow up their entire lives thinking that that's really the only thing that they can bring to the table, in relationships especially, and that's the only important thing about them. So I think in this specific situation, I could lean on strength because I understood that, with my friend posting videos of me, I understood, "Oh, people value this?" And it kind of turned a light on in my head, like, "Oh, people care about this? You mean I don't have to look a certain way and people will find it interesting?" And so, it kind of took other people finding it interesting for me to be like, "You know what? That is kind of cool that I can do that and not everyone can." So, yeah.

Nick: But it's not just about ... I mean, I don't wanna make your YouTube channel sound like it is just narcissistic or it's just about strength, it's not just about what you can do. You're out there meeting with great minds in strength, great athletes of all types, doing experiential things with them, and teaching people about them. So it's definitely more than just like a Meg's PR and vlog channel, especially these days.

Meg Squats: For sure, and I learned that pretty early, too, where my journey can only go so far and it's only one story, where if I'm to, I think, make videos that I enjoy watching and I enjoy making, I don't wanna just share my story because it's kinda boring. My life is not that exciting.

Nick: Powerlifting training is a little boring.

Meg Squats: Extremely boring. It's the same thing every day.

Nick: Not to ruin the Uplifted program, people.

Heather: Spoiler alert.

Meg Squats: I think I say in the promo vids, "It's gonna be boring," because hard work is boring, and the journey can have exciting moments, especially at the beginning, but once you get to a certain elite, advanced level, it's just the progress is slow and it becomes not so exciting. So that's why lately, in the past year, I would say I've been trying to find other ways to be strong because, especially when I was first getting started and doing Smolov and my first powerlifting meeting, I'm like, "This is it. I figured it out. This is what everyone needs to be doing," and I was so hooked. But now, I like that my training and my competition is good training for other people and how they can be

strong.

So, we did a video where we looked at Lindsey Vonn, the Olympic skier, and we looked at her training. And so, it's like, wow, she's doing some weird things that I wouldn't do and I had to investigate why she's doing that, and then she's also doing a lot of movements that I'm familiar with and movements that I take on the platform with me and perform. So, that's a story in itself where it's like, okay, I'm a powerlifter, there's only so many powerlifters in the world, but my training is something that everyone uses. So anyone really can be a powerlifter and every athlete is exposed or should be exposed to those modalities of training and those movements especially.

Heather: So, circling back to something you said, 'cause it sounds like you said that bodybuilding is not a beginner-friendly sport at all, and is powerlifting a beginner-friendly sport or is it something ... And it might be both, 'cause one conversation we've had several times is a lot of former bodybuilders who get burnt out on exactly what you talked about switch over to powerlifting where they can just focus on the lifting part. So is it a sport for beginners? Is it a sport for someone who maybe needs that relief?

Nick: Burned out bodybuilders.

Heather: That relief from going through the bodybuilding experience. What would you say kind of preps people to jump into powerlifting?

Meg Squats: I usually tell people that you're ready for a competition when you've made the decision and you've run at least a three-month program that's getting you ready for that specific competition. So, I do think it is a pretty beginner-friendly sport because I think three months is a good amount of time and I think running a program that's getting you ready for that specific goal ... You can't just walk in and try it. I don't suggest anyone do that. I just suggest know the rules and then spend some time training, getting familiar with them, and understanding how your meet is going to work, and going to a meet and checking it out before you sign up.

So I do think it's a beginner-friendly sport because it's something that someone can show up, do well, and continue to progress after that day, where bodybuilding, the pressure is so much because you're putting yourself in the spotlight, too, and so I think people have a different sort of mental reaction to, "Oh, they're gonna be looking at me." They're looking at you in a powerlifting meet as well, but they're not looking at you and judging your body. So I think there's just a whole other layer of emotion and kind of body image issues that we all go through no matter what, where we are, or how comfortable we are with our bodies, there's still gonna be that layer. So I think it's something that you can walk into and lose and still have a good day because you do something that you've never done before, so there is a way to look at your meet ...

Nick: Especially a first meet, I would think.

Meg Squats: Yeah.

Nick: Nobody says, "You have to lift this much."

Meg Squats: Exactly. You have to just lift the bar, really. If you can't lift the bar, then we should probably train a little bit more. But yeah, I never go into a meet thinking, "I'm gonna win," because I'm going to Nationals and I'm not gonna win Nationals because if I were to win Nationals, then I'd be

the strongest woman in the world. So, I'm not gonna go into a meet and try to really *win* competitively because I can't control the other lifters around me, but I can control what I do and I can set up a plan so that I'm hitting PRs on the platform and having these small wins that kind of ... Last year at Nationals, I think I finished like 14th and Dana Linn Bailey was 15th, which was awesome 'cause I beat her. I love her. That was my one goal. She's still a newbie powerlifter, so ... But I got to have this ...

Nick: It's amazing how many people, how many names we see on that side of the aisle now.

Meg Squats: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Heather: Yeah, actually, one of our science editors, she uses powerlifting and strongman competitions in between her bodybuilding shows ...

Nick: As a periodization.

Heather: ... as just kind of a way to just relax and legitimize that 20-pound gain that's going to happen that you can't avoid all of a sudden, and she'll post pictures of, "This was me four weeks ago and now I'm doing a powerlifting competition."

Meg Squats: Yeah. And because that ... Anyone who's gonna sign up for a bodybuilding show, period, is absolutely insane. They have some level of insanity going on, and it's more so this personality that's like, "I need something. I need something where I'm working towards it and I get to celebrate." It's like a celebration of all the hard work you've done. It might not feel like that when you're getting your spray tan on, but I like to look at powerlifting meets in that way where, okay, you've worked really hard and now we get to have this event where we're really gonna celebrate all the work that you've done. Hopefully, we have a good day, 'cause sometimes it does end up being like a pretty shitty party if you don't plan correctly.

But yeah, those people, they just need something to be working towards, and I can relate with that where it's like, "No, I gotta focus and I need a deadline and I want something that's gonna be a celebration of all the work that I've done." Not just, "Oh, I'm going to the gym. It's day 365. I did a year." So yeah, I think that's really common to see a lot of overlap and hybrid athletes and I know we have Leanna Carr is a bodybuilder, she's an athlete and powerlifter as well. There's many people who dabble in both.

Nick: For sure. So now, let's talk about Uplifted, this program that you did with Bodybuilding.com. It's very cool, it's four days a week. Starts off dedicated bench, deadlift, squat days, and then slowly builds up a crazy amount of assistance work and they become these mixed days at the end. But I wanna talk about the big picture, like where did this program come from and at what point in your lifting career do you feel like you really could've used this?

Meg Squats: I think making the transition to ... This probably would've been a program set up for me when I was running Smolov. As fun as that was, it was terrible, I think I would have had much more success if I would've slowly transitioned from doing these day splits in bodybuilding training, and when I was training for my show, I had back and bi day, and I had my leg day and my glute day. So this will hopefully trick people who are more used to that format into slowly transitioning to a powerlifting program.

So I wish that I would've had it when I was at that point where I started to slowly make the transition to powerlifting, because at that time, I had to do a lot of research and kind of pick apart GZCL and Cody Lefever's program to sort of work in what I wanted to do with his program, but that was kind of making the transition from bodybuilding training, okay, switch, full-on powerlifter. So I think this will be an easier transition for someone who's more, maybe they're not coming from the bodybuilding world, but someone who's more used to a more bro split, I would call it. So you have your bench day, you have your squat day, and this will slowly transition to more of a powerlifter frequency where you're squatting a couple times a week, you're benching a couple times a week, and you're doing both of those in the same training session, too.

Nick: Yeah, sort of a secondary volume approach. There's a surprising amount of volume in it though, and it's not like this is just pure wiry strength you're building, but you will ... I was telling my wife about this program last night and I think my exact words, I was like, "If you follow this, and if you eat, you're gonna fucking grow."

Meg Squats: Yeah.

Nick: I think you said in the promo, it's like, "You're gonna get a little bit bigger in all the right places."

Meg Squats: Yeah.

Nick: Nothing wrong with that, nothing wrong with getting strong, basically.

Heather: And can you, 'cause we have ... And I think we're finally coming over the hump in terms of more and more women are not afraid to lift weights, but we do still kind of get some of that pushback, and maybe you've experienced that with training other people and kind of bringing them into the fold. Can you kinda talk a little bit about what you've experienced personally yourself, and then what you've seen other women experience when they actually kind of take that leap and start lifting really heavy?

Meg Squats: Well, the beauty of powerlifting is that there is a weight class for everyone. So, there are 98-pound lifters, and then there are super heavyweight lifters who are 200 pounds plus. So I think anyone can be inspired by someone who's an athlete in this sport and they're all different heights, sizes, body composition, genetics, come from all different backgrounds of athletic background. And yeah, there's really no ... It's really just the weight on the bar is how, that's what determines if you're gonna be good, and of course, there are certain ... It's nice if you have long arms and short legs, if you can somehow win that genetic lottery.

But I would say for anyone who's worried about dipping their toes in the powerlifting lifestyle, know that there are many different body types who do this and are really great, at the top of the level, but you can always take a step back if you find that maybe it's too much or you're noticing that your body is changing in a way that you didn't want, which I haven't heard that that's ever happened, but you can always take a step back and lower some volume and change things to make it fit you. Yeah, but like I said, I think that's a really big scary thing because people see powerlifting and they're like, "I don't know if I want my body to look like the best athlete in the world at this sport. I don't know if I'm ready for that."

Nick: Not ready to look like Andy Bolton in a dress, yeah.

Meg Squats: Yeah, which I guess I can understand, but also you should look at the 114-pound lifter world champion and what she looks like because that's a completely different body type compared to your 84 kilo lifters. They just look different, and depending on where you wanna take it or what your goal is or what your body type is like, so if you're a really small person, you're probably not gonna look like that super heavyweight lifter. That's just not gonna happen for you because you're probably not gonna be able to gain that much weight.

Nick: Sure. Yeah, no, the jacked powerlifter is definitely much more front and center these days than ever before.

Meg Squats: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Heather: And then as someone who has actually competed in bodybuilding, so you've done the bro splits and you've done the powerlifting splits, and what would you say to someone who is just kind of hanging onto that bro split mentality of, "Well, if I really want my body, my physique to be balanced, I have to lift this way. I can't lift the way you want me to lift."

Meg Squats: Yeah, I program for all my lifters, and in Uplifted, there's a section at the end of every day, and it's called Bro Stuff. You gotta do your bro stuff.

Nick: That's the giant set is the bro stuff?

Meg Squats: Yeah, yeah.

Nick: Okay, I did not know that. I'll change the label on that to say Bro Stuff.

Meg Squats: Yeah, so any bicep curls, any isolated movements that we're doing, I call it bro stuff.

Nick: They still have their place.

Meg Squats: Yeah, because you need to be strong and you need to build some muscles that some of the powerlifting movements just, they're not optimized to strengthen your biceps, unfortunately. So there's bicep curls in every bench day. Every time you're on a bench, you're curling. And a lot of powerlifting programs are set up that way. I think people look at the squat, bench, and deadlift, and that performance side of it, and assume that the training is really focused there, and it is, but there's a lot of accessories, and depending on who you follow, if you're following me and if you're ever coached by me or run Uplifted, you'll see a lot of bro stuff. And there's giant sets and super sets after you squat, after you bench, after you deadlift.

Nick: There's some terrifying pumps in there, for sure.

Meg Squats: Oh, yeah. And so, I think, too, a good transition would be something like this program where it's not quite set up as a program that's so low volume and high intensity to where you're not gonna be gaining more muscle. Every powerlifter is in a, usually, hypertrophy session unless they're peaking for a meet or unless they're peaking for something. So, for me, I've been in offseason for a little while, so it's a lot of volume, it looks very similar to what a bodybuilder would do. Of course, there are differences and there are things that they're specifically working on, but for me, I'm just trying to get jacked.

Nick: Right. No, now, to be clear though, this could be a powerlifting prep program for somebody to a certain degree, but it doesn't have to be.

Meg Squats: Right.

Nick: You could run it with other movements other than just a barbell back squat, potentially, but also ... Yeah, I don't know, there's great opportunities in there to learn from powerlifting training, I feel like. One of the things that I really like about it is that you're teaching people how to lift with RPE in mind, the rate of perceived exertion, instead of just, "All right, we're gonna do percentages, percentages, percentages only." But it's really helping people to figure out how to tap into their innate knowledge of, "All right, this is how this feels." How hard was that for you to grasp that idea and how crucial do you feel like it is to just lifters in general?

Meg Squats: I think understanding RPE and becoming more intuitive with your lifting is something that powerlifters are doing more and more, and it is a good way to auto-regulate what you're doing. Since the training can be really tough and the intensity is really high, it is important to have some sort of auto-regulation built into your program, so that's what we wanted to do with this because it's okay if you're a beginner and if something feels hard for you, but maybe that day, or maybe usually it doesn't, then take that information, you're building up data, and you're starting to understand what's hard for you and what that means. So take that information, write it down in your notebook, and go into your next training session knowing that and using that information.

So I think it is good to track your workouts, to pay more attention to how things feel, and just become a more intelligent lifter and approach it in a way that's gonna be in your best interest. Percentages are great and they work, and using math to figure out what you should lift is always fun, but every lifter's gonna be different, and there are so many outside factors that will make it so that 80% for you this day is not gonna feel the same as it will two weeks from now.

Nick: Yeah, and not everybody gets stronger every day. Sometimes you go and you want the weight to feel a certain way, it's not gonna feel that way, right?

Meg Squats: Yeah.

Nick: Now, one other things that's great about this program is there are four full videos. Basically, the first week of workouts, you're walking everybody through every set of every rep, and I think that's fantastic. You go through things like weight selection, rest, really showing someone, "Okay, here are the accessories that I'm using, here's how this feels." But for somebody who's relatively new to big barbell movements, how helpful do you think it is for them to get some eyes on what they're doing, in particular, get some personalized instruction?

Meg Squats: Yeah, I think that's really important because, even online, I can coach someone and they send me their video, and I give them feedback a week later, a couple days later, and they take it in the next time they have squats. That can be great, but to get a personal trainer who understands powerlifting or weightlifting movements or those sports is going to be ... It's just gonna help a lifter progress a lot quicker.

Nick: They're technical lifts. They don't get credit for being nearly as technical as they are I feel.

Meg Squats: Exactly, and we just had a seminar today, and to see the progress that someone can make from one rep to another just by hearing one cue is really massive. So I do recommend that lifters, especially if they're not feeling confident with the squat, bench, or deadlift, I do recommend that they try to see someone in person. I would say maybe do some research and try to find a barbell club or someone who has experience with powerlifting or weightlifting.

Nick: Even if you're not going to be doing this to prepare for a meet?

Meg Squats: Oh, exactly, yeah. Yeah, just because you'll have someone who understands the movements to competition standard, but usually that means they've just spent so much time with coaching people through the squat or through one of those lifts that it's not just a personal trainer who has great knowledge of physical fitness, but it's gonna be someone's who's hyper-focused in those three movements, which I think will be invaluable to someone. So it's kind of hard to find that in any personal trainer, so I do recommend for someone to look, do some research into finding a USAPL-certified coach or a USAW-certified coach, and that doesn't mean that they're gonna be perfect, but they'll at least have some experience in coaching to competition standard, and usually coaching in a way that is gonna be most optimal for this program and for most lifters.

Nick: No, that makes sense. Yeah, and videoing yourself is a pretty good thing to do.

Heather: Yeah, I was gonna say, if someone can't afford a coach, even just videoing yourself and then reviewing that and even comparing it to what you're doing. If they're looking at your video and their video side by side, that can be really valuable for ...

Meg Squats: Yeah, that's a good way ...

Nick: You don't know what you're doing wrong at first, you really don't.

Meg Squats: Yeah, and that's a good way just to get in the habit of watching good lifters, watching world powerlifting champions, watching their, not just competition, but also their training. So, anyone who's uploading stuff on YouTube or any videos that you can see from competitions, I mean, not all of those reps are gonna be great, but that's why I recommend watching some of their training. It'll be good to just see different bodies and how they move and compare what they're doing to what you're doing.

Nick: Sure. And some of the questions people inevitably have, like, "Well, should I pull conventional? Should I pull sumo?" You address some of that in the workout videos, too. There's still a lot to be gained there.

One other thing I wanted to ask you about was about squatting. So, throughout the year, I squat with all manner of implements, I only squat with a barbell about six weeks out of the year because otherwise I feel like I'm hungry so much that I will just devour my children's college fund. I don't know, I've heard other people say the squat hunger thing is the real deal. There's so much work somebody's gonna be doing on this program. It's not like a killer program, it's not going to put you in the grave, but it's gonna make you hungry, potentially.

Meg Squats: Yeah.

Nick: How do you recommend people deal just with fueling up for this 'cause this is real work.

Meg Squats: Well, there's a couple of tricks I would recommend. Try to eat your carbs in the window of your workout, so eat them before, eat them during, so bring yourself a little snack to the gym.

Nick: Oh, this is the secret weapon that we talked about, yeah.

Meg Squats: And then eat your carbs after. So if you can eat all day and you're in a bulking phase, then go nuts. I mean, I guess, don't go nuts, but eat within your recommended calorie range to where you're bulking healthily. But yeah, if you're concerned with how many carbs you really need, then focus them during that workout, supplement with a protein shake. I recommend to either mix a protein shake during your workout with some maltodextrin or some sort of carb supplement, or I like to have a Rice Krispie Treat just during my workout.

Nick: This is her secret, she told me that the other day. 20 grams of protein, like you sip on during the workout, right, and a Rice Krispie Treat.

Meg Squats: Yep.

Heather: That sounds amazing.

Meg Squats: It's great.

Heather: I love this idea. Now I'm getting excited for powerlifting.

Meg Squats: Yeah, yeah, why not?

Nick: Yeah, powerlifters get to do that. You get to eat in a powerlifting gym, right?

Heather: It sounds like way more fun.

Meg Squats: Yeah, and a lot of people will do gummies, like sour gummy worms.

Nick: How many do you get to eat though? That's like ...

Meg Squats: You know, I try to not go crazy because I don't want my belt to get ... I don't wanna get bloated to where my belt can't fit, so I'm like squatting and bracing and my belt feels weird, but some people will go absolutely nuts. I think they learn very quickly that they can't do that. But yeah, if you prefer candy or if you want something healthy, maybe like mango, dried fruit is also something good. Just some quick-absorbing carbs for during your workout is a good idea.

Nick: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay, and what about that person who, when you said the word bulking, they went, "Okay, I was on board, but now I'm not so sure about this." That's a hard idea for a lot of women, even women who lift, to wrap their brain around. Like, "All right, I'm gonna see the number on the scale go up, but also, I'm not going to be diet, I cannot diet in any capacity here."

Meg Squats: Yeah. Well, I mean, you could run this program while dieting. I don't think it would be quite easy. I think you're gonna be in a better position if you're eating enough food on this program 'cause it is so high volume, but as far as for anyone who's afraid of the word bulking, I think just wait until you see how strong you can get, and when you get hungry for more, when you start to plateau,

you do learn that, "Okay, the thing that's holding me back is my lack of muscle."

And so, usually, that bulking phase is set up to help you build more muscle, and you may put on a little bit of weight, you may put on a little bit of fat, but also understand that you don't have to gain 20 pounds tomorrow. You can take it very slowly and I recommend for people to take it very slowly. This past seven months I've been bulking and now I'm just starting to kind of reel it in a little bit for myself, but that was a really slow bulk and it took me a while to gain that 20 pounds, whereas try a couple of months, try three months and see can you put on a few pounds and then look at your body and see, are you comfortable with this? Can you be? And then keep on going. You don't have to commit to a year-long bulk cycle and 30 extra pounds right away. Take everything slow. Take cutting slow, too, and take making those decisions with time.

Nick: Right. This is a long-term investment in your athletic potential, too. This is kind of a ... It feels like a base-building kind of program.

Meg Squats: Yeah, yeah. I think this will definitely be something good for someone who's just getting started, but I ran this program and when I came off of it, I hit a new six-rep PR for my squat, and so I was killing it and I'm an advanced lifter. So it's something that I think everyone can benefit from, off-season powerlifters can benefit from the high volume, and then newer lifters or lifters who are just getting interested or playing around with this idea of trying some of these movements can start with their traditional bro split and then sort of make their way onto splitting things up and experiencing what it feels like to train like a powerlifter.

Nick: Yeah, so this newer lifter who, say they try the first week and they're like, "God, just the whole RPE thing feels so foreign. The weights that I was moving just didn't quite feel right." Should they repeat week one or just keep plugging ahead?

Meg Squats: I would keep plugging ahead because it's not like .. When you run a program ... Oh, no.

Heather: Sorry, Chase. That's the worst.

Nick: Welcome back, everyone, to The Bodybuilding.com Podcast.

Meg Squats: How do we follow that up?

Nick: Things got dramatic for a moment there. We were all brave. We're doing okay now. So the question, I believe, was, week one, I'm under the bar. The RPE thing's not making sense, I feel like I'm using a weight that's completely pathetic. Do I repeat week one? Do I keep moving ahead, churning, burning?

Meg Squats: Good question. Don't repeat week one. Trust your RPE, and when things feel light, don't worry. When something feels too heavy, that's when you wanna kinda reconsider things, or if you're pushing yourself to where you're failing, that's never a good thing.

Nick: That's a worse thing than going too light.

Meg Squats: Exactly.

Nick: This is important.

Meg Squats: We'll have an FAQ for everyone and probably the first question will be, "This feels too light," and just think of me saying, "It's not too light. You're on week one."

Nick: Do the work, many reps are ahead of you. They will get heavier.

Meg Squats: Because it's gonna get heavier. The program is set up to where week one is going to intro you and prepare you to grow because we're gonna be progressively overloading over the next eight weeks. So it should be not easy, so push yourself on your bro stuff if you're feeling like you really need a workout, push yourself on your bro stuff if you feel like something's kinda light, but it's not gonna feel light in three weeks even. It's gonna feel really hard whenever you're adding more weight on the bar.

Heather: So just to reiterate, you feel like the problem more often than not is people going too heavy rather than too light.

Meg Squats: Absolutely.

Heather: Okay.

Meg Squats: Yeah. And just trust the RPE that you set and let yourself experience what you did because, also, that's a lesson in understanding what RPE really means when you then have to use that to tell you what weight you're gonna use next week. Keep yourself honest, though, and study the RPE chart. We have an RPE chart in the program, and all the information that you need is gonna be in there. But yeah, so read those FAQs and prepare yourself.

Nick: And then proceed, fearlessly.

Meg Squats: Yes, you got it.

Nick: All right. Well, Meg Squats, thank you for coming and talking with us for so long and for being brave in the face of alarms going off.

Meg Squats: Yeah, that was fun, took a little break.

Nick: The program is Uplifted on Bodybuilding.com All Access. You can also find her on [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#). Are there any other places you prefer people find you?

Meg Squats: No, YouTube and Instagram. That's where it's at.

Nick Collias: Okay, sounds good. Thanks again.

Meg Squats: Yeah, thank you guys.

Heather Eastman: Thank you.



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