

# Vince Gironda's

## Bodybuilding for Beginners

by Gene Mozée • Photography by Michael Neveux

Vince Gironda personally trained more bodybuilding champions than any other physique trainer in the world. Bodybuilding legends Larry Scott, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sergio Oliva, Freddy Ortiz, Mohamed Makkawy, Don Howorth, Reg Lewis, John Tristram, Don Peters, Pete Caputo and many other title winners were helped and guided by Gironda. Consequently, many people assumed that he imparted his training wisdom only to advanced bodybuilders. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Vince actually spent far more time and effort advising beginners than any other single category of weight trainees. His methods of training neophytes were unique, differing greatly from other so-called experts and gym owners. For example, most authorities would recommend that a beginner train three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday), employing a system of three sets of 10 repetitions, using eight to 10 exercises.

Gironda believed that a beginner doesn't need a day of rest between workouts. Instead, Vince advised beginners to exercise daily—resting only on Sunday. His reasoning was that beginners are usually so ambitious and keen to progress that they prefer to train daily. He had them train six days in a row, using only one set of each exercise the first week. The second week it was six workouts again, with two sets of each exercise, and for the third week the sets increased to three for each exercise. For week

four he'd switch them to a three-times-a-week schedule, with at least a day of rest between workouts. After that he'd advise them to stay at three sets per exercise for six months, changing the exercises to maintain enthusiasm, prevent boredom and work the muscles from different angles.

Some superfit individuals adapt to an exercise within three workouts. Vince would change their routines more frequently. Conversely, some trainees, because of their high level of dedication and enthusiasm, can stay with a routine for a year or more and still have no reason to change. They continue to love the exercises they're doing, get a good pump, increase strength and maintain a steady growth pattern. Gironda's philosophy was that if it isn't broke, don't fix it. If it works, why change?

One bit of information that Vince used to impart to every beginner was to train in a progressive manner according to the rules of overload training. Start with light weights, and as you grow stronger, you'll be able to add more weight to the exercises. The additional weight—overload—makes new demands on the body, which results in its overcompensating to prepare for future bouts of muscular effort. That causes an increase in strength. Strength, he explained, doesn't always result in bigger muscles, at least not right away. Some people can get tendon strength with little or no increase in muscle size. Muscles increase in size only when overload training is combined with the correct types and quantities of foods.

Models: Savannah Neveux and Justin Bailik

## Vince's Rules

When people came to Vince's Gym, Vince would discuss their goals, briefly explain his procedures and ask if they had health problems, were on medication or had any other problems that might interfere with their training. After explaining how he could help them improve their body, he'd explain the gym rules. Rule number one was that failing to work would result in zero gains. He would say with emphasis, "My system works, but sometimes my students do not. If you're not willing to work, there's the door."

Another point he'd hammer on was, no music in the gym! After giving it a lot of thought and trying it, Vince concluded that music is useful only to hype and control the tempo and cadence of aerobic-type exercises, which are done at a lively dance pace. Besides, since everyone's taste in music is different, it could be pleasant to some but distracting and irritating to others. He felt that people who want music while they

train have no concept of the mental state they must reach to succeed in bodybuilding.

"You can't sculpt and reshape your body to the sounds of the latest rock band," he once replied to the question of why there was no music in his gym. "Don't these music-minded people realize that the accomplishment of physical perfection requires vivid imagination, enormous desire, total faith, visualization and unending mental commitment? How can any of that be put into practice to the strains of distracting music?" Case closed. The master had spoken. (Joe Gold never permitted music in his gym either—probably the only thing he and Vince ever agreed on.)

One last point Vince would emphasize is that it doesn't really matter what time of day you train



Start

Finish

These hit the lower-pec line and improve chest appearance.

Decline Pulley Hugs

Model: Justin Baillik

## Vince Gironda's Routine for Beginners

- 1) Decline pulley hugs** (pectorals), 12 reps
- 2) Short-pulley rows** (upper lats and teres major), 12 reps
- 3) Lateral raises** (medial-deltoid head), 10 reps
- 4) Triceps pushdowns** (triceps), 10 reps
- 5) Barbell body-drag curls** (biceps), 10 reps
- 6) Seated wrist curls** (forearms), 12 reps
- 7) Leg extensions** (thighs), 12 reps
- 8) Leg curls** (hamstrings), 12 reps.
- 9) Calf heel raises** (calves), 20 reps
- 10) Bent-knee leg raises** (lower abdominals), 20-plus reps
- 11) Crunches** (upper and middle abdominals), 10-plus reps
- 12) Double-ups** (complete front midsection), 10-plus reps

Note: A thin, extremely underweight bodybuilder should not perform exercises 10, 11 or 12.

but that it's a good idea to train at the same time each day. That enables the body's internal clock to set itself. After a few workouts at a regular time, the body readies itself for action at the allotted hour. Your energy level will be higher in expectation of the workout.

Here is the exercise routine that Vince found most effective for beginners.

### 1) Decline pulley hugs (pectorals), 12 reps

This exercise is also known as decline cable flies, and all beginners should do it. It's the only way

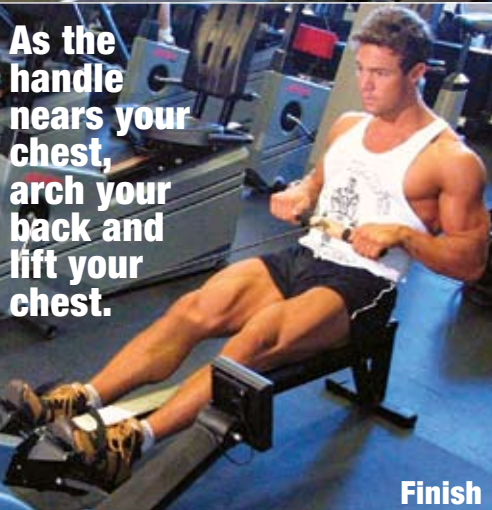
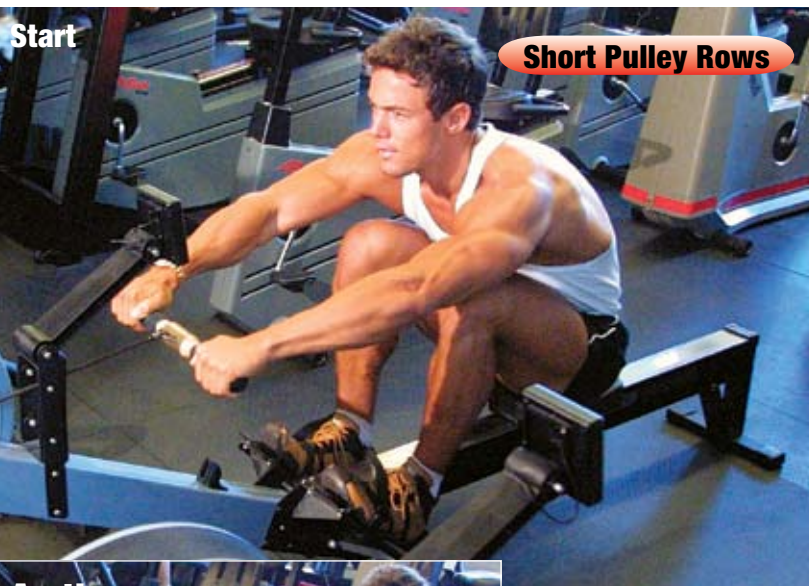
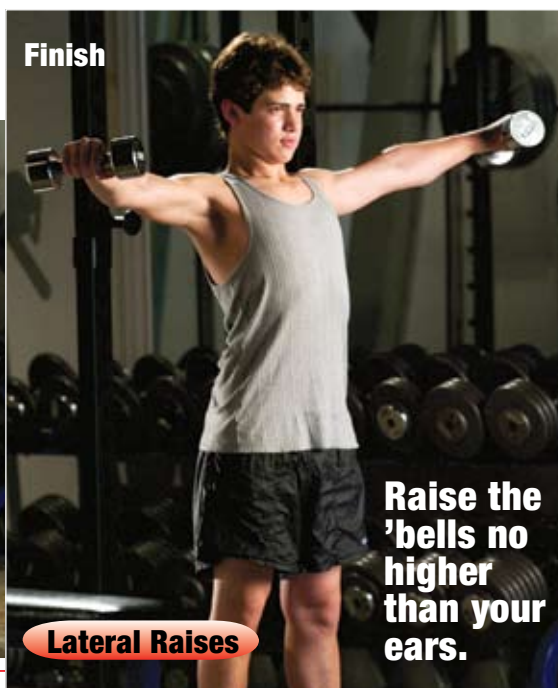


for a weak person, male or female, to hit the lower-pec line and quickly improve overall chest appearance. Lie on a decline bench and grab a low-pulley handle in each hand. Start with your arms outstretched in a flye position. Bring your hands forward in an arc until your knuckles touch a few inches above your groin; do not let your thumbs touch. Throughout the movement keep your arms slightly bent and your elbows back. Return to the starting position and repeat. (Note: The exercise resembles a hugging motion.)

## 2) Short-pulley rows (upper lats and teres major), 12 reps

These broaden the upper back and shoulders and are a super upper-lat builder. Overdeveloped lower lats that run right down to the waistline detract from a bodybuilder's taper and the overall V-shape of the back. Start the short-pulley row by sitting on the floor or cable row bench with your legs slightly bent and stretched out in front of you against foot rests. Lean forward with your head down between your shoulders. As you raise your torso, pull the pulley handle toward your pec line. As the pulley handle nears your chest, arch your back and lift your chest. Return the bar to the starting position and repeat.

## 3) Lateral raises



## (medial-deltoid head), 10 reps

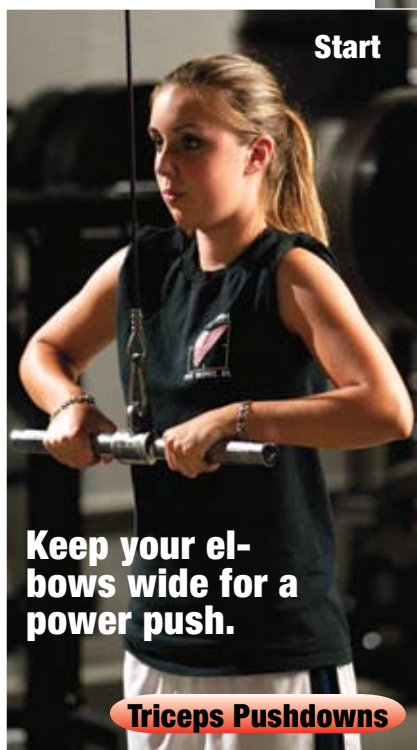
Here's an exercise for building wide shoulders. Stand with your feet comfortably apart, back rounded, knees and elbows slightly bent. The dumbbells must start in front of your body, not from the sides of your thighs. Maintain a slight bend in your elbows and raise the dumbbells in front of your body and to the sides until your arms are at the 10-minutes-past-10-o'clock position. Raise the 'bells no higher than your ears, or your trapezius muscles will take over the workload. Vince said to keep the backs of the dumbbells higher than the fronts to ensure that the lateral, or side, heads of the deltoids (which gives you impressive width) are engaged throughout the movement; however, some trainees may incur shoulder pain from that position [see Sportsmedicine on page 36 for more information]. Lower and repeat.

Model: Sebastian Siegel

Model: Justin Balke

## 4) Triceps pushdowns (triceps), 10 reps

Vince called this one the power push. With your hands about 12 inches apart, grip a straight bar that's connected to a high pulley. Bend your knees to give your body leverage. Keep your elbows wide—not tight against the sides of your waist—and press the bar downward until your arms are straight. Return to the starting position and repeat. Be sure to start with the bar under the pec line, not higher, and you'll build size in both the middle of the triceps and the lower area.



Model: Savannah Neveux

## 5) Barbell body-drag curls (biceps), 10 reps

Take a shoulder-width grip on a barbell with your palms facing forward and the bar resting against your upper legs. Raise the barbell from your thighs to your throat, keeping the bar in contact with your body at all times. Keep your elbows back so your biceps stay totally engaged and take the pressure off your deltoids. Lower and repeat.

(continued on page 108)



Model: Justin Balik



## 6) Seated wrist curls (forearms), 12 reps

Sit near the end of a flat bench and place your forearms on the bench between your thighs, your hands hanging off the end in a palms-up position. You should be holding a barbell with your little fingers about 10 inches apart. Now curl the bar with your hands going as high and as low as possible, repeating for 12 reps. Don't follow the common practice of rolling the bar down your fingers between reps. That works the wrist, not the forearms. If you want to hit lower forearms, place an eight-inch block under the back of the bench to raise it so you're doing decline wrist curls.

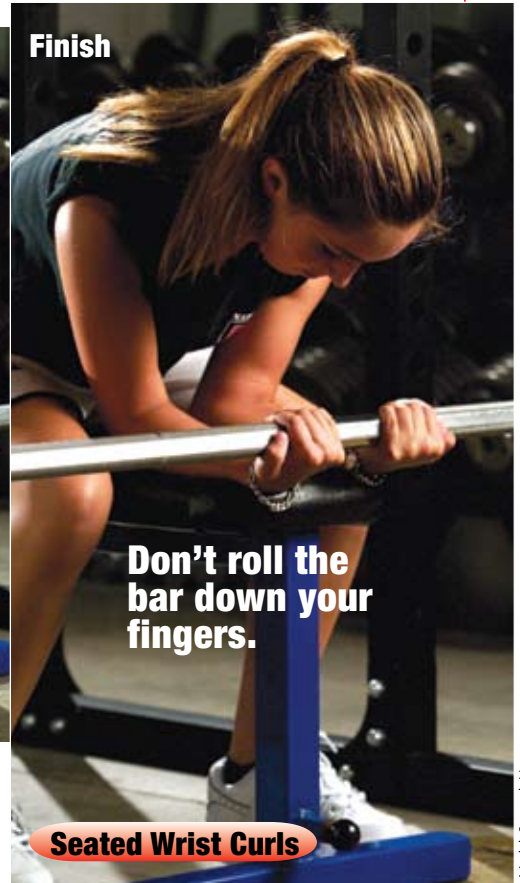
## 7) Leg extensions (thighs), 12 reps

Sit on a leg extension machine with your body angled back and hands gripping the sides of the seat about 16 inches back from your hips. As you raise your lower legs, use your body as a power thrust (fulcrum) by leaning rearward. Lower and repeat. This is an excel-

Start



Finish



Seated Wrist Curls

lent exercise if you have minor knee problems because, unlike the squat, it puts no pressure on the knees.

Start



Finish



Leg Extensions

Model: Savannah Newaux

Model: Justin Balik

## 8) Leg curls (hamstrings), 12 reps

Lie facedown on a leg curl machine, with your hands holding the edge of the bench and arms supporting your torso. With your heels hooked under the pad, curl the weight with your legs and drop your torso to the bench, allowing the momentum created to help you squeeze the footpad against the backs of your thighs. Lower and repeat. Most people do this movement by raising their butt off the apparatus, which diminishes the benefit considerably.



Model: Sebastian Siegel

## 9) Calf heel raises (calves), 20 reps

Stand on the balls of your feet on the foot block of a calf machine, with your big toes about four inches apart. The block should be at least six inches high, as your calves need a full stretch on each repetition. With your knees slightly bent, keep your feet parallel as you raise and lower your heels. The calves are a high-rep muscle—lower reps stimulate calf growth only in genetic naturals, the types who'd develop outstanding calves by just walking or climbing out of bed.

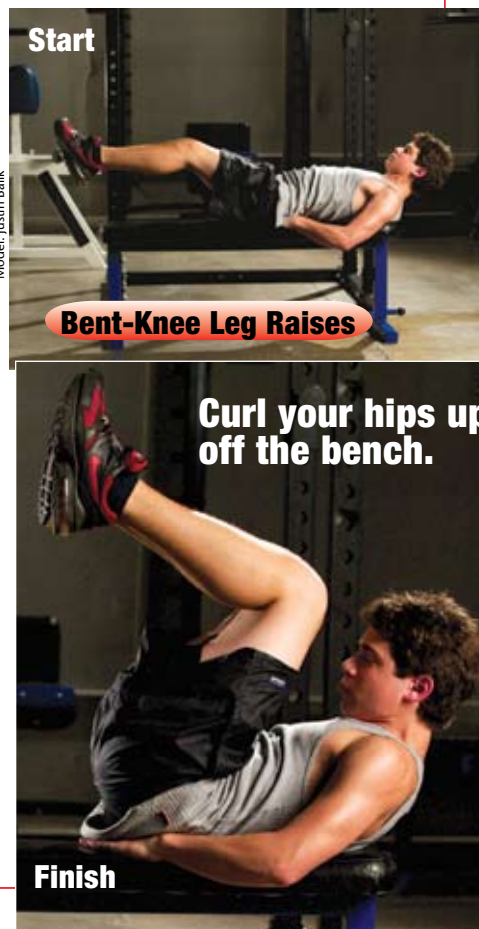


Model: Sebastian Siegel

## 10) Bent-knee leg raises (lower abdominals), 20-plus reps

Lie flat on a table, the floor or a flat bench. Place your palms flat, down next to your hips. Raise your bent knees toward your chest and lift your head forward at the same time. Your hips should rise off the floor during the movement. Exhale as you compress your body; inhale as you return to the extended starting position. If you inhale as

you compress your body, you could stretch your abdominal wall, adding to a drum belly appearance. Always exhale when compressing.



Model: Justin Balik



## 11) Crunches (upper and middle abdominals), 10-plus reps

Lie on the floor with your feet flat or hook your heels over the end of a bench. Place your hands behind your head. Roll forward, exhaling as you curl your torso toward your thighs. Keep your lower back in contact with the floor at all times. As you roll up, pull your pelvis forward in the contracted position. Inhale as you return to the starting position.

**Start**

**Exhale as you curl your torso toward your thighs.**



**Crunches**



**Finish**

Model: Sebastian Siegel

# Vince Gironda's

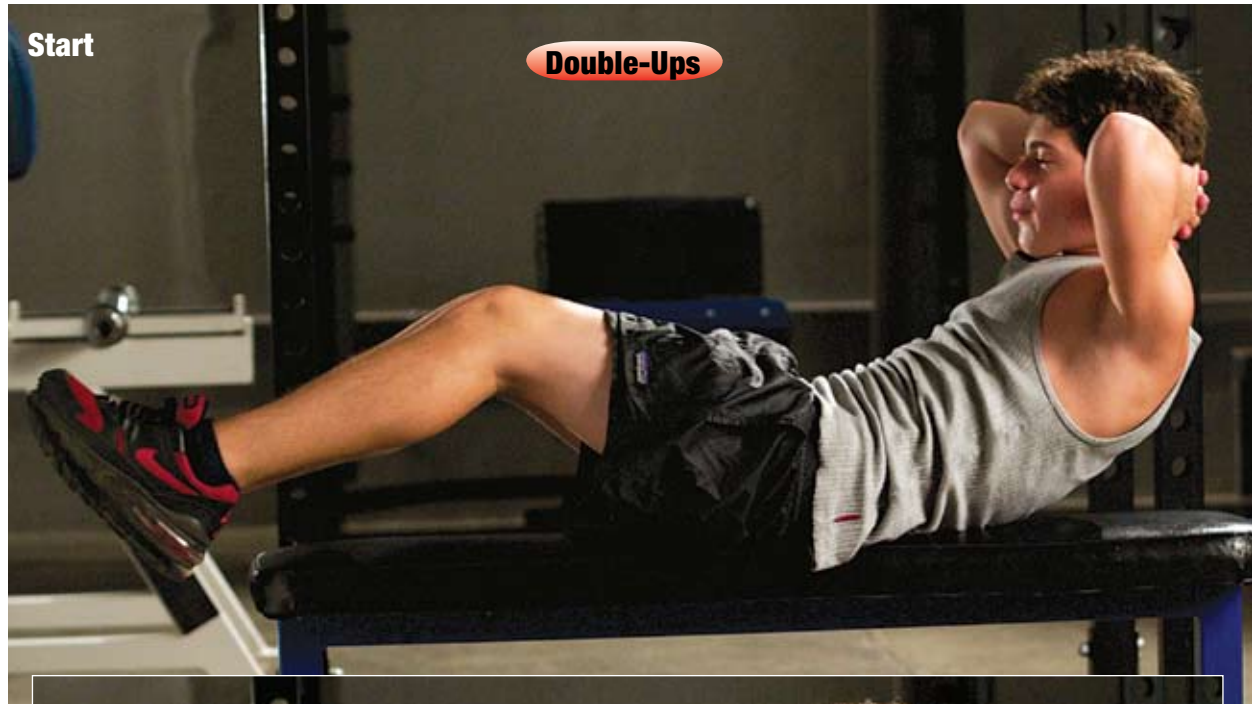
## 12) Double-ups (complete front midsection), 10-plus reps

This is a combination of the two previous movements. Lie on your back, hands behind your head, legs extended, toes pointed. Exhale and raise your upper body

one-third of the way as you lift your legs with the knees bent. You'll find yourself balancing on about 10 inches of your lower back. Don't try to balance on three inches of your bottom, as some may suggest; that's a gymnastic movement, not an abdominal builder. Do it right. Inhale as you return to the starting position.

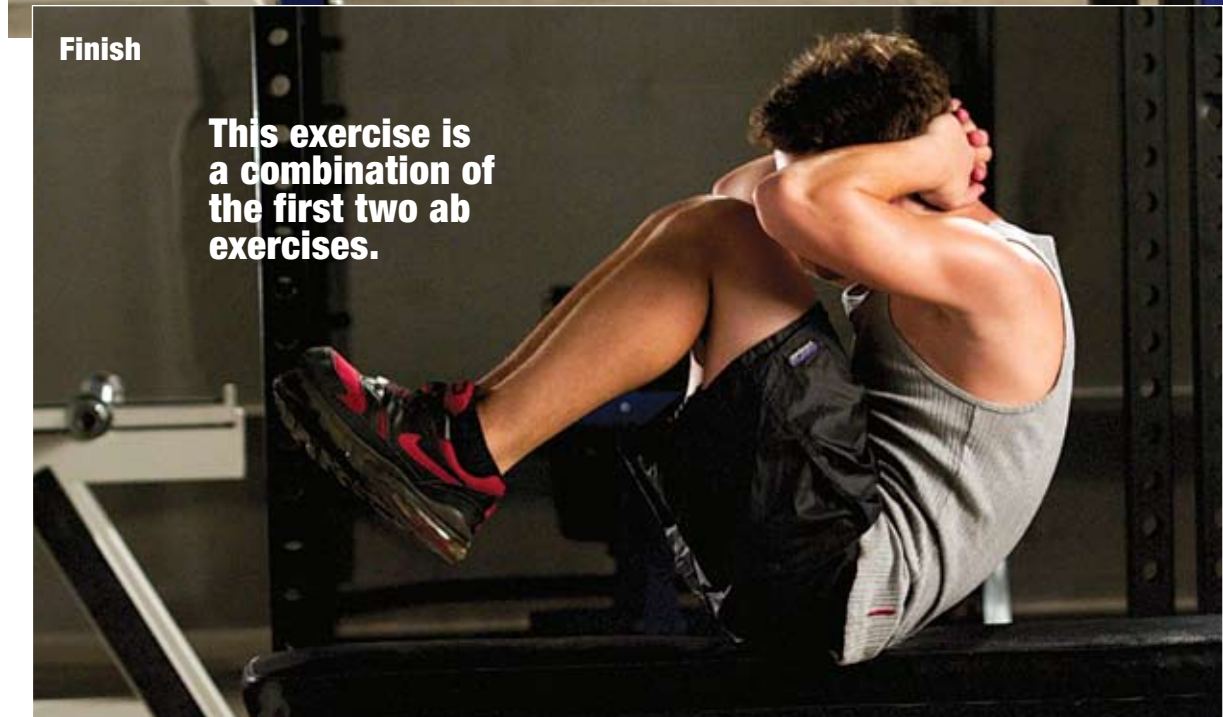
Note: An extremely underweight

bodybuilder should not perform exercises 10, 11 or 12. Concentrated abdominal work shocks the system and prevents normal muscle gains, according to Vince. Those exercises should be performed only if you're overweight. If you want to tighten up your waistline or lose fat, add one to three reps to each of the abdominal exercises at each workout. The abdominal muscles need to



Start

Double-Ups



Finish

This exercise is a combination of the first two ab exercises.

Bodybuilding for Beginners

Model: Justin Balk



## What, No Bench Presses, Deadlifts or Squats?

Vince Gironda's ideas were usually controversial, and sometimes downright blasphemous (he once called Arnold a "fat f#\$@"), but you couldn't argue with his experience or the quick results he could produce. After reading through his beginner program, however, you're probably still shaking your head, wondering why it doesn't include the big core exercises. How can a neophyte make optimal progress without them?

First, realize that Vince was a bodybuilding purist. At his gym you didn't throw around heavy weights, and momentum was never anyone's training partner. He wanted all of his members to *feel* the target muscle working—an especially good idea for beginners who are developing coordination. Notice that many of the exercises he prescribed in the beginner routine have continuous tension, which builds neuromuscular efficiency, or the nerve-to-muscle connections. That NME is key to getting a beginner up to speed for size gains. Many studies show that the strength gains made by beginners the first six to eight weeks, no matter what routine they use, are primarily nervous system improvements, and Vince believed that the exercises in his routine were best for that.

Vince was also a proponent of body sculpting, not pounding the muscles with tendon-jarring powerlifting moves. In fact, there were no squat racks in his gym, no deadlift platforms and trainees were instructed to do bench presses to the neck on a Smith machine—slowly. Once again, it was all about getting in touch with the target muscle.

Yes, the beginner approach he preached is controversial, but it's one *IRON MAN* respects. Because it doesn't include the big, taxing exercises, more people may stick with it longer. After all, the movements are easier to learn and aren't as stressful (many people quit working out because it's hard). Nevertheless, we also know the importance of functional strength and the power of the basic core exercises—squats, deadlifts, bench presses, rows and so on. Building a strong power base *before* incorporating isolation exercises is another way to go. Next month *IRON MAN* publisher John Balik will outline the beginner routine he prescribed for his son, Justin, age 14—a program that focuses on the big basics. In the meantime you may want to check out the Get Started Routine that ran in our October issue's Train to Gain section if you're looking for a more basics-oriented beginner approach.

—Steve Holman

**Editor's note:** *The Ultimate Mass Workout*, a new e-book by Steve Holman and Jonathan Lawson, discusses the best single exercise for each bodypart and outlines a variety of basic mass-building workouts that include those ultra-efficient moves. There is also section for beginners, with a week-by-week template that gradually increases intensity until the trainee is capable of using X Reps, an innovative technique that can build muscle mass fast. For more information, before and after photos and questions and answers, visit the Web site: [www.x-rep.com](http://www.x-rep.com).

be overworked to reduce size, and don't forget that a restricted diet plays a major role in losing bodyfat. All of Vince Gironda's students were given appropriate information about the importance of proper nutrition and food supplements specific to their needs and goals.

In Vince's immortal words: "I can shape up a person faster than anyone else." Thousands of his former pupils can verify that. Let Vince's magic work for you too. Get started now. **IM**

### Squats

**Editor's note: Next month we'll outline a basic routine that includes the core exercises, like squats.**



Model: Justin Balik \ Equipment: Powertec power rack, 1-800-447-0008