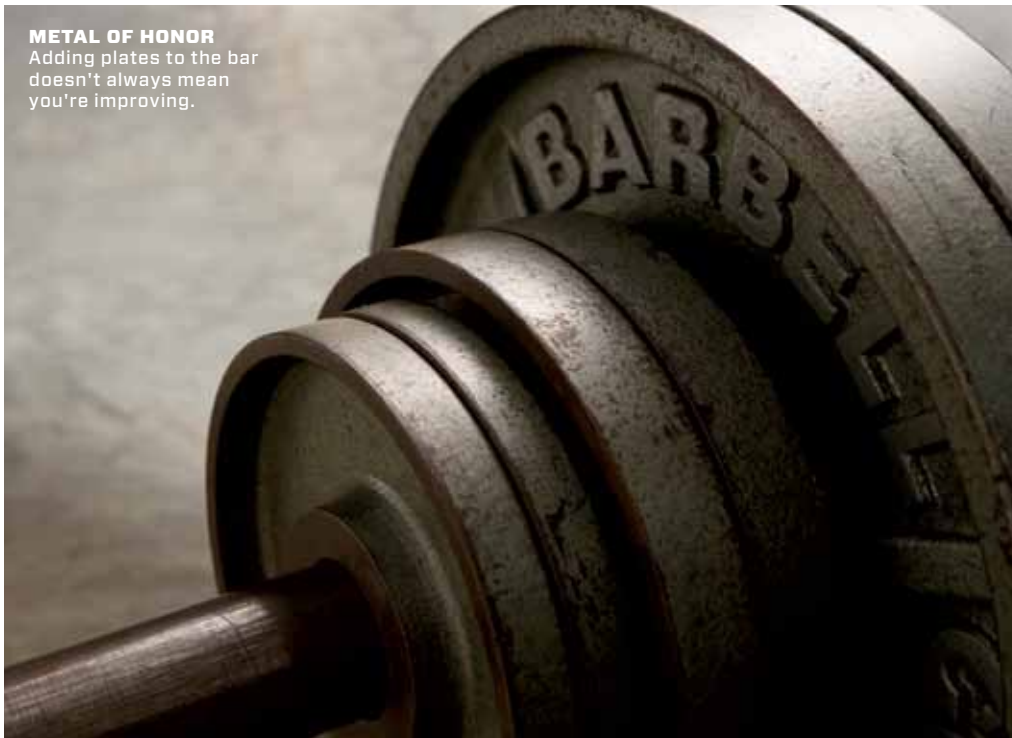


**METAL OF HONOR**

Adding plates to the bar doesn't always mean you're improving.



# The Ultimate Goal

Finding the true answer can be backbreaking. **BY SEAN HYSON**

**THERE WAS A TIME** when I thought pretty much all of life's problems could be solved by deadlifts. Stressed out at work? Squeeze the life out of that bar. Girl trouble? Hit a PR tonight; that'll show her. Strength and improvement, particularly on that one exercise, were central to my identity, and whichever direction my deadlift was going almost single-handedly determined how I felt about the direction in my life, too.

The relentless pursuit of gains had an unexpected result: losses. I hurt my back, and I finally had to confront a hard question:

What do you do when the solution becomes the problem?

My blanket answer for everything, my go-to fixer-upper, and the one thing in my life I'd come to rely on was suddenly not only the wrong response but the absolute worst thing I could do. Naturally, I reacted with panic and despair, but eventually, I found my way to common sense.

Your strength, physique, and health cannot be defined by one quality or weighed via a single metric. If you can't deadlift 500 pounds but you can do 405 on a hip thrust, I

don't think anyone can call you a wuss bag. If your abs aren't as sharp this summer as they were last, but you feel better than you ever have, what are you really missing out on?

Nowadays, I do back-friendlier deadlift variations and chase PRs a little more cautiously. And I recognize that gains on a lift are just numbers, after all, and not necessarily indicative of real growth.

Self-improvement is the goal.

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