

Wout Zijlstra:

Weight for Height Wonder

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There was a time when it was easy to find the strongest man in your town—you went down to the blacksmith shop and that's where you'd be likely to find him. The other good bet was the local butcher shop. And so maybe it's not completely unexpected that Wout Zijlstra, who started working in his father's butcher shop as a young boy in the Netherlands, entered and excelled in his first strongman contest even before he started lifting weights.

At the time, 1987, Wout tipped the scales at 110 kg, and on his way to third place in this Strongest Man of Friesland (northern Holland) competition, he did 120 kg on the log press and, in a hint of what would follow, Wout won the weight for height. As it turned out, Geoff Capes was a referee, and he was so impressed with Wout that he invited him to do some Highland Games competitions in England and Scotland. Since then, Wout has continued this pattern, distinguishing himself in both strongman contests and Highland Games with, for example, a third place finish in the 1998 World's Strongest Man competition and a third place in the 2000 World Grand Prix Highland Games series. On top of that, he's become the world's dominant thrower in the 56-pound weight for height, where he currently holds the world record at a very lofty 5.65 meters (18 feet, 6-1/2 inches).

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Wout's training is geared toward top performance in both strongman and Highland Games competitions, and it emphasizes explosive weight work, along with event training. In a nutshell, Monday is upper body, Tuesday is legs, Wednesday is event training, Thursday is high pulls, Friday is front squats, and Saturday is deadlifts and event training.

Monday's training is built around three movements: bench presses, incline presses and seated military presses. As is Wout's custom, he trains these for five sets of six reps. "Now, in winter, I do six, not more than six, because sometimes I did more, eights and tens, like a bodybuilder, and it cost me too much energy and bodyweight: I cannot eat enough," Wout explained. "In the summer, when I have competitions, for the last few weeks I do singles, warming up and then—boom!—only singles, and save some energy because you always use a lot of energy for traveling and competing."

Wout keeps the weights light in the bench presses, partly due to an old injury and partly because he feels it's not as critical to his performance as the incline press. Thus, he uses 150 kg for six repetitions in both the bench press and the incline press. Wout says he's good for about 180 kilos in the incline press, for a single, and that he feels "that it's very important for putting the stone and also good for the log lift." Wout does 120 kg x 6 on the seated military press.

Biceps and triceps are also trained on Monday, with standing barbell curls done for 70 kg x 6. Wout says that when he's in good shape, he can easily curl 100 kg very strictly, and he trains them in his typical style, "very explosive [up] and slow down." Triceps are trained with the lat pulley.

Tuesday is back squats, followed by leg extensions and leg curls. Wout squats 200 kg for six reps, once again in explosive style. "slow down and up as fast as possible." He says he goes "not so deep," only hitting the same depth he uses on the weight for height and the deadlift.

Wednesday is event training, combining both strongman and the Highland Games. "I do a few throws for weight for height, not more than five, and then I do ten throws with the stone, and ten throws with the weight for distance, and ten throws with the hammer," Wout said. He'll alternate heavy and light implements, week by week. Wout also does some grip work, often in the form of the farmer's walk or Hercules Hold.

Thursday is high pull day. Wout departs from his standard rep scheme here, and does triples in this movement. Since he's not a weightlifter, Wout says that he does pulls rather than cleans, and this lift is done for the weight for height. Although Wout says he goes as heavy as 200 kg on pulls, he says, "I feel more explosive when I do it [not so heavy]."

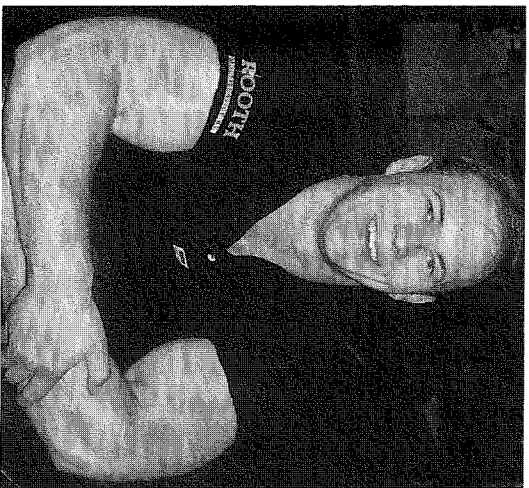
Friday is front squat day, another lift that Wout sees as key to the weight for height. Wout said that prior to his world record throw in Hardenburg, Holland in 1998, he was front squatting 250 kg. As with back squats, Wout says that he squats "not so deep," but very explosive.

Saturday is event training, like Wednesday, and then Wout finishes off his training week with deadlifts, once again done for six repetitions, not so heavy, in explosive style. "Now I do 270 kg, and when I do 300 [for six reps], I feel myself very strong."

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Ready to rock and roll, Wout gets psychical moments before his world record in the weights and height event.



Is Wout armed and ready for another world record?

He says, "Yes!"

Photo courtesy of Wout Zylstra

By now, Wout is ready for a break, and he said that Sunday is "always a rest day; a family day, and I try to go to church."

Standing 1.97 meters tall (just under six feet seven inches), Wout weighs about 130 kg, but he says that it has never been easy for him to maintain this bodyweight.

"I'm a very big eater," Wout says. "I always ate a lot also when I was a young boy. I like a lot of meat: I have days when I eat one kilogram of meat. We always eat meat [beef] and then a lot of potatoes. I always had that when I was young so I like that still now. And a lot of bread." Since Holland is great dairy country, it's not surprising that Wout is also a big milk drinker: "I drink a lot of milk every day, three

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lot of cheese on the bread. I feel myself the strongest when I eat two times a hot meal in a day, but that's not always possible. But when I have the chance, I eat two times hot, two times potatoes."

"I like normal food, I feel myself strong with normal food, not so many food supplements. Good food, that's for me very important. In competitions that's always a surprise, and some people think rice and that kind of thing makes you strong, but they give me one week rice and I'm the weakest man of the world. Meat and potatoes, that's for me very important, very important."

Gerard Meyer advises Wout on both training and nutrition, and Wout credits him for a lot of help over the years.

At thirty-six, Wout sees himself competing until he's forty, and he's thinking about specializing this season. "I'm thinking, at this moment, that I have to do one, only Highland Games or strong-man. I think this year, I'll do a lot of Highland Games, maybe only Highland Games, and try to win the title, and then maybe the year after, only strongman."

Either way, Wout says he wants to break the world record in the weight for height again. Talking about his most recent world record, he said he feels that "five meters seventy [almost eighteen feet eight and half inches] must be possible. It's really high, but I think it's possible. I don't know where I do it, but I want to do it