

BULGARIAN METHOD

Even to this day Bulgarian weightlifting method remains a subject to discuss and one of the most controversial and speculative topics on relevant blogs and forums. This method has earned a sheer mass of fans because the richest history of weightlifting in Bulgaria has practically turned it into a national sport since the 70th. Shining success of Bulgarian Olympic weightlifting team at the World and European Championships as well as at the Olympic Games brought Bulgaria to the top of the world sports ranking. But the contradictors, denying this method also exist, and their position is also reasonable: no science-based approach, not even basic researches, excessive physical loading, high incidence, and quite a short sporting performance life of Top-level athletes. Considering all of the above coaches and athletes that aim at growing and progressing in weightlifting are forced to thoroughly inspect the essence of the Bulgarian method hoping to find in it something beneficial and efficient.

How did it all start?

Ivan Abadjiev – that's the one who truly stands behind the Bulgarian weightlifting method. Everything about weightlifting in Bulgaria had been rather average but Ivan Abadjiev managed to make a revolt that changed everything. In 1975, on the European Coaches Conference, Ivan shared his mind with the world about his vision on the approach to the training process. His new conception shook the whole weightlifting community. He offered a method according to which athletes should train 8 times a week – 2 trainings per day for 3 days and 1 training per day for 2 days. Abadjiev noticed that from the time immemorial human being was involved in heavy physical labor that lasted for many hours daily and that with the use of dosed workload the formidable progress in mastership was acquired. As an example, he referred to miners and woodworkers, and he also mentioned the great Paganini that devoted 14-16 hours daily to violin practice for many years.

The distinct feature that differed Bulgaria from the Soviet method was the absence of the strict detailing about the volume and intensity indices. The only number Abadjiev counted was the number of repetitions with maximal and sub-maximal weight. Here we also should mention that the conception of weightlifting “bulgarisation” was constantly evolving and progressing throughout all of the period of Ivan Abadjiev coach activity.

The initial program consists of the following:

Exercises for Monday, Wednesday and Friday :

Morning	Evening
1. Snatch	1. Clean&jerk
2. Push press from the rack	2. Seated press
3. Power clean	3. Hang Snatch
4. Front squats	4. Bench press
5. Snatch pull 100%	5. Clean pull 100%
6. Half jerk 100%	

On Tuesday and Saturday athletes were training only in the morning:

Morning
Back squats
Front rack hold
Power clean
Max. snatch/clean pull
Max. half jerk

The whole program consisted of 4 weeks: 3 with high loads were followed by 1 recovery week. Each one of the 3 high loads weeks were planned implying maximum efforts and intensity.

Load	Reps	Sets
Record attempt	1	1
Max weight	1	2
10 kg below the max weight	2	2
20 kg below the max weight	2	4-5

However, if an athlete was not capable of performing on such a program, coaches lowered the load according to his capacities.

Also 20-25 days before the competition, the training loads were becoming more selective – pulls and half jerks were excluded. 2 weeks before the competition athletes started to train only 1 time per day. Each Friday the “control training” was implemented on which athletes were making max out.

The first significant successes of Bulgarian weightlifters helped Abadjiev to convince sporting headship to open sports schools countrywide. Physical education teachers and coaches taught by Abadjiev selected gifted boys at the age of 9-10 years on the special testing system basis. Successful candidates were training until the age of 16-17 years on a special program that consisted of 50% weightlifting exercises and 50% general physical training. Moreover, the ratio between these components was changing progressively with an incline towards weightlifting, this means that to the age of 17 only 2% of process was devoted to general physical training, and everything else was about weightlifting. The best pupils were invited to the junior national team afterwards. Such an approach can be literally called “The elite weightlifters forge”.

Athletes that have passed through such a preparation system indeed were “superhumans”. Coaching routine with this “new breed” of athletes granted a new level of development for Abadjiev’s system. He reduced the diversity and variability of exercises and completely focused on specific

movements. From now on there were only 8 exercises left in the list, daily training was splitted into several small pieces of training.

From now on each exercise had a time limit to perform, reps count was limited to single. Resting period between exercises lasted for 30 min, which was supposed to restore the testosterone levels (however, researches that were made in the USA national team provided no evidence about such recovery in adverted rest period).

Two variants in the weekly cycle were based on these new parameters:

Time	Monday/Wednesday/Friday
09:00-09:30	Front squats
09:30-10:00	Break
10:00-11:00	Snatch
11:00-11:30	Break
11:30-12:30	Clean&jerk
12:30-13:00	Front squats
	Lunch
16:30-17:30	Clean&jerk
17:30-18:00	Break
18:00-19:00	Snatch
19:00-19:30	Front squats
19:30-20:00	Snatch/Clean pull

Time	Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday
09:00-09:30	Back squat

09:30-10:00	Break
10:00-10:45	Snatch
10:45-11:15	Break
11:15-12:00	Power clean + push press
12:00-12:30	Front squat
12:30-13:00	Snatch/Clean pull

Load periodization also passed through some changes. The basic preparatory period was extended to 8 weeks: 3 weeks of high volume, 1 week recovery, 3 weeks of medium volume, 1 week of maximum volume. "Control training" on Fridays.

International competitions preparation lasted for 7 weeks:

- 2 weeks – low loads;
- 2 weeks – high loads;
- 2 weeks – maximum loads;
- 1 week – tapering.

Frequent competitions became a specific Bulgarian method feature. To increase competitive ability Abadjiev complimented his team with several athletes of the same weight category. And one with the best results was provided with permission to compete.

A little later the whole system was reworked once again: Abadjiev excluded all pulls and barbell back squats. After that exercise list consisted of front squats, snatch, clean&jerk and power clean to rack position.

Several times Abadjiev left his post of the head coach, but each time he was returned shortly after. During his career, he successfully did his job as a head coach of Turkey and Qatar. Many countries (Greece, Iran, Egypt) have successfully implemented the Bulgarian method.

So what conclusion can we make considering the training method of Ivan Abadjiev?

Definitely, it works.

Bulgarian system borrowed many things from the Soviet system.

The amount of winnings and medals Bulgari have earned in weightlifting totally speaks about the effectiveness and adds a significant score to PROs list.

Is it the best system? That's what only the time can show, we are yet to know the truth.