

# ROUNDING UP THE WNBFF'S BEST GLUTES

By Rich Fitter

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On the figure stage, there is little chance of hiding a weak bodypart with an athlete's beautifully sequined posing suit. A competitor is judged by her conditioning, muscularity, beauty and presentation. And while feminine curves create an attractive shape, they must be fat-free.

Glutes are muscles and need to be fully developed. This does not mean a badonkadonk will win on the pro stage, but a proportionate amount of muscle mass is necessary. It takes more than a few sets on a machine marked "Butt Blaster" to get a show conditioned rear end. Squats, lunges, step-ups, Romanian deadlifts and reverse hyperextensions are all effective exercises for training your gluteus maimus.

Your battle plan for bringing up your rear should begin with an honest assessment. As with any bodypart, you must decide what aspect of your glutes needs to be improved. If the problem is too much fat obscuring the muscle, then diet and cardio must be addressed. If it is a matter of missing muscular development, you need to prioritize that in your training.

Make no mistake: Figure competitors are athletes. They train hard to achieve a certain condition and heavy lifting is (or should be) a part of it. Muscles grow because you stimulate them with a greater-than-normal load (overload) and allow them to recover. The primary function of the gluteus maximus muscle is to extend (straighten) the hips, something you do getting up out of a chair. As a result, the glutes are already accustomed to doing quite a bit of work. To force new growth, a greater stimulus is required.

Top WNBFF pro Allison Frahn says, "When it comes to my glute work, it's all about the squat – and deep! I do squats once a week and typically stay around a 12-rep range for 3-4 sets – this is true for most of my exercises.

"Coupled with the squat, I like to do step-ups on a bench holding dumbbells, and walking lunges to really target and develop my glutes. I also find plyometrics to be really great for definition. Often times I will incorporate a jump squat superset with my barbell squats for an added burn.

"Regardless of what exercise works best for you,



Tara Marie Segundo

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keep your form strict – this is the most important element in your routine.”

The depth of your squats, lunges and step-ups is critical. In order to fully involve the glutes, you must bend your hips and knees to a point where your femur (thigh bone) is parallel to the ground. If your depth is too shallow, the involvement will be minimal. Box squats are a great way to ensure your depth is proper. Set up a stack of aerobics steps so the top of the step is 2-4 inches below the back of your knees. Sit back on the step, pausing momentarily before standing up. If you choose to perform this with a barbell, use a spotter for safety and make sure your steps are secure. Also be sure not to drop heavily onto the surface with your butt to avoid lower back injury.

Pro Masters Figure Champion Janet Marsico, owner of The Figure Workshop, is a proponent of lunges in her glute training. “I usually do some sort of lunge, whether it be the Smith machine or dumbbells. I must admit I prefer the Smith machine, only because I get too winded with dumbbells. In addition, I am able to go heavier with the Smith machine. But if you want to add some good cardio into the mix, stick to the dumbbells. Your heart rate will certainly keep a nice high rate doing it this way. I perform four sets of 12-15 reps per leg, at a moderate weight.”

Marsico also likes to incorporate isolation movements in her training. She recommends the hip abductor machine and stiff-legged deadlifts, in addition to squats, leg presses and lunges.

Tara Marie Segundo has always displayed well-developed glutes on the pro stage. Tara is meticulous with her form while performing lunges. “I start by standing on a step, holding a dumbbell in each hand. The height of the step needs to be in proportion to your leg length so the angle at the knee joint is bent at no less than 90 degrees at the bottom of the lunge. Alternating legs, I step back and off the step, lunging down, up, down, and then pressing my body back up onto the step, which counts as one rep.

“Form is absolutely essential here. If you keep your back very straight and press up through your heel rather than the ball of the foot, you will fully activate your glutes. Angling your upper body forward and using momentum to press up from a lunge defeats the purpose of the movement and cheats your glutes out of a solid contraction.”

Another favorite butt-builder of Tara’s is the back extension exercise. “I always use a heavy medicine ball and perform my back extensions with very strict form,” she says. “I keep my back straight as a board and work slowly, both on the positive and negative phases of the contraction. Also, as you extend your back, focus on initiating the movement using your glutes, contracting them as hard as you can.”

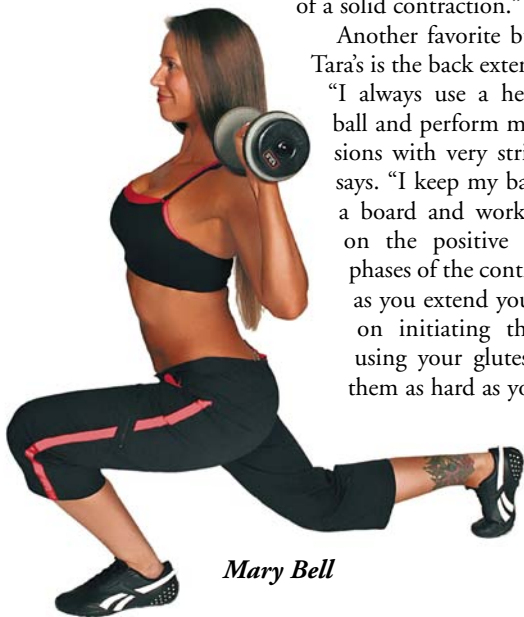
The glutes are very involved in both hip and back extension.

Think of your lower back, glutes and hamstrings like the pieces of a door hinge. The two sides of the hinge are connected in the center, both moving from that axis. Along this analogy, your glutes will be involved in stiff-legged deadlifts and reverse hyperextension, both movements originating at the hips.

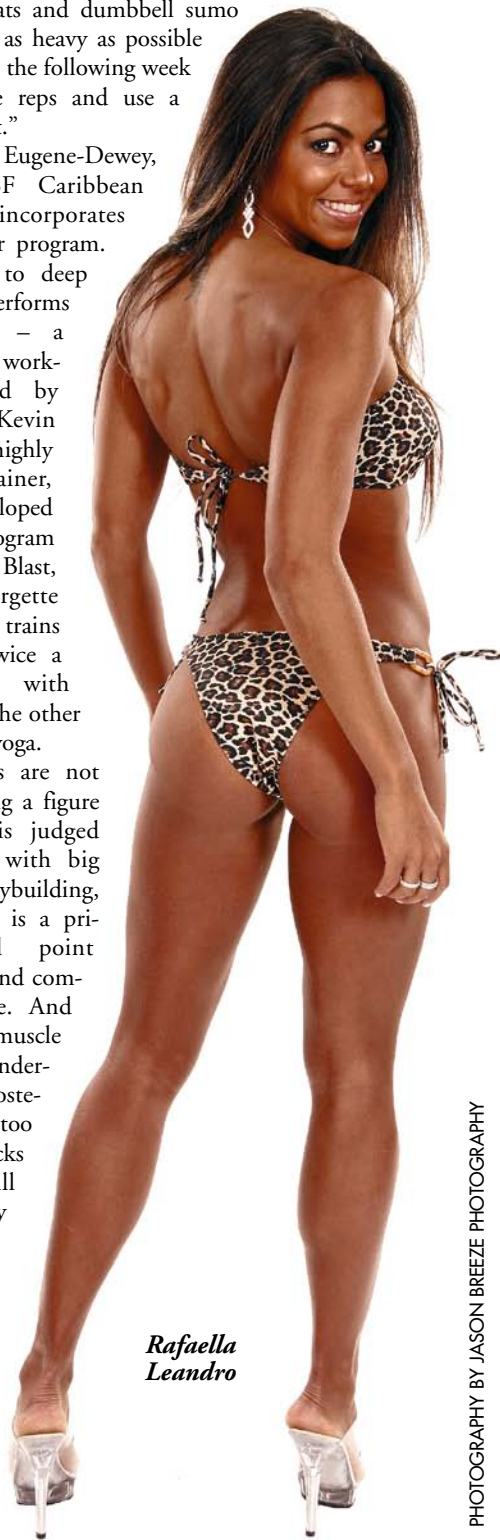
Three-time World Champion Angela Mraz has a unique way of performing stiff-legged deadlifts: “I love this one! I try to do one leg at a time using dumbbells and placing the opposite leg on a bench behind me.” She also performs barbell or Smith machine squats and dumbbell sumo squats. “I go as heavy as possible one week and the following week I double the reps and use a lighter weight.”

Georgette Eugene-Dewey, 2006 WNBF Caribbean Champion, incorporates yoga into her program. In addition to deep squats, she performs Bodyforging – a power yoga workout designed by Miami’s Kevin Phillion. A highly respected trainer, Phillion developed a specific program called Glute Blast, which Georgette practices. She trains her glutes twice a week, once with weights and the other session with yoga.

The glutes are not the only thing a figure competitor is judged on. But as with big arms in bodybuilding, the rear end is a primary focal point among fans and competitors alike. And like with all muscle groups, an underdeveloped posterior that is too soft, flat or lacks shape will most certainly hurt a competitor’s scoring. Rather than take any chances, get to the gym now and bust your butt! ★



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