



# AXE TO GRIND

Woodchop world champ Brad De Losa reveals the secrets to lopping fat and carving serious muscle

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**"YOUR CORE, YOUR LEGS AND YOUR ARMS COME TOGETHER AS ONE TO GET AS MUCH POWER OUT OF YOUR BODY AS POSSIBLE"**



Use the Netpage app to scan the page and see De Losa in action.



## SPLITTING WOOD IS AN ELEMENTAL SKILL EVERY MAN SHOULD HAVE IN HIS KITBAG

**Brad De Losa swings** at logs the way David Warner attacks cricket balls. There's a mighty backswing before his torso uncoils and the blade of his axe slices through the air, driving into the hardwood with a sweet, dull thud. Four runs.

Such a potent combination of savagery and precision recalls samurai sword-play. After 20 seconds of cultured swinging, a chunk of wood detaches from the log and bounces on the concrete at De Losa's feet. The wedge left behind is a geometrical wonder, its fresh-cut edge smooth and true. That's because, in the 15 or so swings it's taken to split the log, De Losa has hit the same line every time.

The 36-year-old mechanical engineer bends down and peers at his handiwork. "You can tell that there were no mishits, that the axe was entering the timber on exactly the same plane as the last blow," he says. With such accuracy, "you can more or less split a matchstick".

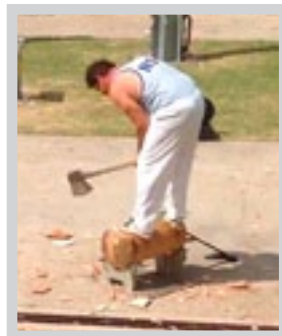
### CHOP SHOP

Recreate the physical challenges of competitive woodchopping in your local gym



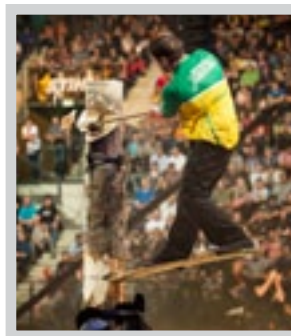
#### Standing block

A log is placed upright in a stand and the cutter chops side-on in upward and downward motions to remove a wedge or "scarf" from one side then the other. This movement calls on the abdominal stabilisers. To practise the motion, do two-handed cable crossovers from the top and bottom, or use a resistance band.



#### Underhand

In this event the axeman stands on top of a horizontal log and uses a downward motion to chop the log in two as fast as possible. Mimic the motion with two-handed vertical cable pull-downs.



#### Tree felling

This involves cutting through a log while balancing on a slender wooden board or "jigger" attached to the trunk. Tractor-tyre turnovers help build strength in your glutes and core to facilitate balance.

### DO THE SPLITS

Solid technique will harness raw brawn when it comes to splitting timber, reckons De Losa. "If your angles don't meet up precisely, your block won't come off." Use De Losa's tips to stock your winter woodpile with Tetris-worthy wedges.

#### 1 Get a grip

Place your left hand about two centimetres from the bottom of the axe handle and your top hand about three-quarters of the way up. "Your grip strength is really important. All your control comes from your bottom hand. Your front, sliding hand is more of a lever that guides the axe into place."



#### 2 Firm and swing

Hold the axe above your head in a controlled manner, your legs slightly bent on keeping the line of the backswing as vertical as possible. I like to give the axe a firm grip in the air to get the angles right at the end of the swing. If you try to hit the wood you lose a lot of power.

#### 3 Split the difference

Balance the axe on the ground with your feet on either side of the axe you want to split the wood. You want to drive through the wood rather than just hitting the top and bottom. →



I'm watching this wood-chopping masterclass on De Losa's in-laws' property near Lithgow, in the western foothills of NSW's Blue Mountains. The yard doubles as De Losa's gym. A concrete slab hosts training set-ups for the main woodchopping disciplines – the standing block and the underhand – while nearby on the lawn there's a three-metre-high trunk to practise tree felling.

To demonstrate, De Losa hacks a hunk of wood from the trunk, then wedges in a supporting beam called a "jigger". He jumps up on the beam and hacks another wedge further up for a second jigger, which he duly leaps on. Finally, he launches a frenzied attack on a log clamped on top, raining chips of hardwood on me as I stand below.

When he's done, De Losa's formidable arms carry a greasy sheen of sweat. If you hadn't already guessed, woodchopping is not only seriously hard yakka – it's a fully functional, total-body workout.

"Your core, your legs and your arms come together as one to get as much power out of your body and onto the block as possible," explains De Losa, who began competing at 16 and last year won the Stihl Timbersports Series World Championships in Germany.

Splitting wood is an elemental skill every man should have in his kitbag. If you have a wood-burning stove, you'll be able to keep your family warm on cold winter nights; and if you don't, your hard work will still create an upper-body muscle matrix primed to unleash explosive force. Needless to say, you'll also be seriously cut.



### CHOP 'TILL YOU DROP

De Losa works out in the gym three days a week with an all-body routine that has a heavy focus on the arms. One day a week he swims, logging around two kilometres, which includes six 50-metre sprints with 60 seconds' rest between each interval, reducing to 30 seconds' rest in the lead-up to a big competition. "I just go as hard as I can," he says. "It really helps your breathing, your timing and your endurance."

One day a week he does the following tractor-tyre/chopping circuit to build spring-loaded explosive force from the ground up. Repeat the circuit twice, resting for one minute between each round.

- 1 Tyre chops with mallet: one minute
- 2 Chop block of wood
- 3 Tractor-tyre roll: 25m
- 4 Chop block of wood
- 5 Tyre pull: 10m

### BY THE NUMBERS

**1471** KILOJOULES BURNT IN AN HOUR OF CHOPPING

**80** NUMBER OF AXES IN DE LOSA'S COLLECTION

**SILVERTOP ASH**

THE TYPE OF HARDWOOD USED AT SYDNEY'S ROYAL EASTER SHOW – THE "WIMBLEDON OF WOODCHOPPING"



NUMBER OF WORLD TITLES WON BY DE LOSA

**1870**

THE YEAR THE SPORT OF WOODCHOPPING ORIGINATED IN TASMANIA FOLLOWING A BET BETWEEN TWO MEN IN A BAR OVER WHO COULD FELL A TREE THE FASTEST



**103KG**  
DE LOSA'S WEIGHT



**12.94 SECS**  
BEST TIME IN THE STANDING BLOCK  
– 300MM DIAMETER LOG

**14 SECS**  
BEST TIME IN THE UNDERHAND  
– 325MM DIAMETER LOG

**43 SECS**  
BEST TIME IN TREE FELLING  
– 275MM DIAMETER LOG