

SHIRT BLOWOUT

Have you ever blown out a bench shirt? I don't mean a little rip, or some stitching popped. I mean a real, honest, shirt torn from neck to navel blowout. I recently had this experience in a big way, and it got me thinking.

Now, I've had the little tears and whatnot, and I even had the entire are tear out on one of my denim shirts. The weight comes down in a hurry. Those incidents had involved 600-700 pounds. Nothing to sneeze at, but my recent experience certainly beat all for me.

Let me set the scene: I'm about 6 weeks out from the WPO Bench Bash for Cash. When I get close to a big meet, I usually go to Mike Miller's Nazareth Barbell every Saturday for shirted bench training. My training has been moving along very well, and I feel I'm finally ready to get back into the 900's. I work up to about 845 in my trusty black Inzer double denim. Then I decide to get out the mother of all badass shirts, the Inzer Ultimate Denim. I use a grid stitch, radical cut Ultimate with reinforced seams from shoulder seams and reinforced neck. This shirt will stand up by itself. It is some seriously heavy fabric.

So I take 905 for ride. I get it within about a half inch of touching, and just can't get it any farther, so I slam it back up. Felt easy. I talk to one of my training partners, Bobby Fields, and he agrees that a weight like 925 should touch and still be in my range. When it comes my turn, I set my shirt, snap my lever belt, and set up on the bench.

My handlers do a 3-person handoff, because it's too difficult for a single person to hand off this much weight smoothly. The weight comes into my hands, and I feel confident. It doesn't even feel heavy. I go down my mental checklist like always:

1. weight steady-check
2. deep breath in-check
3. break elbows loose wide and descend-check
4. push heels down hard-check
5. tuck the elbows hard-check
6. stomach up to the bar-check
7. flex quads-check
8. press call—————???????

I was less than ¼" from touching, and the world went upside down. I thought I heard a gunshot, and suddenly, all the pressure of the shirt disappeared!! I felt no weight in my hands anymore!!

My first thought was that the bar had broken. Then I realized I was being helped back to the rack, and I had completely blown out my bench shirt. The mighty Ultimate Denim had met its match. There was simply too much Lattimer stuffed in a too-small shirt!

It's a very weird feeling to blow out a shirt like that, and it definitely changes your opinion of the people who spot you. My spotters, the great men and women of the Nazbar Power Team along with my handoff guy, Tone Barbaccio, had the bar off me so fast it never actually touched me. That is why I thought the bar had broken; all the weight was taken off by the spotters.

Now, when I am lifting heavy like this, we generally enlist at least 5 spotters. This consists of the handoff guy, one spotter on each end of the bar, and additional person at each end ready to scoop the plates and lift if needed.



Spotting is a skill in and of itself, and it is one all too frequently taught or learned. At most meets, spotters are volunteers, and often they do not have the proper experience to know how to spot on the bench. I have seen everything from spotters with hands in their pockets to being too far from the bar to reach it, let alone in time.

So, short and simple, proper spotting should work as follows:

1. Make absolutely sure the spotters are strong enough, or numerous enough to handle the weight being lifted.
2. Make sure spotters are not being distracted by other duties or issues during the performance of the lift.
3. Spotters should stand with feet apart, knees bent, and abdomen tight so they are ready to take the load of the bar if needed.
4. The spotters' hands should be interlocked and under the bar at all times during the lift. The spotters' hands should be within 1-2 inches of the bar at all times.
5. Here is the skill part: The spotters' eyes should be concentrating on the bar and the lifter's arm simultaneously. Especially, the elbow should be noticed. Most times, the first visible motion will happen at the elbow. The eyes need to scan quickly from the bar to the lifter's arm all throughout the lift.

Why is this important?? Well, human reaction time really isn't all that fast. It can take well over ½ second for the eye to brain to hand connection to be complete. So, for a barbell dropping, accelerating at 32 feet per second squared from full lockout, the bar could be moving at 11 miles per hour by the time the spotter reacts. Try catching something heavy going 11 miles per hour. Most likely, it will rip out of your grip. At 11 miles per hour, 500 pounds can do some serious damage. I really don't want to see what 900 pounds can do.

So do all lifters a favor. When you see poor spotting, educate. Make sure you explain why, and how, to spot properly. It may even save someone's life.

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