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To alter a quote by Nietzsche, "Whatever does not hurt you makes you stronger." This is the foundation of weight training success. We live by this theorem of strength throughout our lifting careers.

I have been considering writing this article for quite some time. It has been a number of years now that I have been using my special bench. Reading Donnie Thompson's article in *Powerlifting USA* "The New Bench," gave me the idea to share my experiment now with my fellow powerlifters. Donnie's "New Bench" is wider and has more padding to give greater support. Today's giants, doing huge assisted poundages, require that extra support for safety. The big bench applies less shearing force, because of wider support for the entire shoulder girdle.

My "Narrow Board Dumbbell Bench" is effective and safe because the force can be controlled and is progressive. My theory is that doing these dumbbell benches on a narrow board gives less support and a longer range of motion for the delt, pec and lat muscles. The stress this creates across the transverse arch of the shoulder girdle causes the muscles and supportive structure of the chest, shoulders and upper back to adapt. This adaptation process increases strength and explosiveness. This could be a great asset for raw benchers who require greater shoulder girdle support. The use of the bench shirt does give artificial shoulder support. The narrow board allows the shoulders to drop transversely, or laterally, allowing the scapula to retract. This puts the load on the shoulder structure, not on the bench, thus forcing greater adaptation. These dumbbell benches should be done without a bench shirt, with a sub-maximum weight and a couple reps short of failure. They should be done this way at least initially until some adaptation and supportive strength has occurred. An athlete should never compromise control or safety to add a few pounds or reps to an assistance exercise, especially without having a history of training that exercise. You can do these "Narrow Board Dumbbell Benches" on your dynamic (light) day with 3-5 sets of 8-10 reps using 50% of your estimated one rep max, or 8-12 sets of 3 reps at 50%. You may also do these as a pump down set after a max effort day, with 50% of an estimated one rep max to

TRAINING

NARROW BOARD DUMBBELL BENCH

as told to *Powerlifting USA* by Jim Douglas of Powerbuilders Gym - Jackson, Michigan



The Narrow Board Dumbbell Bench gives less support and longer range of motion (front view & side view) (photos courtesy J. Douglas)



almost failure (approximately 10 or more reps). After you have completed months of basic narrow board dumbbell benches, you may work up to doing a max effort workout of 5 sets of 5 reps. Extra care using dumbbells is required for safety, use a good spotter. If your dumbbells don't go

heavy enough, do your narrow board dumbbell benches super strict or on your light training day. You can also pre-fatigue your shoulders and chest, then do your dumbbells as a follow up set. Assistance exercises should always be diminished as you near a competition, and these dumbbell

presses are no exception. Stop them 24 weeks out from the meet.

I have always believed that the more variety of exercises you do and the more pieces of equipment you have at your disposal, the greater the gains you can make. Intensity and continuity have the greatest influence on improvement. Defeating monotony is a giant step to achieve intensity and maintain continuity in a training cycle.

There are certain benefits that dumbbell bench pressing in general provides. There is increased effort required to use dumbbells. This narrow board dumbbell bench magnifies that degree of difficulty thereby magnifying the benefits. Extra stabilizing muscles are required throughout the entire movement and especially at the bottom. Using dumbbells requires each arm to lift the exact same amount of weight, not allowing you to shift weight to your strong side. Since increased control and balance are required you will not be able to use as much weight as with a barbell. Start off light until you get accustomed to the exercise then increase gradually.

I built my narrow board dumbbell bench closer to the ground so that setting down the dumbbells is safer for the shoulders, the dumbbells, and the floor. A couple of rubber mats makes the drop very minimal. I made the bench 12 inches high, 8 inches wide, and 48 inches long. The main board is a 2x8 inch board with a 1x6 inch board on top of that, both 48 inches long. This stacking of boards forces the lateral arch to increase with support. The edges are routed or ground round. The sides are also made of 2x8 boards also 48 inches long. The stabilizing feet are 2x8 pieces 18 inches long screwed crosswise under the sides. It can be lightly padded with thin foam and vinyl covered or carpeted. The light padding creates less stability which increases the body's attempt to adapt. Adaptation is the key to building strength, I don't think this statement can be overstated. The narrow width makes these presses uncomfortable and difficult. The narrow board dumbbell bench press introduces benefits of improved stabilizer muscles, increased range of motion, single-limb strength balancing, and variety of exercise. The gains you can make are well worth the effort of building your narrow board dumbbell bench. Here is my ending quote, "If it is difficult, it may do you some good." I think you will enjoy the change of pace, the challenge, and the gains you can make from your narrow board dumbbell bench. Good Luck & Good Lifting.