

Way back, in the beginning of powerlifting, competitors would go out on the platform and register their lifts wearing just gym shorts, t-shirt, tennis shoes and a thin belt. Since then a lot has changed. Space age knee wraps replaced the Ace bandages squatters previously used. Squat suits made of modern stretch fabric wiped out the gym short and even high tech shoes for all 3 lifts are on the market. Lifting belts evolved from those narrow in the front, wide in the back ones to triple thickness with lever-action buckles.

A more recent development has been the bench press shirt. The idea was to use fabric and techniques similar to squat suits for the bench. The shirt would provide tightness and rebound so necessary for a big bench. I might have been the first in Indiana to try one. When I received it through the mail and opened the package, I was a little shocked. How could such a small, narrow shirt possibly fit? After talking to John Inzer, he assured me this was a correct fit. After trying it, I realized this was the way to go, and that the competitive bench press had changed forever. Many lifters use a bench shirt in training and competition, however, they may not be using them to their best advantage and may not be deriving all the benefits that the shirts can provide.

The first issue I'd like to address in proper sizing. It's very important to get accurate measurements when ordering a bench shirt. Don't feel you have to inflate your size requirements just to inflate your ego. A judge does not care what size shirt you're wearing. Too big a shirt will not provide much explosion from the bottom. Just like squat suits, bench shirts can leave little cuts and bruises in the shoulder and arm pit area. I remember coaching Chris Confessore at a national meet. His shirt was so tight, it wore two of us out putting it on him and he couldn't get the bar down to his chest until he got up to 405 in his warm-ups.

STARTIN' OUT

A special section dedicated to the beginning lifter.

The Bench Press Shirt

as told to POWERLIFTING USA by Doug Daniels



Chris Confessore is one of the masters of using a bench shirt properly

Getting a bench shirt on can be a challenge. Since there is no way you can get an accurately sized shirt on by yourself, you'll need help. Try getting the shirt over your head,

then get the arms in. Have your helpers get the shirt down by pulling out and down. Try a little baby powder to absorb the perspiration on your body, which can impede getting the shirt on. After getting it on, take a couple of minutes to get your breath and let the shirt set in. Before every warm-up set and especially before every attempt on the platform, have your helpers adjust the fit, paying careful attention to under the armpits. Remember to pull out and down. While waiting to lift, keep your arms crossed at the chest or behind your head. To get it off, bend over forward and have a helper pull it off from the bottom over your head.

Training in a shirt is also important. I feel you should follow a schedule similar to training with a squat suit. Train with it at least the last 2-3 weeks prior a meet. This will also enable you to get used to

using the shirt, as the leverage will change. Training with a bench shirt for only 2-3 weeks prior a meet will mean those nasty little cuts and bruises I mentioned earlier will not be around too long. Another reason I recommend training in for only 2-3 weeks prior a meet is because the best strength gains will come when training without one. Your chest, shoulders and arms will be doing all the lifting. A good tip is to hit your chest with the bar an inch or two lower towards the waist. This seems to allow the user to extract a little more out of the shirt. Practice this several weeks before the meet to find where you get the best results. This should be second nature come contest time. I also recommend using the shirt only for your low rep sets (1-3 reps). If you are new to using a shirt, start out with lighter weights. The feel of the press on the way down will be a bit restricted. Confidence must be gained otherwise the lifter may think something will tear, either the shirt or them. Lifters with chest or shoulder injuries may be able to train while using a shirt due to its support. Be very careful with injuries, however, and if there's pain, have it looked at.

The bench shirt supplies most of its explosive properties at the start of the lift. Benchers who have weak starts will gain immediate benefits. A friend of mine gained over 40 pounds using a shirt due to his weak start of the press. With the shirt, he was able to get a much higher weight up into lockout. Lifters who are strong at the start will also gain as the increased explosion will tend to push the bar faster upwards towards the top, perhaps past their usual sticking point. Think of it as pushing a car. It's hard to get started, but after it gets going, less effort is required to keep it going. Also, no lifter is too weak to wear one.

Make sure you have at least one shirt as a backup for a meet. Old bench shirts are great for this. Another tip is to wash the shirt before the meet. It will be little tighter and more odor friendly to your helpers. This can apply to your squat suit too.

I'm not a big fan of powerlifting adding more and more competitive gear that can help us lift more. Soon it may be hard to tell which did the lifting, the gear or the lifter. Either way, the rules allow use of a bench shirt. If you don't use one, you're giving a big advantage to your fellow competitors. Also, if you aren't using one the most effective way, score yet another plus for your fellow lifters. Did I tell you about these new power shoe strings I'm developing. Well, that's another article.



T-SHIRTS
Heavyweight Quality!

S, M, L, XL, XXL (circle size)

GREAT GIFT!



order now!

\$14.95

• 100% Cotton
• Ash color

Send check or money order in U.S. funds with ad for \$14.95+2.00/shirt S&H (5.00/shirt outside U.S.A.) to: **Heavywear**, P.O. Box 9628, San Diego, CA 92169.

Include name, address and phone.

Heavywear designs and slogans are trade marked & copyright registered. Dealer inquiries: (619) 272-7702.