

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BENCH ACCESSORIES

BY ROBERT WILKERSON

The age-old question we all ask is, “What can you do to increase your raw bench?” If you are like me, even though I bench over 600 lbs. raw, I still do research and ask other powerlifters about what has helped them increase their bench press.

Based on my research, I believe accessories are the key to improving any lift. Most novice lifters do not understand the importance of accessory movements, which increase balance, strengthen weaknesses and promote recovery. The best formula for this is the “K.I.S.S.” method: Keep It Simple, Stupid.

Take the bench press. It’s not a very complex movement, but it requires a lot of technique and incorporates different muscle groups. The problem many lifters run into is the dreaded plateau; their bench doesn’t want to move 5 lbs. – or worse, it goes down 5 or 10 lbs. This is where lifters lose their minds and think they need to do more sets of bench or bench heavy two or three times a week.

The key to breaking this plateau is incorporating the accessory work needed to get the bench moving in the right direction. This means take a new approach to training and having fun, because powerlifters should enjoy what they are doing before they make gains.

Secondly, lifters must understand their bodies by understanding their weaknesses and imbalances, and then attack them every chance they get. The final step is to get other core lifts stronger, like the military press, which incorporates many of

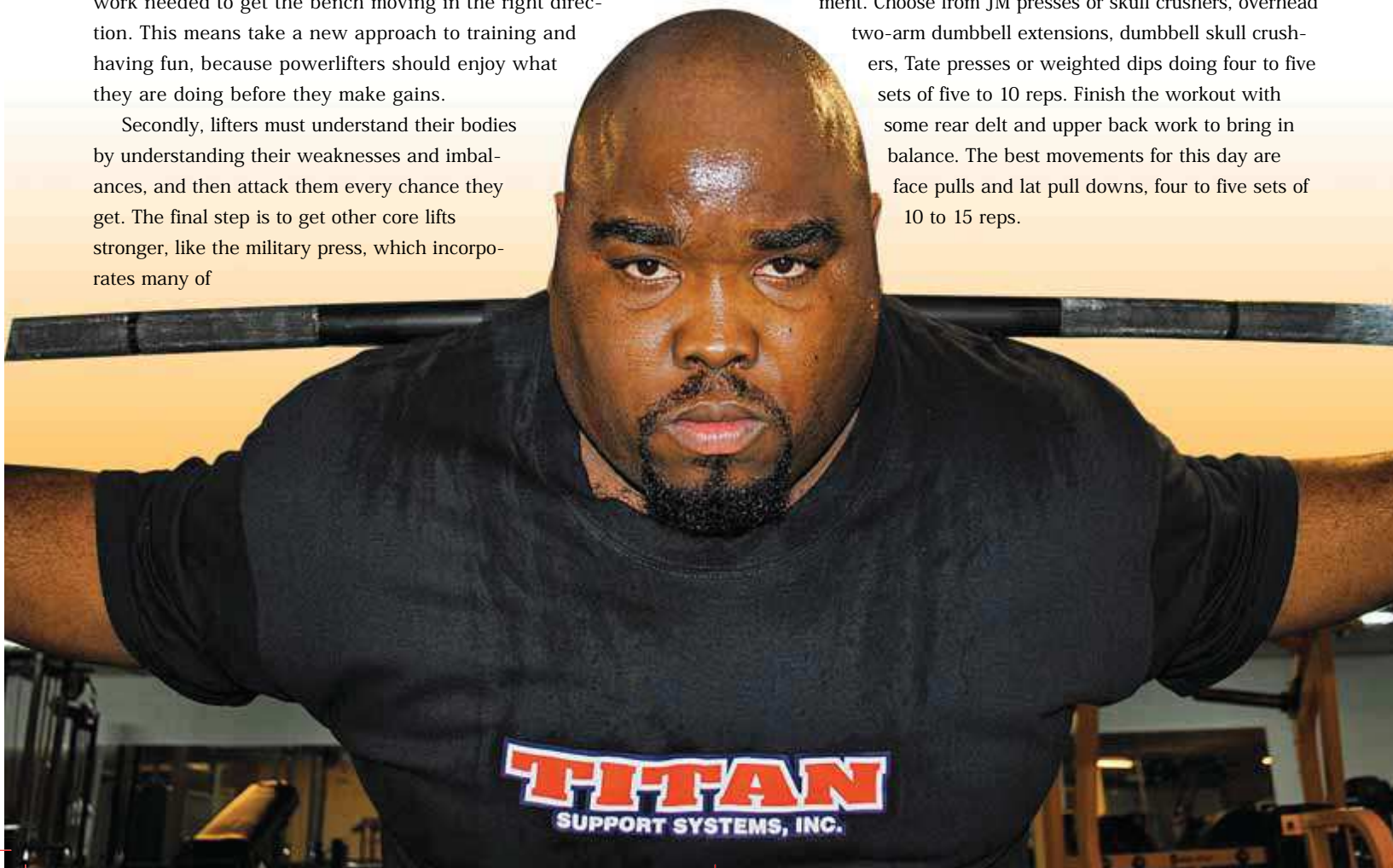
the same muscles as the bench and eventually adds pounds to the bench press.

SIMPLE, COMPOUND AND EFFECTIVE

The way to bring up weaknesses is to attack with simple, compound and effective accessory movements. The key word here is simple, because we all have a tendency to pick pointless or lazy exercises. The simplest way to incorporate this is to designate your ME (max effort) bench/heavy upper day and DE (dynamic effort) bench/upper accessory day. On your ME bench day, focus on heavy press movements and heavy triceps, then finish upper back and rear delts work after ME exercise.

First, pick one of these pressing movements: incline barbell, close grip full range, close grip floor presses, or close grip two- or three-board presses and do four to five sets of three to five reps.

Second, pick one barbell and one dumbbell heavy triceps movement. Choose from JM presses or skull crushers, overhead two-arm dumbbell extensions, dumbbell skull crushers, Tate presses or weighted dips doing four to five sets of five to 10 reps. Finish the workout with some rear delt and upper back work to bring in balance. The best movements for this day are face pulls and lat pull downs, four to five sets of 10 to 15 reps.





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The DE bench upper accessory day is when you focus on imbalances and weaknesses your upper body may have after speed bench. On DE/upper accessory days, focus on working the entire upper body. This is the heavy shoulders and upper back workout, and an extra chest and arm workout. Compound and finisher exercises for the shoulders and back are to be performed. The best movements for shoulders are military press, front, side and rear laterals, face pulls, upright rows and shrugs using dumbbell, kettle bells or a barbell. The best movements for the upper back are Kroc rows/dumbbell rows, chest supported rows, seated cable rows, T-Bar rows, hammer rows, pull-downs with different grips, and pull ups.

Focus on building muscle and balance. The best way to do this is to pick one compound and one accessory for each body part and finish with rear delts. For the chest, do dumbbell movements like high-rep dumbbell incline or flat, three- or four-board work for high reps, high rep triceps pushdowns or light dumbbell extensions and hammer curls to work the biceps. The sets and reps depend on strength levels, but for beginners start with four to five sets of five to 15 reps on the com-

pound movements and on finishers three to five sets of 15 to 20 reps.

The key to breaking that plateau is taking a new approach to training. Recognize your imbalances and weaknesses and get your core lifts stronger. And most importantly, add accessory work! It's the only way to reach your full potential in your bench press. Train hard. **PM**



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