

RAW TRAINING: The Bench

BY ROBERT WILKERSON



Strengthening a raw bench is like building a house. You start with a solid foundation. As powerlifters, our body is our foundation, so we must develop a routine for the chest, shoulders, back and legs.

“Don’t max out every workout. Instead, work toward increasing muscle growth and development.”

BUILD THE CHEST

Developing the chest is the first step. A chest routine needs to promote growth and develop strength. It should contain basic barbell and dumbbell movements, use different hand positioning and vary the number of sets and repetitions. Recommended chest exercises include barbell/dumbbell inclines, close-grip bench, wide-grip

bench and floor presses.

Remember that weights need to increase with each set. Keep the routine simple for main lifts by performing four to five sets with 12 to 15 reps in the first set working up to a heavy three to five reps in the final set. Try three or four sets for auxiliary lifts and stay between six and 12 reps. Don’t max out every workout. Instead, work toward increasing muscle growth and development.

DEVELOP THE SHOULDERS

The second step is shoulder development. This is a must for lifters seeking constant gains. One bad shoulder equals time off from training, so develop strong shoulders to increase your bench.

Great benchers have a big chest and shoulders. Take it from Nick Winters and Vincent Dizenzo, two



great raw benchers who used over head presses to increase their bench.

Stick with basic barbell and dumbbell movements; they work and guarantee results. The shoulder work-out should be intense, with four or five sets of six to 12 reps using moderate to heavy weights. Recommended shoulder exercises include military presses, dumbbell bench, side laterals and face pulls.

STRENGTHEN THE UPPER BACK

I achieved my biggest gains after I started training my upper back. I was able to finish my lifts and maintain tightness on the bench, and if I neglected my upper back my progress stalled or declined. This is why I believe upper back strength is not just for shirted benchers, but for also for raw benchers.

In a shirted bench, the upper back pulls the bar into the groove, but for a raw bench, the upper back is more for stability. Most lifters miss their lifts because they are unstable on the bench. Weakness in the upper back causes instability while pressing.

Upper back workouts need to be basic, but very intense. Begin with four or five sets of 10 to 12 reps using the heaviest weight possible. Recommended back exercises include lat pulldowns, bent over rows, seated cable rows and shrugs.

DEVELOP LEG MUSCLES

Leg drive gives you the last pop at the end of the lift and great benchers agree that you must train your legs to strengthen leg drive. Ryan Kennelly, Travis Bell and Winters are all great benchers who know the importance of training their legs.

Whenever I see an increase in my squats, I notice an increase in my bench.

The increase may only be 5 lbs. or one rep, but when my legs are stronger my bench is stronger. That is why I recommend all lifters to do some type of leg work-out at least once a week.

The leg work out should be basic: one compound movement of four or five sets performing five to 12 reps using moderate weight. Recommended leg exercises include squats, leg extensions and leg curls.

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BUILD A STRONG HOUSE

If the foundation is weak, your bench will suffer. But if the foundation is solid, it can withstand great pressure. Use these principals to strengthen your foundation and increase your raw bench. Train hard! PM