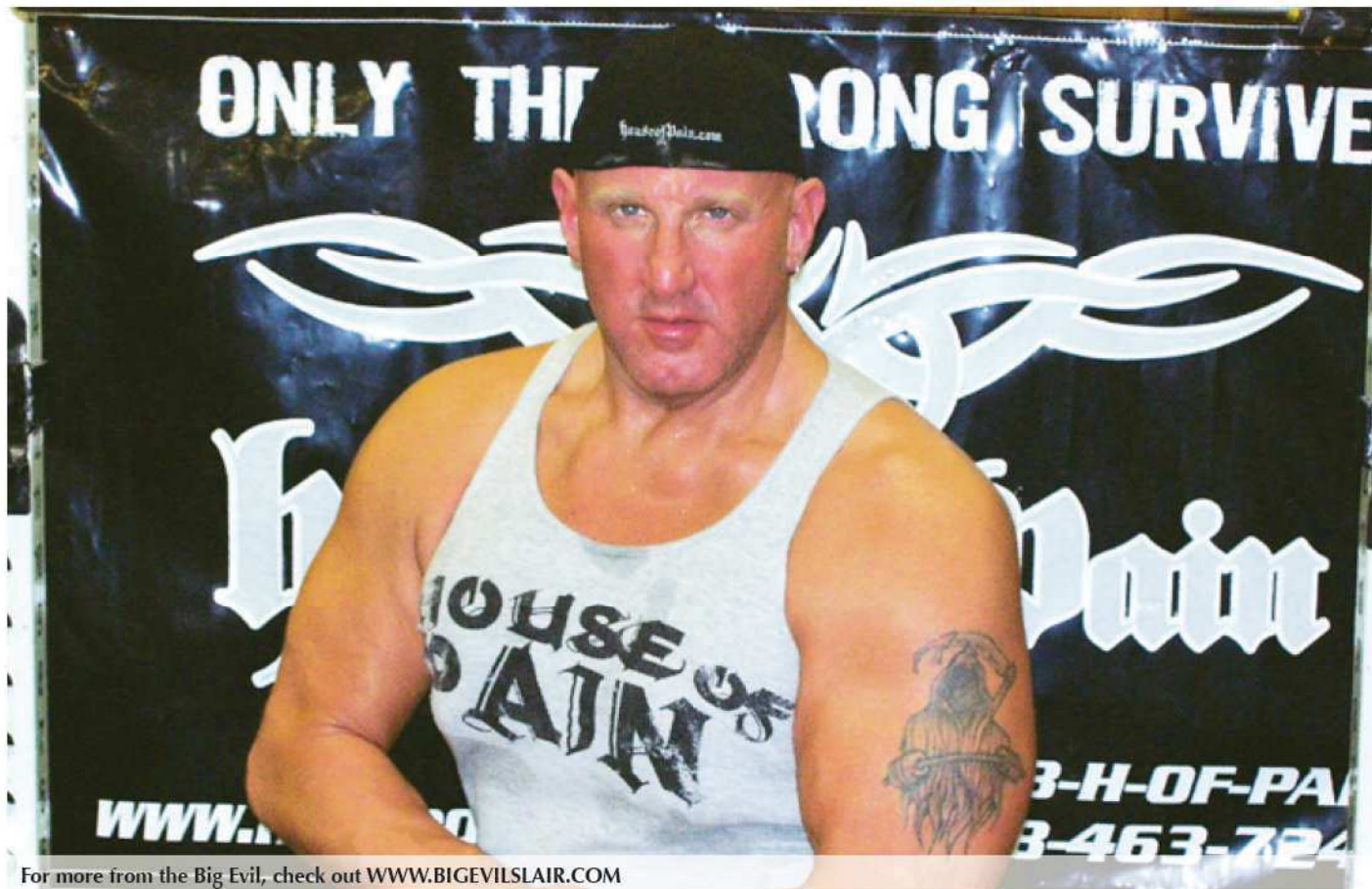


MAXIMIZING YOUR ARCH FOR BENCH PRESS SUPREMACY

as told to Powerlifting USA by Jamie Harris, aka. Big Evil » www.bigevilslair.com



For more from the Big Evil, check out WWW.BIGEVILSLAIR.COM

Greetings, ironheads, and welcome to another installment of *Big Evil's Lair*. This month the Big Evil is going to cover a topic that we touched on in past articles. The arch in the bench press is often talked about and also often misunderstood. A great arch will considerably shorten the distance the bar has to travel to your chest. An increased arch can also even out shortcomings a lifter has bio-mechanically, such as having long arms. There is no question it would be to a lifter's advantage to really work on increasing their arching ability.

The Big Evil says the arch is broken up into two parts. The first part is increasing the strength of your upper back (traps, rear delts, lats). The Big Evil has covered this in past articles. The stronger and thicker these muscles are, the more pushing power and stability you will have at the bottom end of your press. The second part of the arch lies in your erector, glutes, abdominals, hip flexors and hamstring

muscles. Of course, it is important to strengthen these muscles to increase your arch, but more importantly the Big Evil says flexibility in these muscles is the most important factor.

The Big Evil has heard other world class bench pressers say that the arch in your lower back isn't important, but only the arch in your upper back is. **WRONG!** Although the upper back arch is the most important, the lower back arch is not far behind. The Big Evil says you should work both parts equally to build a really great flexible but sturdy arch. At 5-foot-11-inches and 360 pounds you would think that the Big Evil had awesome leverages for bench pressing. Although I was very thick, along with having a big stomach, the Big Evil had relatively long arms. This made the Big Evil really work hard on creating an arch that would cut down my bench press stroke. I got news for you guys, I don't want to sound like Richard Simmons, but to really improve your arch the Big Evil says you

are going to have to stretch. The Big Evil has put together a program that he used before every bench press workout and before every meet. So give yourself about twenty minutes before your first warm-up to stretch properly. This is also a great time to put your headset on and focus on the workout before you (or your meet attempts). This should be a relaxing experience with a lot of breathing in your nose and out your mouth to enhance concentration as well as getting warmed up. Also, recruit one of your minions to help you stretch, as some of the exercises require some help from an assistant. Also, before you get started, rub Icy Hot on your lower back and hamstrings, then cover up with sweats to lock the heat in. Alright, are you ready to increase your arch like you never thought possible? Here is the exact routine the Big Evil used for years while he set the powerlifting world on fire with legendary bench presses. Very simplistic, yet effective. Read on and prosper...

MAXIMIZING YOUR ARCH »

HURDLER STRETCH: This is a very simple stretch where you will sit on the floor with one leg extended straight out in front of you and the other leg "hurdled" behind you with the inside of your knee and ankle touching the floor. The first part of the stretch has you reaching forward trying to touch your toes with your fingers while you are keeping your leg straight. This really stretches out the hamstrings. After you hold that for a ten count, lie back on the floor as your other leg is hurdled behind you and try to lay your back flat on the floor while you are keeping your knee flat to the floor as well. As you will see, at first it will be hard to keep your knee down while you try to lay back. Take your time and breathe and relax. Little by little your ability to stretch and relax will increase. This part will stretch your quads, hip flexors and your hamstrings. Now switch legs and repeat the same thing on the other side. The Big Evil says to hold each position for a ten count, then release. Your training partner can be



The Big Evil during his days as the "King of the Bench"

a big help in lightly pushing you in these stretch positions and helping you keep your form. It would be wise to let your spotter lightly start to stretch you and as you get to your limit stretching point make them aware of it and tread lightly on the limits of the stretch. When you hold the stretch, concentrate on the breathing—it will help alleviate the anxiety and discomfort of the stretch.

THE BIG EVIL LOWER BACK STRETCH: Everyone has an exercise named after them, so the hell with it. Now I have one too! Start by lying on your back. Now have your spotter stand at the top of your head. (No, not on your head, you big oaf!) Now bring your legs over your head and have your spotter hold your ankles and try to get your toes to touch the ground. **WARNING!** You need to be very careful in this position and you need to make cues with your spotter to signal when you have stretched far enough and then hold the stretch. This stretch is very uncomfortable and causes a lot of anxiety because you are in a very vulnerable position with your legs over your head. Remember to breathe and relax and really concentrate on the stretch. This stretch concentrates on the lower back (erector muscles) and believe it or not stretches out your neck also.

TORSO TWIST: This stretch has you again lying on your back. Take your right leg and rotate your lower body as you try and touch your right leg to your left extended hand. This is pretty much a torso stretch which will stretch your erectors along with your abdominal and oblique muscles. Now switch and stretch your other side the same way. Again, have your spotter lightly push down as you stretch, being careful not to over stretch you. The Big Evil says by now you should be good and warm and flexible. The last exercise we are going to do is done right on the bench itself. Let's get to it.

PRACTICING YOUR ARCH: Let's start with an empty bar so we can concentrate on form. The Big Evil says to lie on the bench and get your

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grip placement first. This is very important, and remember, once you grab hold of the bar do not let it go until your lift is completed. Now squeeze your lat, trap and rear delt muscles together; now walk your butt up the bench and try to place it as close as you can to your lat muscles. The distance between your butt and lats will improve in time as your flexibility increases. The Big Evil says now to tuck your legs on the side of the bench with the inside of your thighs running up the outside end of the bench pad. Now take a deep lung full of air and hold it, then bring the bar down right under your rib cage, through this whole motion staying tight. After some practice you will become better at arching and you will be able to hold the arch tighter and deeper. Remember, practice, practice, practice! With your new stretching ability you will already see the value of stretching right before you bench press. Eventually, after you feel comfortable, you can start adding weight progressively at your comfort level. Remember, the Big Evil says form is the most important factor before adding weight on the bar.

SOME OTHER POINTS ABOUT ARCHING: A few things we need to consider here. The Big Evil has heard from some lifters that arching is trickery to help cheat to increase your bench press, when in fact it's flexibility and using everything to your advantage inside the rules to win. So there! The Big Evil said it, so now it is so. Let's talk about bench height first because it plays an important role when building your arch. One nice thing about benches today is that it seems the Forza bench is an awesome bench that is used universally in gyms and, more importantly, meets across the world. The measure of a Forza bench from the top of the pad to the floor is 17.5 inches, which is a higher bench, but well within the boundaries of being officially accepted in all federations. This way when you use a Forza bench there are no surprises on meet day. If you can afford one, pick one up on their site at www.forzastrength.com. The Big Evil will tell you a higher bench is what you want for a big bench press!

Back in the day when the Big Evil was on top, there was no consistent bench out there that was being used in big meets. The benches could range from 3 to 4 inches difference in height which can spell disaster on meet day. Thank goodness for modern day progression. The lower the bench is, the tighter and more flexible your arch will have to be. It is always good to be prepared for whatever unexpected road block comes up on meet day. The Big Evil says to build your arch and watch your bench press numbers go through the roof. Until next month, God bless, and *Believe to Achieve!* «

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