

I'm sure that most of you have read the numerous training articles written by Louie Simmons. A good number of you must be questioning the validity of some of his seemingly off-beat theories. Let me simply say this - Louie's training concepts have added 95 lbs. to my top bench in the last 38 months. Some of you may remember the article I wrote two years ago ('Not So Basic Benching', February 1992 PL USA) regarding the benching-by-percents program and how it had boosted my bench from 310 at 210 bodyweight in October 1990 to 360 at 204 in December 1991. Since then, the bench has steadily improved, with a 365 at 213 in January 1992, 375 at 216 in February 1993, 380 at 195 and 385 at 202 (both done at sanctioned meets during October 1993) and 405 at 202 in December 1993. The program has worked even better for my training partners, with one lifter moving from a 240 bench at 255 bodyweight to 400 at 280 in only 11 months, and two-time APF Teen National champ Dale Benton putting 55 lbs. on his bench in the last 16 months (and it is important to note that Dale is not built to bench, with extremely long arms and a short torso).

Needless to say, you don't have to sell us on Louie's training theories (or, should I say, training facts). While my previous article gave a thumbnail sketch of the routine, I think it's important to lay out the routine in an easy-to-understand manner so that you can use it, too. So, here it is:

MONDAY - (1)- BENCH PRESSES BY PERCENTS - take 60 - 72% of your 1 rep max as achieved with a bench shirt - after warm-ups, do 8 sets of 3 reps with the 60 - 72% - use 3 to 5 grips, your contest grip and 2 to 4 that are narrower - we use a 16", 20", 24", 28" and 32" grip - our contest grip is 32" - alternate the grip on each set - rest 1 to 2 minutes between sets - no more! - push the weight at full speed, using a touch and go style - never use a bench shirt in training except to try a new shirt out - max out every 4 to 5 weeks, using your weakest grip - we use a thumbless grip at 16", 20" and 24"

(2)- PAUL DICKS MODIFIED BENCHES - refer to Louie's Bench Press Secrets video for correct performance - we use an 18" thumbless grip, and work up to a heavy 5 rep set, followed by a heavy triple - hit the bar high on the chest, keeping elbows in. It is 25% press and 75% extension

(3)- LYING TRICEP EXTENSIONS TO THROAT w/STRAIGHT BAR - once again, refer to Louie's video - bring bar to throat, keeping elbows in and bending at elbow and at the shoulder - do 4 to 6 sets of 8 to 12 reps - the area of emphasis in this movement is the area around the elbow

(4)- FRONT PLATE RAISES - using a plate, sit on the edge of a bench and raise it up until the bottom of the plate is at eye level - do 2 to 4 sets of 20 to 25 reps

(5)- SIDE LATERAL RAISES - do 3 to 5 sets of 10 to 20 reps

THURSDAY - (1) PICK 1 OR 2

WORKOUT of the Month

Not So Basic Benching II - The Fine Points

as told to Powerlifting USA by Dave Caster



Louie Simmons' Bench Press Techniques have proven to work successfully over a long term training period, for author Dave Caster.

FAVORITE ASSISTANCE EXERCISES & USE FOR 3 WEEKS - we pick assistance movements that address absolute strength - favorite movements include: - very heavy lockouts in the power rack (2" to 3" lockout) - power rack benches at 4" and 7" off chest - close-grip incline benches worked to a heavy triple - decline benches worked to a heavy set of 5 to 8 reps - very heavy partial dips with weights - heavy dumbbell benches on a slight incline and decline for 2 sets of 10 to 15 reps - we pound the movement hard for 3 weeks, then switch to another

(2)- CHIN UPS OR LAT PULLDOWNS - we prefer chin ups, and do 5 to 15 sets of 5 reps - alternate grip each set - rest 1 to 2 minutes each set.

(3)- HAMMER CURLS - do 4 to 6 sets of 8 to 12 reps

As you can see, we do our explosive work on Mondays, as well as specific tricep and shoulder work. While the bench press weight may seem light, it is quite challenging to move the closer grips at a fast bar speed. Be sure to bring the weight down under control, touch gently and then push like hell. Explosive training doesn't mean to bounce the weight off your rib cage violently. We have found that 63-68% works best for us. Always be sure to calculate your training percentage from your current max. We also like to use a thumbless grip on our closer-grip sets, as we have found that the bar tracks differently, using more tricep and lat than with a thumb grip. While we all use a 32" grip in contests, we have found that pounding our weaker grips is what has given us our best gains. That is why most of our sets are done with the disadvantaged grip. If

you are a close-gripper, use wider grips in training and you will get the same effect. As Louie says, train what is weak and you will be strong.

On Thursdays, we pick one or two good assistance exercises that enhance absolute strength and hit them hard for 3 weeks, then switch. Our current favorites are power rack benches at different levels and decline benches. We always shoot to hit a personal rep or poundage record in each assistance exercise. With rack work, we keep track of max singles at the different heights and grips, and with declines and inclines we try to hit rep P.R.s with a given weight. We follow up our assistance work with chin-ups, using various grips, and hammer curls. We absolutely love chin-ups, working them with very rapid 5 rep sets. We basically keep doing sets until we can't pull 5 good reps anymore. You fat guys can substitute lat pulldowns.

For you bench press specialists out there, you may want to add a third day (Saturday) and do your second assistance movement then. You can perform Monday's and Thursday's workout as scheduled, picking one assistance movement on Thursday (example-power rack benches) and doing a second assistance movement on Saturday all by itself (example-decline benches). This makes for very short and sweet workouts on Thursday and Saturday. Try this out if you have the time to spare. We have found that workouts exceeding 1 hour are less productive, so this also helps us fit our workouts into our 1 hour time parameter.

Please make note of the fact that we use this format year-round. This is not

some quickie gimmick routine used to bust you out of some training doldrum. When preparing for a meet, we do not drop any assistance exercises at all. The only change we make is that we will switch our training days from Monday and Thursday to Sunday and Wednesday during the last week so as to provide an extra day of recovery from the assistance day, and we will often increase the number of percentage bench press sets as we close in on a meet, increasing total tonnage as the big day approaches. That is, at four weeks out, 8 sets of 3 reps are done in the bench. At 3 weeks out, we go to 9 sets of 3. At 2 weeks out, 10 sets of 3 are done, and at 1 week out, we do 11 sets of 3. We also rotate various different tricep and shoulder movements in from time to time. I have listed our favorites in the aforementioned routine. I highly suggest that you check out Louie's Bench Press Secrets video for other tidbits.

Keep in mind that each lifter has strong points and weak points unique to him or herself. Be that as it may, you will find that this routine will work for anyone. My training partners and myself run the broad spectrum of age groups, experience levels and body types, and this routine has yet to fail any of us. It is also important to note that we are all drug free, in case you were wondering if our gains were due to some exogenous hormonal boost. The better you understand your own personal weaknesses, the better prepared you will be to make wise selections as to what assistance exercises you should incorporate.

That's it! If you train your weaker grips hard (going wide if you're a close-gripper and close if you're a wide-gripper), practice compensatory acceleration on all pressing movements, lean on your triceps, wisely choose assistance exercises that produce absolute strength and stay away from the bench shirts until meet time, your bench will go nowhere but up. One last word about bench shirts - if you insist on using a shirt on a regular basis to "keep the groove", you can hit some singles prior to your assistance training on Thursday or Saturday if it makes you feel better. I personally think this is a waste of time. When I used a bench shirt regularly, I could bench 310. Now I do 405. You may also want to try various brands of shirts to find out which is most compatible with your groove. You will find a great difference if you pick and choose.

I hope I've covered all the critical points. Please forward any inquiries you may have regarding any undiscussed matters to: Dave Caster, 123 Centennial Lane, Hilton, New York 14468. Please be sure to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope so I can get the info back to you with no delay.

If you end up making big gains from this routine, don't thank me, thank Louie Simmons. Check out his videos and read his articles with a discerning mind, then go to the gym and cut loose on your training like you never have before. I promise you that you will not be sorry. God Bless you all.