

Of the three lifts, the bench is certainly the most popular, but at the same time it is a major source of frustration for many lifters. To overcome their frustration, which is usually a result of lack of progress, most seek out a new routine from a successful bench or in an article from a magazine like *PL USA*. In many cases, this could prove to be the answer, but others will continue to experience problems. Their difficulties may not be caused by an ineffective routine, but by a flaw in benching technique or training practices. Let's examine a few possible flaws.

One possible flaw could be an uneven press. The rules state that the

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Bench Press Flaws as told by DOUG DANIELS



Great Bench Pressers...utilize feedback from various sources on their technique in the lift in order to correct any flaws.

bar must be locked out evenly in order to be considered a good lift. Some benchers press unevenly from the chest, yet still manage to lock out at the top to the judges' satisfaction, but in doing so, they don't get maximum power into the press. One arm may start out quicker than the other or one arm may press the bar up crooked, that is, the bar does not travel up perpendicularly to the body. One side of the bar may drift more towards the bench's head, while the other will tilt towards the direction of his feet. This means that one arm is not pressing it's half of the weight and if not corrected, it will continue to get stronger at a faster rate than the lagging arm, compounding the problem.

The problem is that many benchers aren't even aware that they are pushing uneven or crooked, let alone know how to resolve the problem. An aware training partner should tell you have this problem. Another way to identify uneven pressing is to tighten the collars on the bar so there is a small amount of play in the plates. Of course, in this case, spotters should be extra careful. Before the set, press the plates inward, flush with the inner sleeve. After the set, look at the bar. Are the plates still

flush against the sleeve? If not, this indicates that you're pressing unevenly. The side that is off, along with the opinions of your now observant training partners, will indicate which, if any side, is the problem.

The solution requires patience. I suggest dropping your weights down to a level where you can press evenly and gradually re-increasing the weights used while pressing evenly. If during your set, the bar starts to come up uneven, stop the set right there! After breaking my left arm some years ago, I couldn't lift a fraction of what I used to with it. An instructor suggested this a 'stop when you get uneven' approach and my strength evened out very quickly. You may also have to examine yourself to see why this may be happening. Perhaps it could be an injury on one side, or you're laying on the bench crooked, or you shift to one side during the actual press. Here again, a training partner can help. Some dumbbell work could help too, as you are forced to lift the same weight with each arm. I'm not a fan of using dumbbells of different weights for each arm, as we are striving for balance. Concentrate on pushing against the center of the bar instead

of any one arm or side.

Another flaw in the bench I have noticed is bending of the wrists back during the descent of the bar to the chest. By bending the wrists back, you put the bar out of the line of power from the arms, shoulders and chest. Try bending your wrist back and pressing against a wall with the area of your hand just below the base of the fingers. Now try it by pressing with the area nearer the base of the palm, in line with your forearm and shoulder. You'll notice a greater feeling of power and less wrist strain. Again, the benchers must be made aware that he does this. Once that is done, half the battle is won. Start with lighter weights and work up gradually, paying extra attention to keeping the wrist straight and the bar lower in the hand. Some lifters use a thumbless grip to achieve this, but be aware that with a thumbless grip, the bar is more susceptible to rolling out of the hand and on you. Wrist wraps may help, but the wrist can still bend back if you don't concentrate.

Many benchers use an arch. Some start the lift with a high, tight arch, but as the bar nears the chest, the benchers relaxes his arch and loses his desired position, with a lower lift and

possibly injury as the result. Have your training partner watch your position throughout the lift. Stay tight!

More and more benchers use bench shirts every day and that's great, but some don't use them optimally. I recommend readjusting the shirt position before each attempt, as they may tend to get a little out of place after an attempt. The critical area to adjust is under the armpits. Before each attempt have your helpers pull the shirt out, then down under the armpits to get the best fit. Since the shirt should fit tight, you must pull out, then down to get the shirt to adjust. One trick I picked up from world record setter, Chris Confessore, is that before each attempt, he has his helpers pull his shirt down on the sides and tighten his lifting belt around it to keep it in place, and every little bit helps. Chris uses a light belt for this.

If you're having problems getting your bench moving or just want to check out your bench form, give some of my observations a quick once-over. Remember that though a good routine is critical in keeping your bench going up, there are other factors you can control with the help of observant training partners and concentration. You can use a video camera to help detect flaws in your bench in case you don't have an experienced training partner. The most important thing is to become aware of any flaw in your technique or training, then patiently address and correct it.

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