

After having returned from my second IPF Bench Press Worlds, I have done some thinking and it has become increasingly obvious to me that we as Americans are doing something wrong. It appears as if we are not making gains in our benches compared to the rest of the world. I know that some of the lifters in the U.S. may be putting up some bigger benches than those seen in Vaasa, Finland where the Bench Worlds were held, but you have to compare apples to apples. First of all, single ply polyester shirts are permitted. No denim or canvas or velcro, or double and triple ply shirts are allowed. Even repairs to shirts are carefully scrutinized. The IPF meet is also drug tested and full screen IOC tests are done.

Each month I read the articles in *Powerlifting USA* like the rest of you. I occasionally read the *Work-out of the Month* to see what routines are out there but unless you are seriously over training, I don't believe that you will make tremendous gains by following another lifter's program. Instead, I think that most lifters will make significant gains if they take the time to analyze their bench technique. I was very impressed with the Japanese team

the shirt from pulling up your arms. Pinching the shirt on the pec side will add resistance to the bar going to your chest. I have my local tailor do some alterations and I have "Titan Support Systems" do some also. You are probably best to go to the manufacturer so as not to jeopardize your warranty. Also make certain that your bench shirt doesn't throw you out of your groove. Bench shirts are designed differently and you should attempt to find a shirt that doesn't tend to pull you out of your groove.

I don't know of anyone who can bench more with their feet on the bench than they can with their feet on the floor. The next question is how to maximize your feet while you bench. As I've stated before, you must first have good shoes so that your feet will not move when you drive with them. I have never seen any one use as much leg drive as I do, although, one of my training partners is pretty close. I can usually tell how much leg drive a lifter is using by how much their body moves during sets of high reps. When I do sets of 8 repetitions, my feet drive me 4-6 inches back into the bench. You can position your feet out in front of you, or you can move them underneath. I have found the best shoes for gripping are either sandpaper or scuba shoes.

Over the next few months I will again attempt to increase the arch in my back. Anytime you can shorten the distance the bar travels, you will add pounds to your bench. You should firstly move your grip out to the maximum width. Before placing an object underneath your back to increase your arch, I would consult your physician or chiropractor. The arches that the Japanese lifters exhibited were unbelievable and when you watch them, you think, "If I only had to lift the bar 4 inches, I could do that much weight". The Japanese increase the diameter of the object under their backs until they reach their maximum arch.

When you increase your arch, you must then re-evaluate at what point the bar contacts your chest or abs. Again, you are trying to shorten the distance that the bar travels, so locate the highest point on your

TRAINING

THE BENCH PRESS: Putting All the Pieces Together as told to Powerlifting USA by Larry Miller

will not fit perfectly either. I remember trying on my bench shirt for Susumu Yoshida, the Japanese coach. With all my experience I thought the shirt fit well, but he informed me that I needed to take it in. Well, he was right, because when I took it in, I had trouble getting the bar to my chest. When you order your shirt from the manufacturer, make certain that the sleeve is long enough to fit within an inch of your elbow. You can alter a bench shirt from the elbow to the underarm by pinching off the seam and you can pinch it in the underarm area on the side closest to the pecs. Pinching the shirt along the triceps will keep

which finished second to Hungary this past year at the Bench Worlds. Some members of the Japanese team look like they have barely picked up a weight, but when it comes to technique, they are the kings of the hill. I want to start out by discussing our bench shirts. The one thing that irritates me the most is the fit of the bench press shirts. Think of your shirt as if it were your tuxedo or dress for your wedding. You go in, get sized, try the garment on and then the alterations begin. I have never heard of someone getting the perfect fitting tux or dress off the racks. Odds are, your bench shirt

the average bench presser into a world class bench presser. There is no substitute for hard work and intelligent weight training. When you think about it, a good fitting bench shirt should move the bar off your chest. For most individuals the problem is half way up, from the chest to lock out. Over the years, I've seen many articles, on power rack lockouts, board presses and floor presses and other exercises emphasizing the second half of the bench press. I've tried them all, but I never liked starting with the bar half way up my chest. I couldn't tell if I was in my groove or not. I have found the "Jump Stretch" rubber bands to be a fantastic tool for training the second half of the bench. By adding rubber bands, I can have 250 lbs. at my chest and lock out 450. The bands also develop explosive strength like nothing else.

It seems as though most athletes, no matter what the sport, will eventually get into a rut. The problem is how to get out of it. I usually know when I am doing something wrong because my shoulders will bother me. For me, I either like to go back and look at old video tapes of me benching and/or I will visualize the bench at night with my eyes closed before I go to bed. You can visualize yourself doing the lift over and over again as you lay in bed

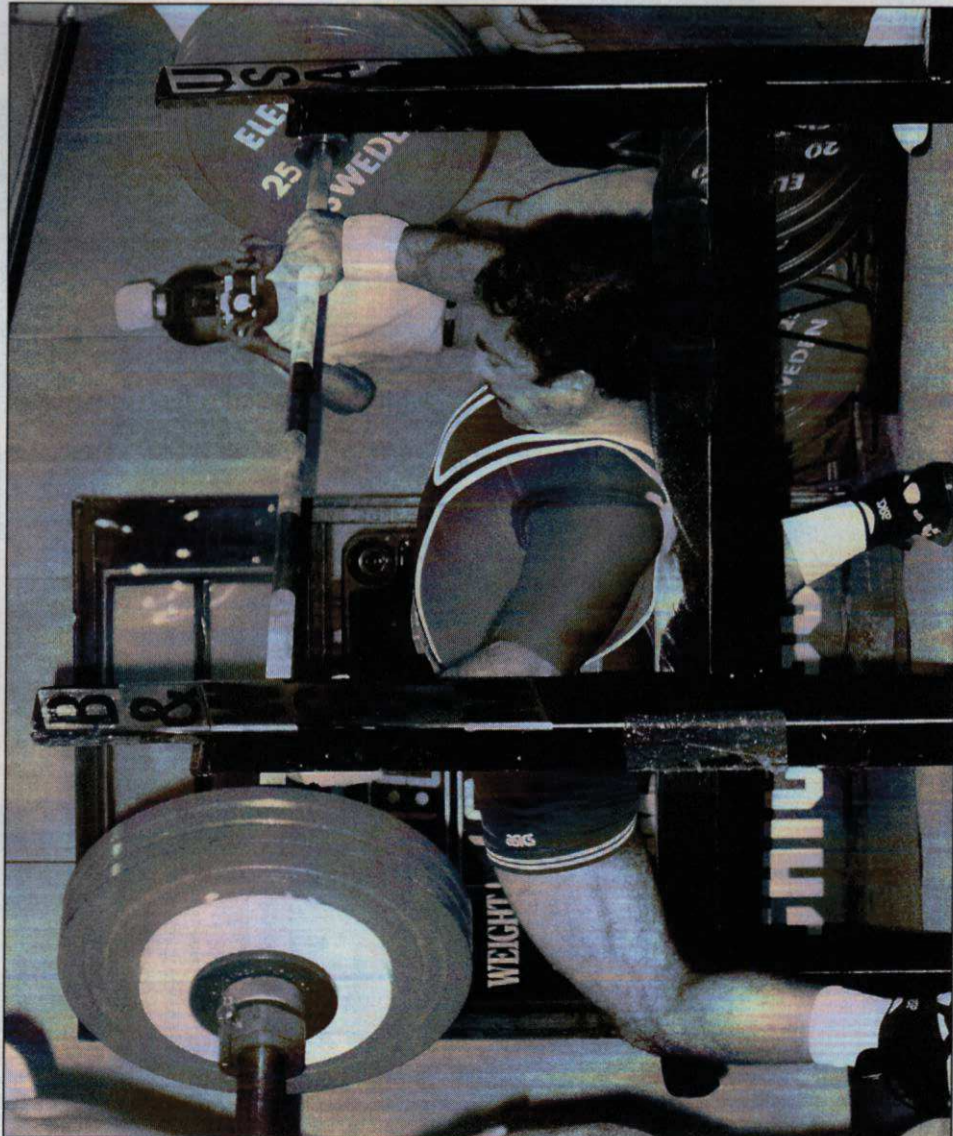
with your eyes shut. You should visualize every aspect of the bench including your set up, waiting for the signals, etc. I tell lifters that the most important part of the bench to focus on is where the bar contacts your body. Once you get the lift off and receive the start signal, all your energy should be focused on where to bring the bar down to your chest. Don't let the bench shirt pull you out of your groove. If you are an inch above or below your normal contact point, there is a good chance you will miss the lift.

Every top lifter has a program that works well for them. I am no different. Aside from the rubber bands, I have not changed my program much over the last 5 years. Most of my gains have come from changes in my technique. I would like to offer my opinion on intensity training and some assistance exercises. I like doing 3 sets of 8 reps after a good warm up. I do my heaviest set of 8 reps first which is usually between 355-365. I must then drop down to 340-355 for my second set of eight reps and then down to 330-340 for my third set. Each time I hit 8 reps in any set, I add five pounds the following week. This way I am always trying to achieve a PR on each set. Bench pressing 360 or so for 8 reps allows me to use a relatively heavy weight and

move it quickly. There is also less risk of injury. Over the years after recording thousands of workouts I was able to estimate my maximum bench based on my sets of eight repetitions. For those of you who will do three sets of the same weight for whatever number of repetitions, I don't think you're getting the maximum out of your workouts.

A great bench presser years ago told me to do decline bench presses. Since then, I have passed this along to a number of great benchers and they, in turn, have found it to be quite valuable. The decline bench allows you to use a heavier weight than you can on the flat bench. I have done 405 for 8-10 reps on the decline. I also like to do weighted dips and heavy close grip benches, but don't bring the hands too close together. I prefer doing exercises that allow me to go through a full range of motion.

Every lifter, no matter how good, needs to evaluate and re-evaluate their bench on a regular basis. You need to make adjustments and see where they take you. Whenever I go to a contest which features great lifters, I always watch and analyze what they are doing. I usually discuss things with them and decide if I should incorporate some of their ideas. Hopefully, I have given you some ideas worth considering.



There are many technical issues to consider when Larry "Dr. Bench Press" Miller presses up a competition rep.

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