

RAW BENCHING

as told to Powerlifting USA by Louie Simmons » 614.801.2060 » www.westside-barbell.com

I am asked all the time about how Westside trains for a strong raw bench. Westside lifters wear a bench shirt only once every month on max effort day. That means the other seven bench workouts a month are without a shirt. Of course, one cannot wear a shirt on speed-strength day, when the bar weight is only 40–45% of a 1 rep max. For example, a 500-pound raw bencher trains with 205 to 225 pounds with bands or chains for accommodating resistance.

Leading into a meet, Westside lifters train on the concept of a fast rate of force development. This is the first of the only three proven scientific methods of strength training. The dynamic method will not build maximal strength because it is impossible to attain maximal force in a fast movement when using an intermediate resistance (*Science and Practice of Strength Training, Zatsiorsky, 1995*). Another very important reason for the speed-strength day is the value of a high volume/moderate intensity day separated by 72 hours from max effort, which is low volume and maximum intensity.

On dynamic day, which is Saturday or Sunday at Westside, 9 sets of 3 reps are performed, concentrating on bar acceleration on both the eccentric and concentric phase. Westside lifters use on a rotating basis bands, chains, and occasionally weight releasers. We also rotate through an assortment of bars every 3 weeks.

These bars are the following:

- Football bar
- Bow bar
- 2 ½ inch cambered bar
- 3 ⅝ inch cambered bar
- T-Bar

Westside lifters sometimes train with the Bulldog squat bar, which is much thicker than an average bench bar. We also train with the Bulldog bench bar, which is a 50-pound bar and is much thicker and longer than a regular power bar.

SIX-WEEK TRAINING EXAMPLE OF A 570 LB. RAW BENCHER:

WEEK	WEIGHT	ACCOMODATING RESISTANCE TYPE	SETS	REPS	TOTAL # OF LIFTS
1	205 lb.	Mini Band, adds 85 lb.	9	3	27
2	225 lb.	Mini Band, adds 85 lb.	9	3	27
3	245 lb.	Mini Band, adds 85 lb.	9	3	27

NEW 3-WEEK WAVE BEGINS, CHANGING FROM MINI-BANDS TO MONSTER BANDS:

WEEK	WEIGHT	ACCOMODATING RESISTANCE TYPE	SETS	REPS	TOTAL # OF LIFTS
4	205 lb.	Monster, adds 125 lb.	9	3	27
5	225 lb.	Monster, adds 125 lb.	9	3	27
6	245 lb.	Monster, adds 125 lb.	9	3	27

After each 3-week wave we will change the training stimulus of the lift by either rotating to a different bar or using different accommodating resistance. Your grip should be close or moderately close to involve the triceps more. One must realize that when using a 2-inch cambered bow bar, a 2 ½-inch cambered bar, or, our favorite, a 3 ⅝-inch cambered bar, you must push an extra 2 to 3 ⅝ inches to lockout, in addition to the bar going lower than with a regular bar, which has a great benefit when using a regular power bar. Mike McDonald made the cambered bar quite popular before the Inzer bench shirt came out in 1985.



Mike MacDonald at the Whittier Open in 1980, where he was going for well over 600 without a bench shirt, in the 242 lb. class. Mike lifted all over the weight class spectrum from 181 to 242, and held official IPF World Records in multiple classes for an astonishing length of time. He was an early proponent of the Cambered Bench Press Bar and used to sell them through Powerlifting USA for many years. He was very careful not to overuse this training aid.

After the dynamic benches, 2 sets of dumbbells for very easy sets are done, changing the bench angle each workout. Next, triceps extensions with dumbbells or a barbell are done. We have found that using a 5-board or a 4-board press with a close grip and pressing relatively high on the chest will prevent you from heaving the bar using the chest and delts first; this should NEVER be done. Larry Pacifico told me, and all who would listen, that the triceps are 75% of the bench press.

Next, a strong upper back and lats must be developed. Westside likes dumbbell and barbell rowing, shrugs, low-pulley rows, lat pull-downs, chest-supported rows, etc. At least four workouts a week are done for the upper back. The last muscles trained are the rear and side delts plus hammer curls for large and strong arms. The small exercises are the product of the second scientific method of strength training, namely, the repetition method, also known as the "repeated effort method" (*Science and Practice of Strength Training, Zatsiorsky, 1995*). The repeated effort method should be used with small exercises; back, triceps, and thigh extensions come to mind. The squat, bench, or deadlift should not be used for high reps because the weakest muscle group is very susceptible to injury. Large exercises should be kept to low reps.

An example of this follows:

- 3 reps for benching
- 2 reps for squatting
- 1 rep for deadlifting

For high-rep sets, look at A. S. Prilepin's table in the book *Managing the Training of Weightlifters* (N. P. Laputin, V. G. Oleshko, 1982). You owe it to yourself to learn how many lifts at a certain percent of a 1-rep max should be lifted and how speed-strength benching should be held between 24 and 30 lifts and somewhat higher total volume can be done, but the intensity, or percent of a 1-rep max, must be maintained.

« RAW BENCHING

The number of lifts at a certain percentage must be maintained at all costs. The Soviets calculated weights at only 70% and above for speed and strength-speed workouts in the intensity zones of 70%, 80%, and 90% and above and the minimum, maximum, and optimal number of lifts, the optimal number being the most efficient to use. A second workout, 72 hours later, is performed. This workout is low-volume, high-intensity, with the goal being an all-time record. This workout has also been scientifically proven for nearly 50 years. It is called the maximal effort method. This is the greatest method for the purpose of lifting maximum weights. It recruits the most muscle units (*Science and Practice of Strength Training, Zatsiorsky, 1995*). As you see, I have used Zatsiorsky as a source of information for the methods Westside Barbell utilizes. As renowned as Zatsiorsky is, there are many sources that discuss their own methods, such as Yuri Verkoshansky. Westside started using these methods to further the progress of our lifters.

From research, we know that doing the same exercise for three weeks or longer at 90% will cause you to go backward, but at Westside we max out all year long. How? We rotate the barbell exercises each week, normally a full range lift one week and the following week a partial range of motion exercise. In no particular order here is a list of different bars, grips, lifts with chains, and lifts with bands to give you an idea of how we do this. When going to a competition, the last max effort bench on a Wednesday should be done 10 days out from the meet. I have witnessed lifters doing a max effort bench day on Sunday, and this doesn't work well. Seven days out is too late, and 14 days is too long. This has been well documented at Westside Barbell for several years.

It should be noted that when using some of the lifts below, make sure to rotate among 3 or 4 exercises before a meet:

- Floor press
- 2-Board press
- Incline press
- 200 lb. of band over bar
- 3 5/8-inch cambered bar
- Close grip for 6-rep max
- Floor press with 150 lb. of chains
- Max grip for 6 reps
- Football bar
- 3-Board press
- Lightened method in bands with chains
- Max dumbbell weight for 3 sets
- Decline press
- T-Bar max

This is just a sample list to give you a guide. Follow any order that works best for you. You will find that some of these lifts are builders and others are testers. What does this mean? It means that you will find that some exercises will make you stronger, while some can tell you your bench is, without doubt, stronger. This saves on mental stress. Westside is known for its lifters breaking several world records in shirts. But you must become stronger "raw" if you're going to break a shirt record. Remember to do as much triceps and upper-back work as you can handle each workout.

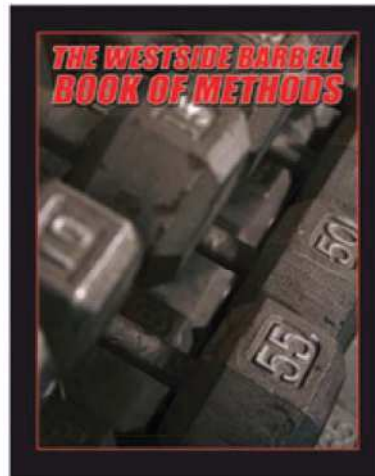
"RAW" RECORD BENCHES AT WESTSIDE BARBELL:

NAME	BENCH	WEIGHT CLASS
N. Winters	700 lb.	SHW
K. Patterson	625 lb.	275 lb.
G. Hallbert	625 lb.	235 lb.
P. Keys	600 lb.	290 lb.
J.L. Hollohan	600 lb.	290 lb.
G. Hallbert	550 lb.	198 lb.
A. Weisberger	285 lb.	148 lb.
L. Phelps	335 lb.	165 lb.

There are always mass contradictions about how strong Westside is "raw." We do train for a shirt, but that is because geared lifting is where the money is and where the rankings of the Top 100 are. «

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