

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING

Bench Press Training - Russian National Team Style as told to PL USA by Pavel Tsatsouline, Master of Sports

Eight out of the eleven gold medals at the IPF Men's Worlds went home beyond what used to be the Iron Curtain. Wouldn't you like to know how guys like Alexey Sivokon train?

Following is a bench press program designed by the Russian powerlifting mastermind Boris Sheyko. The man used to train the Kazakhstan team and today is the Chief Coach Men's Powerlifting Team Russia. Comrade Sheyko's credentials include Sivokon, Mor, and Podtinity. 'Nuff said.

Heavily influenced by R. Plukfelder and I. Abajiev, Sheyko believes in some serious volume. While Western PLers

have gradually cut back to one weekly BP workout, the Russian team coach insists on four to eight bench press sessions a week! The arms and shoulder girdle can recover a lot quicker than the legs and back, he says, so why not?!

Sheyko likes to quote the popular among Russian weightlifters in the fifties and sixties expression: "To press a lot, one must press a lot".

No, it is not a program just for bench specialists like Irina Lugovaya who owes it her European championship title. The following supersystem is every bit as effective for full meet lifters. So enjoy the pain, Comrade!

The matrix is designed for five BP workouts a week and is aimed at an advanced powerlifter, a KMS or an MS in Russian classification.

The cycle is divided into preparatory and competition periods. Here is how the prep period gets kicked off:

Preparatory Week 1 - Monday:
1. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (20). Tuesday: 1. Incline BP - 50% \times 6, 60% \times 5, 70% \times 4, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 2 (24). Wednesday: 1. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (20). Thursday: 1. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (20). Friday: 1. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (20). Saturday: 1. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (20). Sunday: 1. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (20). Total lifts per week: 201. Average intensity: 67.1%.

Note the number in brackets following a series; it is the total number of lifts in the series. The number before an exercise denotes its position in a training session. For example, on Monday you bench first, then do some SQ or DL drill and

bench again. On Friday you bench second after another lift.

More often than not Sheyko's changes, including IPF bench press world champions Alexey Sivokon and Fani Mukhamatyanov, press twice in one training session. There is a curious wrinkle: the two pressing series are always separated by squat or deadlift work.

Boris Sheyko points out how the Monday load was intense and the Wednesday load beats you up with high volume. Note, says the Russian team coach, even though the athlete has worked up to 80-85% 1RM, he has done many lighter lifts and therefore the average intensity is low. If you have a general idea of the Russian approach to strength program design, you should appreciate how this elegant and precise method relies heavily on the calculations of the volume expressed in a number of barbell lifts (NBL) in a given intensity zone or percentage of one rep max. According to Boris Sheyko, tracking



Alexei Vorobiev of Russia was able to win the 2000 IPF World Bench Press Championship 181 pound class title against USA's McCormick (left) and Cleri. (photograph by Hiro Isagawa)

these numbers, as well as the average training weight and total tonnage - or, if you are not up on the metric system, poundage - is mandatory. The Russian coach points out how helpful they are for serving the critical component of any strength training plan, variability, or rotation of heavy, medium, and light training sessions, both in a weekly and in a monthly cycle. Indeed, these calculations have been an integral part of Soviet weightlifting since 1958 when

In week three Sheyko gives his

Intensity Zones	Preparatory Period Load Distribution				Per Month
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	
50%	24	13	41	17	95
51-60%	31	21	54	20	126
61-70%	34	24	84	20	162
71-80%	61	61	61	27	210
81-90%	2	11	8	21	42
91-100%	-	-	-	-	-
NBL	152	130	240	92	614
Intensity	67.1%	71.5%	64.7%	67.2%	67.1%

lifters 240 barbell lifts at a 64.7% average intensity. The increased volume in the 65-75% intensity zone has necessitated a drop in intensity. But because there is no one right way to wave the load up and down the coach muses that he might as well have written up something like NBL 170/69.1%.

Note the brutal eighty-six rep Wednesday marathon. Sheyko warns that you will be a hurting unit and will have to have the grit to make it through. By the way, the above numbers are not the limit; Alexey Sivokon has done hundred twenty rep marathons while working up to 90% intensity! Naturally he cut back on intensity the week after.

Preparatory Week 4 - Monday:
2. BP - 50% \times 4, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (24). Tuesday: 2. Incline BP - 50% \times 5 (15) 3. Parallel bar dips - 6x5. Wednesday: 2. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (24). Thursday: 2. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (24). Friday: 2. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (24). Saturday: 2. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (24). Sunday: 2. BP - 50% \times 5, 60% \times 4, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (24). Total lifts per week: 125. Average intensity: 67.2%.

The table at right, which should find its way into your training log, illustrates variability of the Russian bench press program.

In the four to six week long competition period the Russian National Team says good-bye to marathons and reduces the reps to the maximum of three per set. NBL with warm-up weights of 50-70% goes down and the number of 75-95% lifts goes up.

Competition Week 1 - Monday:
2. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (30). Tuesday: 1. Incline BP - 50% \times 3 (15), Wednesday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (30). Thursday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (30). Friday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (30). Saturday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (30). Sunday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (30). Total lifts per week: 117. Average intensity: 71.6%.

Competition Week 2 - Monday:
1. BP - 55% \times 3, 65% \times 3, 75% \times 3, 85% \times 3, 95% \times 3 (20) 3. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (20). Wednesday: 1. PBN - 5x5 (25) 2. Parallel bar dips - 4x6. Total lifts per week: 240. Average intensity: 64.7%.



Alexey Sivokon of Kazakhstan winning the 2000 IPF World Bench Press crown. (photograph by Hiro Isagawa)

the intensity and the tonnage are tapered.

Competition Week 6 - Monday:
1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 2, 80% \times 2, 90% \times 1 (12). Tuesday: Rest. Wednesday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (12). Thursday: Rest. Friday: Rest. Saturday: Competition. Total lifts per week: 24. Average intensity: 61.7%.

Sheyko points out how the last session before the meet is similar to a pre-competition warm-up. (Note the table below)

If you compare the two tables you shall notice that in the competitive period the Russian coach cut back on the volume while increasing the intensity compared to the preparatory period. In the last two weeks of the competition cycle both the intensity and the tonnage take a dive to enable the athlete to recover well before the meet.

Nothing fancy-trendy about Sheyko's cycle; just the classic Matveyev's formula of progression from volume to intensity and finally the taper. You will not find any exotic assistance exercises in the Team Russia regimen either. "A golden rule is never to use more complex movements than necessary to achieve the desired result," as Bruce Lee once put it. "...To hit a worthy opponent with a complex movement is satisfying and shows one's mastery of technique; to hit the same opponent with a simple movement is a sign of greatness."

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Competition Week 4 - Monday:
2. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (24). Tuesday: Rest. Wednesday: 1. BP - 55% \times 3, 65% \times 3, 75% \times 3, 85% \times 3, 95% \times 3 (24). Friday: 2. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (27). Saturday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (27). Sunday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (27). Total lifts per week: 81. Average intensity: 71.8%.

The fourth week is the last week with substantial NBL and heavy, 80-90% 1RM, poundages. It is time to taper before the competition. Next, or fifth, week the athlete will cut back to three training days a week and throttle down on volume and intensity.

Competition Week 5 - Monday:
2. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (20). Tuesday: Rest. Wednesday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (13). Friday: 1. BP - 50% \times 3, 60% \times 3, 70% \times 3, 80% \times 3, 90% \times 3 (20). Saturday: Rest. Total lifts per week: 53. Average intensity: 67.7%.

In week five the lifting frequency drops to three times a week and both

Intensity Zones	Competition Period Load Distribution						Per Month
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	
50%	9	9	9	6	6	48	
51-60%	13	15	12	12	9	70	
61-70%	22	21	22	18	16	106	
71-80%	55	56	32	47	19	211	
81-90%	3	14	1	8	2	26	
91-100%	-	-	-	-	-	-	
NBL	102	115	79	91	53	464	
Intensity	71.6%	72.7%	68.8%	72.4%	67.7%	61.7%	