

TRAINING

BENCH PRESS TRAINING as told to Powerlifting USA by Louie Simmons

"If you havin' bench problems, I feel bad for you son. Westside got 99 problems, but a bench ain't one". With 15 men who bench 700 or more, I believe we have a system that proves it's the best.

Westside has two new bench stars: Jason Fry — 600 at 177 — who erased Fred Boldt's 597 at 181, and Westside's first over 800 bench — Mike Wolf, at 825. How they accomplished these big benches and who was responsible for their training are discussed below.

George Halbert, who has broken the all-time record no less than 11 times, designed and

switch time from eccentric to concentric. The grip is changed three times during the workout, no wider than little finger on the rings. Bands or chains are always used to accommodate resistance. Remember, there must be a correct weight at the chest and at lockout.

When bands are used, an overspeed eccentric phase occurs, providing more kinetic energy. Why is this important? Reversible muscle action is determined by the kinetic energy of the falling body, not its weight (mass) or velocity alone. (Refer to Zatsiorsky's "Science and Practice of Strength Training" and Westside's article in Powerlifting USA on Optimal Eccentrics.)

Jason has a background of explosive strength from gymnastics. Plyo pushups and, of course, all the pushups on the rings have provided a solid base to improve from. His GPP is extremely high in the upper body exercises from rigorous gymnastics as well. Not only is Jason explosive, but he has high muscular strength endurance. Speed strength work for benching is 9 sets of 3 reps with

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a fast eccentric and concentric phase plus a fast reverse time. The bar weight for Jason is 205 plus 120 pounds of chain, which deloads and reloads during each lift. A double-looped mini-band is used instead, periodically, for speed work. This provides an additional 45 pounds at the bottom and 85 pounds at the top.

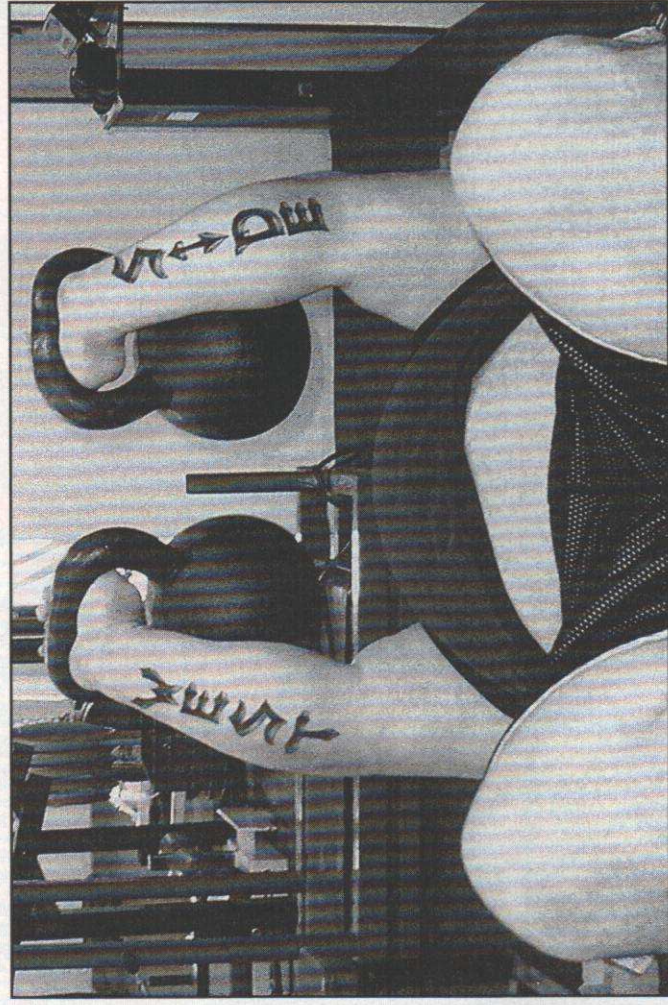
George has planned a rigorous triceps program that is constantly changing to prevent accommodation. Jason is very muscular, but is always looking to pile on more lats, upper back, triceps, delts, and forearms. With a 70 pound increase in 4 months of training at Westside, who knows what will happen, especially when he finds the shirt that works best for him. For max effort work, Jason does seated, incline, and decline presses, rack work, board work, and floor press. These exercises are performed with either chains, bands, or pure bar weight. Even isometric and very slow concentric work is done during the yearly plan.

It is very important to understand how proteins play a role when training in different intensity zones. While lifting very heavy weights for low (1-3) reps, a high rate of protein degradation occurs, keeping bodyweight down to a certain extent. When doing higher reps with lighter-weight low-intensity training, bodyweight can go up due to a lesser degree of protein degradation. Plan your yearly training accordingly to monitor body weight close to meet time.

How did George push Mike Wolf's bench from 585 to 825 in 9 months? First, even though Mike has participated in two MMA fights, his physical conditioning was rather low. His bodyweight ranges from 385 to 400 pounds. His weight was 401 when he made an 825 PR at Kenny Patterson's WPO bench qualifier in Columbus. George's first task was to get Mike in shape. Short rest periods were used in his workout.

After about 6 months, his GPP had improved. Mike was no doubt very strong, but lacked a high work capacity to achieve his lofty goals. Speed work was done with no more than 60 seconds between sets. George monitored the bar velocity to ensure that every rep was explosive but also never decelerated while pressing.

Next, Mike was placed on a regimen of max effort exercises. These were rotated every week. A large number of exercises were chosen to evaluate Mike's strengths, but most importantly his weaknesses. We found several. First, Mike had to build stronger lats. This enabled him to place



WESTSIDE shows up in the most unexpected places ... like the backside of Mike Wolf's forearms

the bar precisely on his chest where it needed to be. Mike had to train his lats at least three times a week. Dumbbells, barbells, and chest-supported rows were employed. Overhead band barbell rowing along with a lot of upper back work was utilized. The lat work helped to correct a second problem: bad bench form with and without a shirt.

Mike had trouble with floor presses because of his lack of tightness. Lying on the floor eliminates leg drive and bouncing the bar. Relying only on arm and lat tightness, Mike began to understand what being tight is and what proper form is. This has greatly reduced his chance of injury.

Being in a very small gym with 14 other 700+ benchers, Mike realized that a huge bench was possible if he followed a plan. Remember, without a plan, you plan to fail.

Next was to have Mike compete first at a money meet in Dayton, Ohio. After he missed his first two attempts with 700, I reminded him to relax and have fun. On his third, do or die, attempt, I saw him smile at his mother. A calm came over him, and he blasted up 700. Then on a fourth attempt, he smoked 750. Mike showed guts because ex-Westside Paul Keys made 765 on his third and Ohio's first 800 with 805 at 308. Congrats to Paul.

Two weeks later in Columbus, Westside got its first 800 plus, with a solid 825 bench. These two are Westside through and through. Just check out Mike's tattoos on his huge forearms.

What's next for Mike and Jason? Well, Jason has Fred Boldt to contend with. They say it's important to keep your friends close and your enemies closer. At Westside we're very close, but on the platform we're enemies. This keeps us honest. No one is a star at Westside, so we're never blinded by stardom.

As for Mike "Wolfman" Wolf, there's room for improvement in many areas. George said that Mike is just coming into his own. So watch out for the Wolfman on the prowl.

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George Halbert, Jason Fry (600 BP @ 177), Mike Wolf (825 BP @ SHW), and the One and Only Louie Simmons. (courtesy D. Simmons)