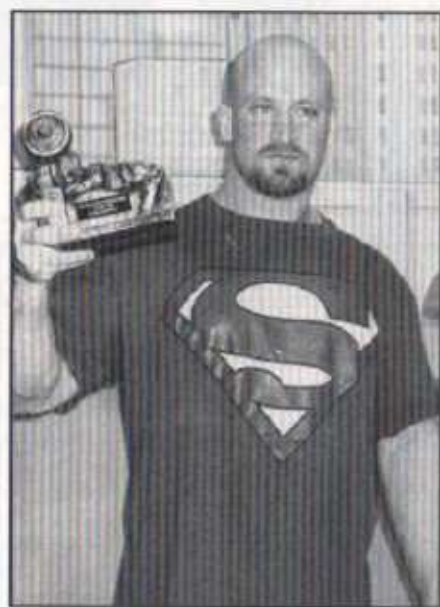


The biggest problem most benchers have today is finishing out the lockout. How many times have you seen others blast the weight off their chest only to fail at their lockout. So, what's the solution? When I first came to Westside Barbell this too was my dilemma. My first attempts to solve this problem were futile. I tried tricep extensions, tricep pushdowns, lockouts, board presses, etc., only to have very little progress and, mostly, just elbow tendinitis. My first breakthrough came with the introduction of floor chair presses. By doing these on my maxi-



George Halbert has set 10 all time world bench records in his career. (Ned Low)

mum effort day I started to see a little progress on my lockouts, however, I was still dissatisfied with my progress and then, finally, a huge breakthrough was made. I found by slightly modifying the board press exercise, my triceps were hit in a new way that had a great carryover to my lockout strength.

So, let's set up this altered board press. The first rule, and most important rule, to this exercise is **DRIVE YOUR ELBOWS INTO THE SIDE OF YOUR BODY AT ALL TIMES DURING THE LIFT**. This means on the descent and ascent of this lift, your top priority is driving your elbows in. Now, you will need enough boards that you will only be working the top 4 inches of your bench - this meant 5 boards to me, but may be more or less to you. You will be using a close grip. I go about an inch from the smooth part of the bar. You will probably need a handout and you will definitely need a good spot. Take the weight out of the rack and without breaking at the elbows, lower the bar as far towards your stomach as possible without dropping the weight out of your hands. As you lower the bar in this method you will feel the weight transfer right into your tricep and out of your chest and shoulders. Once you have reached this point, you will want to break at the elbows

The BENCH

Unlocking Your Lockout

as told to Powerlifting USA by George Halbert

and lower the bar to the boards as low on your stomach as possible. Now, drive the bar back up towards your feet. If you hit the groove right it will feel like it's on the verge of dropping out of your hands. Now, did you remember the first rule - **TO DRIVE YOUR ELBOWS INTO THE SIDE OF YOUR BODY THE WHOLE TIME**. You should only feel the weight in your triceps. If you feel it somewhere else, your form is incorrect. Try this exercise as a max effort and you will see great improvement. Now, let me warn you, as the weight increases on the bar your body will fight the correct form until you build the right muscles up. So, don't cheat, or it won't work. Sure, you will be able to do more weight when you cheat, but your lockout will not improve - so what's the point? Another tip is to always squeeze the bar as

hard as possible. This is how the 5 board press works, but it is only the beginning.

Once you have mastered this exercise, you will be ready for the next step. You should notice that your board press is much easier with a nice heave off of the boards. This heave is normal and should not be fought, however, it also greatly hinders total tricep strength because of momentum - so, what to do with this dilemma? The answer is bands. Start with a small percentage of bands and build up over time to as high an amount of bands as possible. These bands will give your triceps a workout like they've never seen and will send your lockout through the roof. However, these bands will once again make it hard to use correct form, until you build the right muscles up, so **DON'T CHEAT**. By performing this exercise over time, you will realize the secret to locking out with your arms is to keep your arms underneath the weight. This leads to the final modification of this exercise.

This modification should only be performed after the five board band press has been mastered. First, you will want to take a board out, and next you will want to go to a max grip, or at least a pinky finger on the ring. You

will want to use as great a percentage of bands as possible. Now, instead of driving the bar towards your feet, drive the bar straight up, however, you will want to squeeze out on the bar to lock it out. Also, instead of driving your elbows in, you will want to lock them in place at about 30-35 degrees angle to your body. This means - don't let them flare out, but keep them locked in place. This will reinforce the need to

keep your arms underneath the weight. At least this way, if you miss, it will be because your arms failed and not your technique. This is the maximum effort exercise that is now my favorite, however, I took small steps to get here and I did not start here. First, you must build your arms up and teach your body how to bench correctly.

This is not an easy road. I have seen some fail on this road because they were unable to perform the first step correctly and chose to cheat instead of lowering the weight. Sometimes, to go forward, you must take a step back and take the detour. Be diligent and persistent and you too can solve the lockout riddle. It only took me 14 years and Westside Barbell to solve the riddle. You can take the shortcut and save yourself a lot of time and save yourself from elbow tendinitis. Just remember - **DON'T CHEAT AND DRIVE YOUR ELBOWS IN** and next time you'll be able to grind that PR out.

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