

Most training articles and templates today are dedicated to shirt training. Since most of us compete in a bench shirt it only seems logical, but there are many gains to be made through training correctly for both the shirt and raw maxes. Here at Lexen, we train raw for much of our upper body development, but by using both environments (the shirt and raw training) you can actually make personal records in each.

By designing our training in this fashion (using gear and raw maxes to develop our bench), we have hit some impressive numbers in both our elite and amateur lifters.

Chuck Fought went from a 490 to a 535 raw and a 655 to a 715 in a shirt in 15 weeks. Personally, I went from a 570 to a 605 raw and 800 to an 815. Now, our newer lifters Nate Strong went from 335 to 365 raw and a shirted max went from 460 to 520. Melissa Henry went from 300 to 369 in a shirt, and veteran Danny Dague who is 49 years of age went from 405 to 440 raw and 515 to 565 in a shirt. Substantial progress for 3 months of work, wouldn't you agree?

So how do you get both your raw and shirted bench to come up? Well, for the main work you must rotate your training. We try to do shirt work every third week, sometimes more, depending on when the competition is. The real key is that we also rotate what portion of the lift gets concentrated on that work day. Usually, what we do is an exercise that hits the bottom portion of the lift, then an exercise that focuses on the middle of the lift, then an exercise that builds the top of the lift and rotate them in this fashion in a three week wave. We change bars, band tensions, chains, weight releasers, anything at our disposal.

For example:

- Week 1 (lower) Cambered bar bench real weight 1-RM
- Week 2 (middle) Double purple bench with fat bar (roughly 200 lb. of band)
- Week 3 (top) 3 board shirt work with normal bar narrow grip (work

TRAINING

BENCH TRAINING FOR GEAR & RAW

as told to PL USA by Matt Wenning M.S.



Matt Wenning has been increasing both his raw and shirted bench press (c. Dave Tate)

up to a max with real weight)

This would be a three week wave of max effort work to target different areas. This will allow heavy training for much longer periods of time since the emphasis is changed.

We always try to keep our hands in a little closer than competition grip for most of the training cycles to become tricep dominant in our pressing. We have about 25 different variations of work to pick and

choose from following this format.

Now, when meets are far away, usually more than 12 to 15 weeks, it is good to have a little extra volume on dumbbells and failure sets on your pressing exercises to promote hypertrophy and GPP. But 10-12 weeks out from a meet the training will become more severe, especially for the other lifts (squats and deadlifts), so that must come down (but not be ignored). This is where bench only guys will differ because of less overall body work. Remember the key is the total of the three lifts, so training must be a little more planned out for excess stress.

Assistance exercises must promote good form (which specific pressing reps will not do) and build up lagging muscle groups. I focus most of my energy on arms and lats for bench pressing, and only do enough pectoral work to keep them healthy especially close to meets. It is also a great idea to have exercises built in your cycle to promote joint integrity and stability. I do a ton of external rotator work at home before bed (mini workouts). As well as flexibility work to keep soreness and pulled muscles at bay.

In a 3-4 month period, there should be slight changes in your training. This variation will allow a longer term of growth. I usually go through phases where I will work on strength, then speed, then size, and most importantly health. By making a 5-10% change in my training periodically, my body always comes back stronger. I try to never ignore any one area, but just make one a little more important than another for a short time. This is a huge factor in consistent and long term progress.

This layout has allowed my bench to go from 700 to 815 shirted and 570 to 600 raw in less than 18 months and has also worked for many of the developing lifters. I also hold a great deal of value being able to do things raw and know that I can walk into any environment and hold my own with or without the equipment.