

Big Benching Takes Time

BY ADRIAN LARSEN



Everyone wants to bench more. Everyone. If they say they don't, they are lying. Benching has become the big staple in lifting. No one asks, "Hey bro, what is your knee extension?" They ask what you can bench. No matter if you're benching 200 or 700 lbs., everyone wants to

bench more.

From when I first started lifting to now, the goal is to put myself in the best position possible to bench more. If you asked me 10 years ago if I thought I could be the strongest raw bencher at 220 lbs., I would have told you probably not. Why? I don't have high-tech

equipment. I don't own thousands of dollars in bands, chains, boards, foam rollers or whatever else is needed. I go to a regular gym and lift with regular people just trying to get stronger. To top it off, if you haven't noticed, I do not get a ton of leg drive. Okay, that was a lie. I don't get any leg drive.

How is it possible to increase your bench or maybe break an all-time record? How is it possible to make decent jumps every year? How possible is it to reach a goal? Whether it is to bench 225 lbs. 10 times or to bench 405 lbs. for five reps. Following some very simple steps will help increase your bench no matter what level you're on.

I see this often when a person tries to make leaps and bounds on the bench in a short period of time. It has taken me years to get to where I am. Usually people think that working harder in the gym translates into bigger numbers. Not always. It is great to have a strong work ethic. In fact, something that drives me in the gym is to think of someone that could possibly be out-working me. That makes me train harder and stay focused, but that doesn't mean I overdo it.

Think about this: training hard with high intensity during every training session does equal gains, but that isn't all that it takes. You also have to put thought into your training. Ask yourself, Why I am doing certain things? Am I getting the most out of my training?

Follow the Alpha Project. Here is a break down of a common four-week outline of the Alpha Project.

Week 1

Front-load your training. Get in some good accessory work prior to benching. For instance, I will super-set some lat pulls with a rear delt exercise. I will also incorporate some band movements, like face pulls, along with some curls. This is a good way to warm up.

Bench press. Work up to benching three sets of two, without ever failing. This puts a little thought into your workout. Not failing at a lift takes time to judge and makes you leave your ego outside.

Dead-pin presses from the chest. Focus on firing that bar off your chest as fast as you can. Shirted benchers need to work on lockout work with boards, but raw benchers need to work on the opposite side of things. We need to work on firing the bar off our chest and create as much speed as possible to carry us to lockout.



Shoulder and triceps work. I try to stick around five sets of eight reps for both. I will hit shoulder raises along with a variety of triceps work that includes push downs, dips and incorporate dumbbells.

Week 2

Front-load your training.

Bench press. This week's benching is much different. It is designed to fix the trouble areas in form. When benching, your working sets should not be over 75 percent with a pyramid set of three reps, two reps and single

rep. Using a light weight will help you make adjustments in your form.

Push-ups, pull-ups and flies. Three or four sets of eight to 10 reps. Think of this workout as taking it easy to prepare for the next heavy week.

Once you get to week three, repeat week one. Flip flop these two weeks and you will see a dramatic change in your benching. This means you will only go heavy 26 times a year. Take every single workout seriously! Put in the effort and train as hard as possible — 26 times in one year isn't a lot. There isn't room for texting and play-



Adrian and Mark Bell having fun at the Sling Shot booth at the 2014 Arnold Fitness Expo

ing grab-ass. Part of understanding 26 weeks of heavy benching is making a sacrifice that you will be in there week in and week out trying to better yourself. That means taking care of your body days in advance with hydration, supplements and plenty of sleep.

Examine your weak areas on benching and make them your strong areas, but do this without neglecting your strong areas. Remember they are your strong areas for a reason. Continue to train them hard and do not neglect them. Train smart by evaluating movements and what you are expecting to get from doing those movements. Don't be the sheep and follow around someone and do something just because they do it. Understand why you are doing things and have an expectation of what you are getting from what you're doing. Expecting results is important.

Ask questions. I often get asked,

"How do stop the bar from stalling off my chest?" Once that question is answered, the very next question should be why. Why would I do that? How does that fix the problem? Understand what you're doing and why you're doing it. Do not just settle with an answer not fully understanding the concept.

Remember that doing a lot of volume is as hard on your body as doing heavy singles. You're not doing your body a favor by thinking you're taking it easy one week and doing high repetition work. Benchng high reps takes a toll on your body and can take as long to recover from high rep work as heavy benching can. It is fun to gauge your training and the hard work you have put in by doing some volume work or testing your eight or ten rep max. However, keep in mind on how your body reacts to that, along with your

expectation of what it is doing for you. Doing high repetition work doesn't get your body used to handling heavy weight and it doesn't make your one rep stronger.

There is no rep calculator out there that can judge where you should be. Your training dictates that. The one rep calculator is you on the platform. That is the only calculator that matters.

Lastly, it took me an entire year to increase my raw one rep bench from 545 to 585 lbs. I am happy with a 40 lbs. progress per year. Though, that will not be the case every year. I set myself up for the best chance of that by hard work and following the few things listed above. You can simply follow any program out there and have success, but you must be consistent and give what you expect out of the gym. Be an alpha; don't be a sheep. **PM**