

# THE GOLDEN RULES OF BENCH PRESSING RAW

as told to Powerlifting USA by Richard Allen Weil

My name says it all. I was born to bench raw. So what is it that makes a raw bencher great? I intend to answer that, and without insulting my good friend John Inzer. Let's go back to the beginning...

It was the summer of 1972 when my family moved to a suburb of Cincinnati called Finneytown. I was going to start 9th grade at a strange high school where I didn't know anyone. I had been a gymnast through the 8th grade and this new school did not have a gymnastics team. I was lost. The day we moved in, I met a neighbor who also moved in across the street the very same day. Little did I know that this kid, two years my senior, would end up changing my life. His name was Kyle Keller, one of eight kids, including four boys who were all top wrestling champions. I went over to Kyle's house that day and saw in his basement an amazing piece of equipment made of two-by-fours and a padded narrow bench. My first bench press. We lifted together that summer as he talked me into going out for wrestling. We bench pressed every day. It is amazing how at 13 you can get away with that. Kyle also threw in some curls. I thought that was stupid; I just wanted to bench. I weighed about 95 pounds and by the end of the summer I was benching my bodyweight plus 40.

One of Kyle's older brothers was wrestling in college. He and his buddy Danny would work out in the basement as well. They had 285 pounds total weight that could be put on the bar. I thought, no one needed that much weight, but to my amazement, Danny could lift that much.

When school started, Coach Bean, the wrestling coach, had us condition prior to the beginning of the season. We ran and worked out on the school's universal machine. One day after school, I was working out and the school's red-headed, red-necked, and mean as a snake bully, Jeff Statham, came up and slapped me on the back of the head saying, "Come on, Weil, work out harder." This was Jeff's way to encourage you to do your best. I told him not to touch me, so naturally he hit me again. Jeff outweighed me by at least 40 pounds, but I was always told if you stand up to a bully he will back down. So I punched him in the mouth. Just for the record, it is not true that bullies always back down. Jeff was shocked that this little guy drew blood. He came after me and punched me in the nose. The only three things that saved me from getting killed were: that the shock of me standing up to him had not worn off, I was still holding my ground, and the gym teacher, Mr. Harker, stepped in and broke it up. I still remember the look Mr. Harker gave me as he realized I had hit Jeff in the mouth. We did not get in trouble, but Jeff and I did become life-long friends. Jeff actually handed out a 580 exhibition lift that I did in Cincinnati. He still wants to know my secret. I have told him over and over that I do not have some special secret that made me a great bench presser. I have always believed this to be true, however, when Mike Lambert asked me to write about the Golden Rules of bench pressing raw, I realized it was time to tell everything I know about the subject. This is for Kyle and Jeff. Thanks for making me great.

I wrestled through high school and my bodyweight went up to 145 my senior year. I was pushing up over double bodyweight. As I worked out on the school's Universal machine I actually started doing assistance exercises. I did slow down to only benching three or four times per week. My first bench press competition was right after high school and I weighed 145. I got third in the meet with a 325. I never lost another bench competition after that.

I moved to Florida in 1980 and joined a gym where there were powerlifters. I was 165 and hit a 410 in competition. I looked up the World record at the time that was held by James Rouse at 479. I told everyone in the gym that I was going to break that record. They all laughed and rolled their eyes. I started powerlifting so that when I broke the record it would be recorded. I never wanted to be one of the great bench pressers who token squatted and token deadlifted. I wanted to win Nationals. I



Richard Weil with his buddy and competition, Ed Coan (right)

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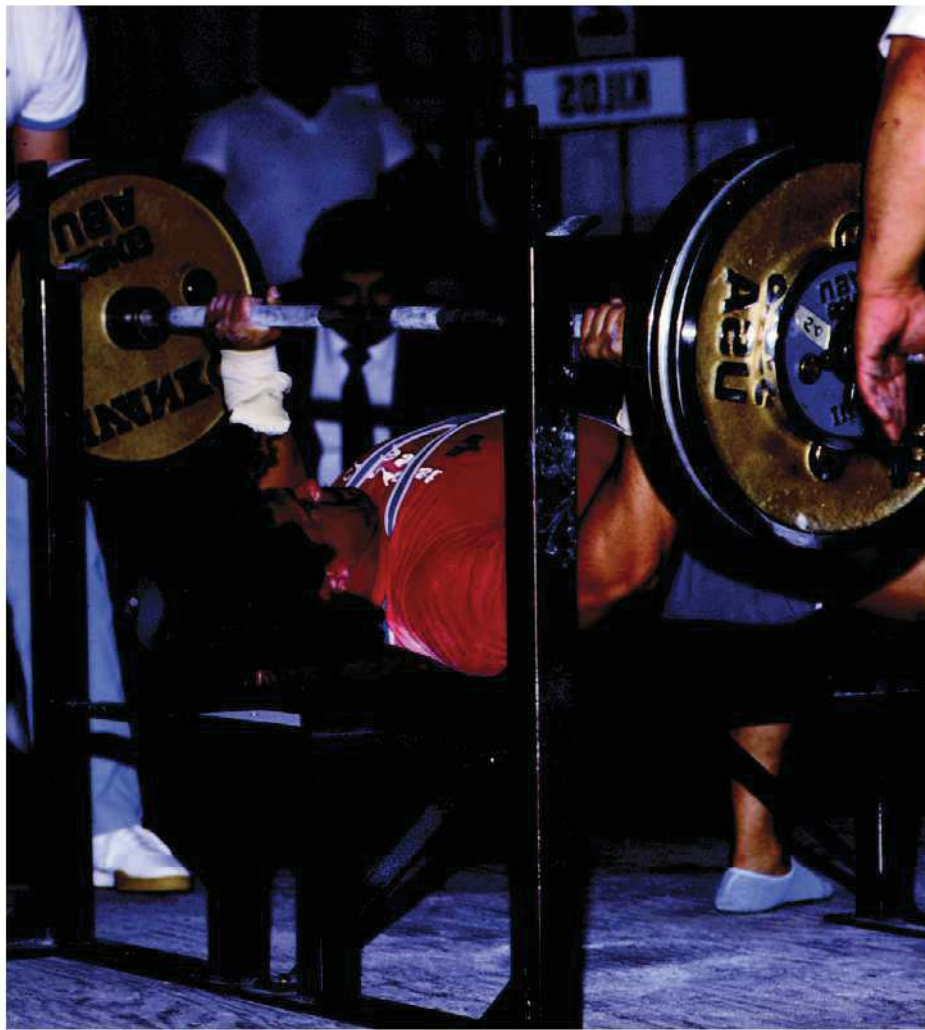
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Richard Allen Weil followed the Bench Press Golden Rules to put up world record weight RAW

finally did so at the YMCA Nationals in Columbus, Ohio, a few years later. I hit a 462 at the Junior Nationals that summer, missing the 485 record. I used a close grip and Larry Pacifico advised me to widen my grip. It was a year later that I listened to the great Mr. Pacifico, but only a month later that I broke the record with a close grip at the Seniors. The event started the night before as I fought to make weight. There was a kid who also was struggling to lose the last few pounds and all night we talked as we sat in the sauna. He told me he was a teenage national champ and he was going to hit some big numbers at his first Seniors the next day. I thought to myself, the heat is getting to this kid's brain. But the next day he hit his numbers—going nine for nine in the 181 class. His name was Ed Coan. Can you believe I doubted him? The meet was a playground for me. I was more like a stand-up comic than a powerlifter. I was wearing my wrestling singlet from high school, a Suncoast Gym tee-shirt, my socks did not match, a pair of deadlift slippers and no belt. This was back in the day of following yourself in competition if you were the last lifter. The bar only went up. The division was

comprised of 148, 165 and 181 pounds. I opened at the Seniors at 462. All of the other lifters were done. Even the immortal Ed Coan had finished benching in the 181 class. He was great, but I could still out-bench him. I made my opener easily after doubling it minutes before in the warm up room. This was a normal practice for me. I felt if I could double my opener in the warm up room, I would be mentally prepared for the platform. Bill Kazmaier wandered in as I finished warming up, just to check out the meet site for his performance the following day. He took a second look as I doubled the 462. When I came off of the bench after making my 462 opener, I told the platform manager I wanted the bar loaded to 485 for the world record. He told me I had a minute to pick my weight because I had to follow myself and that I had three minutes after that to make the lift. I jokingly told him I was in a hurry because I had to pee. They loaded the bar and I immediately laid down and broke my first raw world record. The platform manager made me stay by the bench so the international judges could check my equipment. They shrugged and said "good lift" as they saw I had no equipment on.

I met John Inzer at one of the national meets and immediately liked him. He told me he would be glad to give me one of his bench shirts to wear if I would give him the endorsement after breaking more records. I had him send me a shirt. I put it on and felt so weird I took it back off. I was destined to stay raw. I went to the 181 class and broke Mike Bridges 528 record with a 534. I had the wider grip as I had torn my pec and widened it to strengthen the tie in. I was amazed that Larry was right. How could I have ever questioned the Great One? My bench press of 556 at the Seniors in 1986 was a great lift. I was very proud, but had no idea the impact that lift would have 25 years later. I saw my name as number one in the Bench Press Hall of Fame. The highest over triple bodyweight lift done unequipped. I was also the heaviest lifter on the list. Staying raw gave me this great honor.

As I look at the poundages being pushed in the sport today, I find myself wondering what these lifters could have done raw. I am glad that I am not in competition anymore—I would look weird being the only one at the meet who can reach around to scratch his ass. Sorry Mike, it had to be said.

Let's look at what Mike had asked me to write about. The Golden Rules of bench pressing RAW.

⇒Never give up: I did not know Thomas Edison personally, but his quote is so true. Success only comes to those who never give up. I never doubted that I would be successful.

⇒Do not be greedy: Train hard, but give yourself time to improve. Recuperation is essential to growth. I was able to bench everyday when I was 13. When I was breaking records I benched once a week. Early on, I noticed the one thing most lifters did was take off the week before a meet so that they can rebuild 100%. I did that every week and had an amazing workout every time.

⇒Pace yourself: Set goals, but make them reasonable. Raw lifting takes time. To put 20 or 30 pounds on your personal best means patience. It is easy to put on equipment to add pounds to your lift. I never saw winning as being that important.

A quick story about winning... It was the Sub-Masters World Championships in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I was making a comeback to start breaking those world records. I was back down to 165 and hit a sub-masters world record lift of 462. I took second overall. The champion in my division was a fellow I did not know. He came up to me after winning to congratulate me on a great bench. He commented that the bench was always difficult for him. Twenty minutes later his wife found the two of us in the warm up room as I was helping him with his bench. Again, I was helping the world champion who just beat me with his bench. Winning is nice, but it is not everything.

Another quick story... I could not remember the guy's name that beat me at Worlds. So I called Doug Heath up in Columbus. I figure he might remember his name. The important part of this story is powerlifting brought me something valuable, life-long friends. I talk to Doug

Heath regularly and he never misses the opportunity to come down to Cincinnati when I am visiting my folks. We always go to the Cincinnati Zoo and the last visit was memorable. We were sitting there waiting for the Cheetah Run show to start and I mentioned John Inzer. I pulled out my cell phone and for some unknown reason I remembered his phone number from 25 years before. His office answered and took my message. John called me back a few days later and we got caught up. These kinds of friendships are what powerlifting gave me. I had the honor of knowing Chris Confessore as I helped him try to break my 181 record. When he finally did it, I called him up to congratulate him. I could not help but ask him if he was wearing a shirt. I cannot print what he called me. I love that guy. Anthony Conyers lives here in Tampa Bay near me. I sometimes go a few years without seeing him and then we run in to each other and it seems like yesterday we were chatting. There are so many more stories, but back to the Golden Rules.

Prepare well for each workout. This is a combination of physical and mental preparation. "Physical" means being well recuperated and nourished. Muscles need calories to perform as much as they need time to rebuild. "Mental" means the workout is a success if you make it a success in your mind prior to the first

rep. Missing a lift is data to be used for analysis, not a reason to beat yourself up. Great research scientists have many failed hypotheses before they hit upon a successful one. The failed research is used to formulate the successful ones. All positives.

⇒Work hard: There are a lot of phrases I do not like. A common one we hear every day is "Don't work too hard." I cringe when I hear this. What is wrong with working hard??? I love to work hard. I got where I am from working hard. I saw a quote once and I am sorry I do not know where it came from. It said that every brick in your empire should carry a drop of blood (HARD WORK) because when you achieve, each brick will speak about you.

⇒Experience will help you more than ego: I should have listened to Larry Pacifico. We can learn so much from our elders and those who are at least one step ahead of us. Never let your ego make your decisions.

⇒Think: Use your strongest muscle and work it out daily. I am referring to your brain. My mind broke all of the world records before my body did. Thinking is one of the greatest resources humans possess. Use it in every workout, analyzing the past workouts, and planning future workouts. Use it to set goals, modify goals and achieve goals. Knowledge development has no age, no limit.

⇒Have fun: When I talk to Doug Heath, we remember how much fun we had powerlifting. I think this is the number one golden rule of bench pressing raw. Keep it fun. Ed Coan was helping me at the YMCA Nationals where I broke three consecutive world records: 540, 545, and 551. He was aggravated with me as all his attempts to get me psyched up were met with me joking and clowning around. I was having fun and Ed could not understand how I was hitting world records without concentrating. I was well prepared and this was the fun part. I came off of the bench after hitting my third world record and looked at Mike Lambert, who was on the edge of the platform taking pictures. I asked him if he thought he got a good cover shot. He said he did and the next month's issue honored me with my only PL USA cover photo; a highlight of my career. The photo shows my mismatched socks, wrestling singlet, and deadlift slippers.

There are more golden rules. There are more fun stories. But I hope these few help you figure out your own reasons for training raw. I did it because it just seemed to be the right choice for me. We all have a part of our body that tells us when something is right or wrong. For me it is located in the pit of my stomach. I call it my Dorky Meter. Listening to it has always been my key to success. «