

WORKOUT of the Month

Rick Weil Bench Press



Rick Weil was a spectacularly successful bencher in the 165s and 181s back in the 1980s. Here is a reprise of his workout from the September 1985 edition of POWERLIFTING USA. (Lambert photo)

In this article I am assuming you have a 400 lb. bench press and are looking to maximize your potential in a ten week period. First of all, any lifter with a 400 lb. bench is definitely an experienced lifter. Therefore, I will assume your problem getting maximum gains might be a plateau, sticking point, or incorrect form. Heavy weight must be attacked with a positive attitude, yet with great preparation so as to minimize any chance of injury.

If you are having trouble handling heavy weight, then I recommend doing heavy negatives. After your bench workout assuming your last set is a single with 400, go on to 425-430 for a controlled negative rep - never more than 1 rep per set. 1 or 2 sets per workout is plenty. This will strengthen tendons and prepare you mentally for the day when you will be benching the heavier weight. The lighter the weight feels to you, the easier it is to concentrate on form. When I performed a 518 bench at the Mountaineer Open, I had previously done in training negatives with 570 and 600 lbs. controlled. Negatives also help the lifter who is stuck at a certain weight for a period of time or in other words, plateaued.

Sticking points come into play quite often with the experienced lifter. It can be very aggravating. There are four basic parts to the bench press, we will call them the

approach, the drive, the push, and the lock out. The approach is the part of the lift where you bring the bar down to your chest. This is important because done properly it sets up the rest of the lift for hitting the groove. Remember to stay very tight during the approach, do not relax at your chest. The negatives will help here.

When the clap is sounded, the drive part of the lift begins. Practice pause benching in the gym because good habits are hard to break as well as bad habits. Also, injury can come from sloppy form, so always train as if a judge is watching. If you are stuck at your chest, perhaps you are forgetting a very strong and important body part at your disposal - your BACK. Remember the

bench press is an upperbody exercise and your back is part of your upper body. Powerlifters generally have very strong lats, so why not use them? With 135 on the bar, practice using

A new concept in weight training instruction. A workout by workout, set by set, rep by rep workout plan, with exact training poundages specified over the entire span of a strength training cycle, laid out for you by a top Powerlifting authority. Each month, a different lift is analyzed. For those of different strength levels than the starting poundage specified, simply increase or decrease the training weights in direct proportion. For example, if your lift is 400, and a starting lift for the program is 500, multiply the training poundages by .8 (400 divided by 500); if your lift is 600, multiply the poundages specified by 1.2 (600 divided by 500)

your lats to drive the weight off of your chest. You do this by initiating a lat spread of sorts at the bottom of the lift. Trying is believing - it really works and with practice your lats will drive any weight off of your chest you would normally have been stuck with. Since powerlifters train their backs, only the lifters who strictly bench need to do special back exercises. I recommend doing lat pull downs and cable seated rows for building the muscles necessary for the drive part of the bench press. Those of you with strong backs need only to work the correct form, getting used to driving with the back.

The push is that part of the lift between the drive and the lockout. Momentum is obtained from the lats in the drive, then the front delts must take control. Front delts will move weight, so train them as a separate body part. Steep incline presses will isolate the front delt if the bar is kept in close to your face and driven back towards the uprights. Seated dumbbell presses are not only great for the delts, but also one of my favorite exercises. This is performed seated straight up driving the weight with palms forward. 3 sets of 5 reps on both of these exercises is plenty. Also, only train them once a week. That's right, once a week. I have trained this way for three years, each body part once a week and made maximum gains on every cycle. This type of training also keeps injury to a minimum.

Now we come to one of the most frustrating part of the bench press, the lockout. I have seen many lifters miss what appeared to be an

easy lift, right at the top. There are two reasons for missing a lift at lockout; fatigue, which can cause bad form, or not enough tricep strength. If your gym does not have a dip bar, tell the owner to get one. Weighted dips are the best exercise for lockout power available. Close grip benching puts too much strain on the wrists and hinders complete tricep movement. Doing weighted dips with heavy weight, however, will not guarantee a powerful lockout. Remember the other reason I stated for missing a lockout? Fatigue. I had pushed 3 sets of 3 reps with 285 lbs. in the weighted dips in training, yet I was having a lockout problem. After a lot of thought I realized my problem was not strength, but tricep fatigue. My triceps were pumping too fast. To correct this problem I dropped the weight on the bench after doing negatives, down to 405 and did reps until failure. By the time I could perform 10 easy reps, my sticking point was gone. Now, I am not saying you should drop to 405, but 80% of your maximum lift is a good place to start. For example the 400 lb. bench presser would start with 320 to 325 lbs. and try that for a week or two.

Here is a typical workout for the 400 lb. bencher, who is looking for a 430 lb. bench in a ten week time.

Remember to train only once a week, that is the secret to making 5 lb. jumps per week. Rest is very important as is diet, so keep all these things in mind during the 10 week period. You can do anything you set your mind to do. Never give up or say "I can't". Think positive and you will succeed.

WK	Bench Press warm up	Negatives	BP to failure	Incline Press	Seated Dumbbells	Bar Dips	Tricep + Pushdowns
1	330x5x3	none	320*	225x5x3	75x5x3	3x5-	3 sets*
2	335x5x3	none	320*	230x5x3	75x3x5	3x5-	3 sets*
3	340x5x3	none	320*	3x5-	3x5-	3x5-	3 sets*
4	350x3, 400x1	425	325*	3x5-	3x5-	3x5-	3 sets*
5	355x3, 405x1	430	330*	3x5-	3x5-	3x5-	3sets*
6	360x3, 410x1	435	330*	3x5-	3x5-	3x5-	3 sets*
7	365x3, 415x1	440	330*	3x5-	3x5-	3x5-	3sets*
8	370x3, 420x1	445	335*	3x5-	3x5-	3x5-	3 sets*
9	375x3, 425x1	450	335*	3x5-	3x5-	3x5-	3 sets*
10	380x3, 430x1						

* to failure. + with about 80-90 - with appropriate weight you can handle with good form