

# BIG BENCHING WITH JIMMY KOLB

BY JEFF ROBOT IRION

**How old are you and what are your best lifts?** I'm 23. My best competition lifts are a 903 squat, 903 bench in single-ply, a 700-lb. deadlift and a 2410 total.

**Where do you train and who is your coach?** I train at Iron Chamber Gym. The guy who I call my coach is actually the owner, Jeff Begue.

**What world records do you hold?** I have the all-time heaviest single-ply bench in the 242s with 903 lbs. That lift actually gave me two world records. I just set an RPS world record bench a week or two ago with 850 at 242. When I was a teenager I broke the IPF junior world record in the 220s with 636 (they didn't have a teen division at that time). When I was 20 years old I totaled 2,410 at 220 in the APF, which was the sixth highest all-time total at the time.

**What is your ultimate goal?** I want to bench 1,000 in a single-ply shirt. The current biggest single-ply bench is 942 by Mike Womack, which he did at SHW. I believe my 903 is the third biggest single-ply bench, behind Mike's 942 and Robert Vick's 909 and ahead of Tiny Meeker's 900.

**How is it that you hold numerous world records and have benched 903 lbs. in a single-ply shirt, no less, and yet no one knows who you are?** I'm not as well-known as guys like Kennelly, Mendelson or Donnie Thompson. But it's mainly because I don't promote myself like I probably should. MHP is trying to get me to do more of that.

**You've hit some big training lifts, including 1,100 off a two-board and doubles with 1,000 off a three-board and 900 off a one-board. Are you going to shock the world by beating Dave Hoff to become the first to bench 1,000 lbs. in a full meet?** Full power is something I really want to go after pretty soon. As far as benching 1,000, especially at my lighter body weight, it would be more realistic to do it in a bench-only meet. I would like to hit 900 in a full meet. I've come close (as a 242), but it just hasn't happened yet. I had a perfect meet when I hit that 2,410, but it hasn't happened again since then.

**So then are you a full-power guy or a bench-only guy?** I mainly compete bench only nowadays and have only done

two full power meets over the last three years, although full power is fun. But I do train all three lifts heavy year-round.

**Let's focus on the bench. Has benching always come easily to you and, if so, to what do you attribute this?** Very much so. The only bump in the road I've had is that something in my right shoulder is pinched right now and it's hindering my lockout, but it doesn't hurt. Benching has always come easily. I'm the most inflexible person ever, but I can arch big time on the bench. I have short arms and I take a full width grip and I know how to manipulate the gear to do what I want it to do.

**How often do you train the bench?** I shirt up every

Monday night and do my overload workouts. On Thursday night I'll do accessory work, stuff like raw top end work (two- and three-board presses, JM presses, dumbbell work), rotator cuff exercises, traction movements for my shoulders.

**What's your reason for doing these huge overloads?** That's something I've developed myself. I've tried different methods and training programs, and as I've progressed as a lifter and developed my own training style, that's been a constant in my training.

Every week I'm overloading in one way or another. If my goal is to bench 900, then I need to be handling 900-plus every workout. I kind of took that from Kennelly, he was one of my early inspirations.

**What kind of shirt do you wear?** In competition I have a single-ply Super Katana, stock, off the shelf. No extra scooping or reinforcement or anything like that. In training I use a double-ply Super Katana with grid stitch, which I've competed in on a couple occasions at a lighter body weight. I also have a triple ply Super Katana. That shirt is so radical that I use it for training purposes only. I've wet it down and tried to touch 1,000 but it just won't happen, so it's strictly an overload shirt.

**Why do you wear a single-ply bench shirt? Have you always competed in a single-ply shirt?** When I first started competing I used multi-ply. The first shirt I ever touched and competed in was a Karin's double denim. My first meet was a push-pull and I ended up benching 585 in that shirt at 220 and 18 years old. I only deadlifted 570, but at least it was raw!



My original mentor, Adam Hicks, had given me the shirt (it was one of his old ones). I owe a lot to Adam. When I first met him, he was the third youngest to bench 700, which he did at age 23. He told me that if I could bench in that shirt, I could bench in anything.

**And did that statement hold true?** Definitely. I did a lot of research when I was younger and getting into the gear. Everything said to start with a single-ply poly and progress to a denim when you're ready. But Adam just threw me into a denim right away, and I had no choice but to learn perfect technique. My bench went up 100 lbs. every year for three years, from 600 to 900 lbs.

**How often do you touch in training?** As often as possible. That's one thing I've found over my five years of shirted bench training: The more often I practice touching with weights, the better I do at the meet. Some training sessions are just for overload, but at least every other week I'm trying to get a weight to touch. For example, in my last workout I did three full range doubles with 800 lbs. in a single-ply shirt. I always wear a single-ply shirt when I want to bench full range.

**Let's talk more about shirts, Mr. Lord of the Plies. Why do you wear a double-ply shirt in training? And do you feel that it doesn't throw you off because it's the same model?** Exactly. The double- and triple-ply shirts have the same groove as the single-ply. So I train in those and save the single-ply shirts for the competitions. The drawbacks to single-ply shirts is that they wear out very quickly, so if I wore them all the time in training I wouldn't be able to use them in meets.

**Do you ever bench in your meet shirt in the gym?** If I feel as though I need to, I will. But I've taken a brand new, out-of-the-bag Katana, put it on at a meet and gotten a weight to touch.



Granted, I couldn't do that with a two-ply shirt. A multi-ply lifter needs to bench in his shirt, but for a single-ply lifter, I don't think so.

**How did you do in the double-ply Katana?** The most I ever benched was 900 lbs. in Iron Chamber's non-sanctioned meet. Before that the most I'd ever benched was 810 at 220, in the meet where I totaled 2,410.

**You've talked about manipulating the shirt. How do you do that?** I can make a single-ply shirt a 900-lb. shirt or a 700-lb. shirt by torquing the sleeves, pulling the neckline down and tweaking the back of the shirt. I can make it so that it takes a little weight to touch or a lot of weight. That's something you can do better with a single-ply shirt than a multi-ply shirt.

**How did your bench progress over the years?** When I was 18 I hit 585 at 220. When I turned 19 a few months later, I benched 700 and later 740 lbs. at 220. That was a big number to me because Louie Simmons had called me and told me how they had the heaviest bench ever by a teenager, 735 by

Mike Brown at SHW. (The record book shows my lift as 738, but it was really 740!) When I was 20 I hit my first 800-lb. bench in a bench-only meet, still at 220. I also benched 810 in a full meet. At 21 I benched 903, and that is still my heaviest bench in a meet to date.

**Why haven't you been able to beat your 903 bench?** After benching that 903 in February 2012, my outlook changed completely. The next month I wanted to bench 920, and then it was 950. I competed probably eight months that year. I tore myself down competing so often, and I bombed a few times and got in a rut. So that was kind of a wasted year because I wasn't patient enough to wait until I was ready. This year I've turned things around. I've got my own game plan and my weights are starting to come around. Once I get

this kink in my shoulder worked out and I can lock out weights with my right arm, a new PR will come. But in general, I just need to be patient. At this level, the PRs don't come as quickly as they used to.

**Do you train your raw bench much?** My rule is that I do not train raw full range. Every time I try to do it I get hurt in one way or another. I don't compete raw, so there's no reason to do it. I used to be able to hit 500 lbs. full-range, but now I won't hit anything over 405 full-range. Hitting 500 raw every week killed my tendons and shoulders. It hurt and it wasn't worth it.

**Give us three of your top secret tips for benching big.** One thing that comes in handy when wearing very tight gear, is having a great ability to be patient. The gear will slow the bar down, but you have to be patient and wait for it to touch in the right spot. If you can make a big weight touch in the right spot when the shirt is outrageously tight, you'll do well. Another thing is the constant overload. I've done that every single workout for three years straight,





and it's put 300 lbs. on my bench. Lastly, when you're stuck in a rut, people tell you to change things up: change your exercises, training days, rep schemes, etc. I applied that mentality to my bench shirts. For a while I was benching multi-ply and I stalled out, so I tried changing to single-ply. Even though they have the same groove, the shirts will feel different on your body and give you a different stimulus. So in addition to the other ways to change up your training, I change up my bench shirts.

**Let's talk briefly about full-power stuff. You bench in a single-ply shirt when you compete full power in multi-ply. Why not compete full-power in single-ply?** I'd really like to do a full-power single-ply meet, probably USPA or APF. I used to train at Blackstone's Gym, and the owner of that gym, John Blackstone, hosts one single-ply APF meet per year, so that's probably what I'd do.

**Why not go IPF?** I competed in the IPF on a few occasions a few years ago. The last USAPL meet was when I hit that

636. I lost my taste for that fed when I had to pay \$135 out of pocket so I could get drug tested in order to keep my world record. That really turned me off from competing with them ever again. I wish there were more federations like them, where there's an even playing field. I really think that would help the sport. And I have entered the amateur division a couple times recently so I could be drug tested. Even though I'm not at an amateur level, it's important to me to get tested. But I don't like the USAPL and I don't plan to compete there again.

**For your recent 903 squat at the Arnold Classic, why did you choose to not wear knee wraps?** I hate knee wraps! I used them when I was younger and hit my 2,410 total, including a 900 squat. But with the multi-ply gear being so temperamental and all the pressure from the weight, the added pain of the knee wraps is too much to handle. That sounds really sissy, but I find that it distracts me and ends up being a hindrance. Although I will use them from time to time when I'm squatting raw in training.

**Let's get back to the only lift people actually care about: the bench. I understand that you're getting married soon. How do you think that will affect your bench press?** It can only make it better! I've been with the same woman for three years, and in that time she's only missed one competition. She comes to the gym with me, she knows how to put my shirts on, she knows what I need in meets and training, and she's my camera girl. I'm very excited to get married to her, and it's only going to help.

**Is there anyone you'd like to thank?** I'd like to thank my wife and all of my family for their support. All of my training partners, past and present. It would be impossible to do it without them; they are relentless in helping me. Also, Titan Support Systems. They've sponsored me for quite a few years. Ken Anderson took me under his wing when I was 19 and has treated me very, very well. MHP picked me up about a year ago, and they've been great to me as well. Without my three main sponsors, a lot of this would not be possible. **PM**