

I FIRST BECAME AWARE OF MIKE AT A WABDL WORLD MEET IN 2009 WHERE I SAW HIM BENCH PRESS 942, WEIGHING ABOUT 340. IT LOOKED LIKE HE HAD "DUDE CLEAVAGE" UP TO HIS CHIN AND AFTER BUYING A TRAINING VIDEO FROM HIM, I FOUND THAT HE HAD MANY UNIQUE IDEAS LIKE PULLING THE PECS UP AND TWEAKING A BENCH SHIRT FOR OPTIMAL RESULTS. I WAS IN DALLAS AT THE TIME OF THIS INTERVIEW SO I FOLLOWED HIM AROUND AND HE PUT ME IN HIS NEWEST TRAINING DEVICE THAT HE CALLS AN "MRS". I'M A LOUSY BENCHER, BUT I MATCHED MY BEST SHIRTED BENCH OF 365 AND JUST MISSED LOCKING OUT 385, A NEW PR FOR ME, ALL AFTER EATING A GIANT HAMBURGER 15 MINUTES EARLIER. I'M FIRST IN LINE TO BUY ONE OF THESE WHEN THEY ARE READY FOR PRODUCTION.

INTERVIEW BY JIM CURLEY

MIKE
WOMACK

KING



bench daddy

"THERE'S NO WRONG WAY TO BENCH PRESS,
BUT THERE'S ALWAYS A BETTER WAY TO
BENCH PRESS...."

OF THE BENCH

How old are you and what do you do?

I'm 32 and I train people at Lockout Gym in McKinney, TX. My wife and I have six kids and until she had some health issues, we were going for twelve. I became a father at 14 with my first girlfriend (not my wife). My then girlfriend's parents stepped up to the plate and took care of our daughter as their own. My dad had a chain of video stores in Modesto, CA where we lived, and I went to work for him at 14 selling videos and games. He would take money out and I would help however I could with raising our daughter. I met my wife, Stephanie, in our senior year of high school and got married in 2006 at a powerlifting meet in Vegas. My kids are 5, 7, 10, 11 and 12 and 18. My son Xander at 10 has my build and benches so he may be a big bencher someday. I bought and sold video game stores and a commercial gym in the Modesto area and moved to Dallas in 2009. I currently train people how to bench better at Lockout Gym in McKinney, TX. I train all ages and the reward for that is mostly intangible.

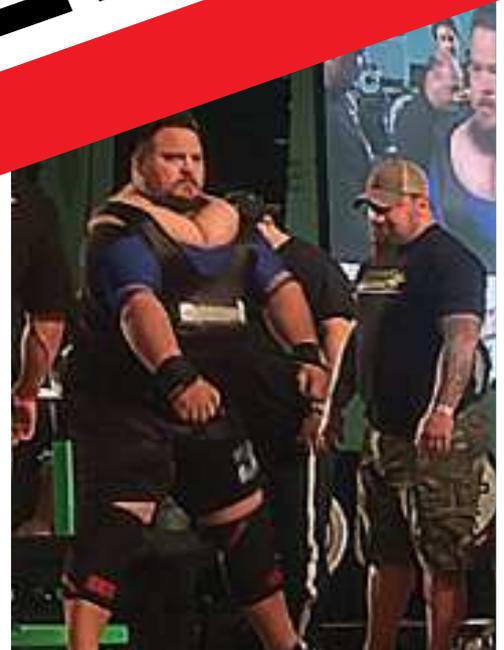
The bench press is your signature lift. Have you always been a natural bencher?

When I was 14 I benched 315 trying out for football in school. By the time I got home the coach had called my dad

wanting to know what kind of steroids I was on! In my senior year weighing between 180 and 205 I got a 495, sloppy and no pause. My very first powerlifting meet was at 19 and I benched 385 in an early bench shirt. My next meet was an AAU meet two weeks later where I benched 475 raw with a pause. I came in when the second generation bench shirts were just coming on the scene. I got up to 550 and would blow out every shirt I bought so I just kind of quit powerlifting for a while. I still coached my mom, dad and sisters and brother. I weigh about 370 at 5'7" and I've always had a barrel chest and big shoulders. Even at 220 the upper body doesn't change much so I guess I'm built to bench.

Have you ever looked in the family tree to see where this strength comes from?

I have and I half expected some of my ancestors to be circus freaks! When I really started digging, I found that my great-great grandmother was a woman named Sarah Womack, who had 38 children! This was confirmed by a Ripley's Believe It or Not article, along with several articles in the Dallas Morning News. My birth father was her grandson. Sarah only had a couple of single births – all the others were multiple births. Twins, triplets, sextuplets – she had 38 kids in 38 years. If you put a goatee like I have on her picture, she and I are almost twins. She



was tough!

Did your family compete?

Oh yeah, we traveled together to meets from 2001-2005. My dad has benched 500 in a meet, raw in 259 or 275. My mom and sister still have some WABDL records, but they don't compete much any more. We went to WABDL Worlds in 2005 and I bought a Titan F6 from Ken Anderson. I opened with 450 and it flew up but it came up so fast I hit the rack. Second attempt it came up so fast it hit a spotter in the chest. I went to 600, having never benched that much and smoked it weighing 259. In 2006 I went to 275 and then 308, and my bench went from 661 to 881 all in one year just by learning how to bench in a shirt and work on what a shirt could do.

None of that was raw?

Oh no, I stopped raw benching in 2005. When I stopped raw benching my lifts started going up and I've had no elbow or shoulder pain since then. I realized that I had been overtraining. The body is like an army of "healers". When you break down muscle while training that "army" goes to rebuild the muscle tissue that you broke down, but if you've got inflammation the army is "split" and can't do what it's supposed to do on either side effectively. What happens is that recovery is extended. If you're "on the juice" your recovery is 48 hours, but a natural lifter takes more like four days. People who overtrain, it's more like 5 or 6 days, and the body NEVER gets healed or builds like it should because of that overtraining. It's a trade off though; if you go for just strength you'll never have the "look" that a lot of people want because you only bench once a week and don't do much assistance work. I want to be as strong as I possibly can, so I'll give up some of the "look".

Does your family go with you to meets?

Mostly local meets and if there's one in Vegas we all go, but with five kids it's tough.

Did you ever squat and deadlift in competition?

No, my ACL and meniscus have all had surgeries at age 15 due to wrestling. If I squat, sometimes my leg will lock up, so I do above parallel squats and heavy

leg presses in the gym. I hate deadlifting so I don't do it. If I train kids for sports I have them all do deadlifts because they're all weak from sitting around playing video games and the lower back is so susceptible to injury.

Let's talk about body weight. Weren't you a contender for the TV show "The Biggest Loser"?

Yes, I just got cut from the casting finals six weeks ago at the last cut. I was ensconced at their facility – no outside communication, a battery of tests, both psychological and medical. In fact I just got my medical report back yesterday and my doc looked at it. He said I'm healthy as a horse – no pre-diabetes, cholesterol and serum levels all good, normal blood pressure – and he said that's probably why I got cut. A lot of contestants have serious medical problems from being overweight, so it's almost a matter of life and death if they don't lose the weight which increases the drama for the show. For my height and weight I'm way overweight so I was a prime contender, but I'm actually pretty healthy. I need to lose weight, no doubt, and I'm working on it but it was a lot more motivating to do it and win 250 grand if I could do it. Often people get cut, come back next year and win it. It's happened several times on the show, so I'll



try it again next year.

What would be your optimal weight for health and a big bench?

I'm shooting for 220-242 and a big bench. I've never even tried steroids because I want to be around as long as possible for my kids and grandkids, but my shoulders and chest would still be there and I think I could do well at that weight.

So how do you get some of these guys benching what they do? Sean Finegan (also interviewed in this issue) at 65 benching near 700 in single ply, Austin Sellers at 20 in single ply benching 700 – how do you do it?

I just change slight things that they're doing. I've already done the hard work. I know what to do, and it's a bunch of small things adding up. There's no wrong way to bench press, but there's always a better way to bench press. I could write a book on how to bench better and show a hundred ways to do it, but I can't teach anyone how to get better until I see a flaw. Many people are "on point" until they get to that 90% area, then the faults start to happen – butt comes up, head comes up, bar gets out of the track. I don't teach anything until I see their max.

Most of the time their technique forced them out of the groove. The bar path has left the correct alignment. The right bar path can be found by holding a max weight at full extension for a long 3-5 count. Wherever the bar drifts, whether towards the feet or the head, that's where the body wants it and is recruiting the muscles in the right place to push it. Once you find that spot, lower it straight down and it will go straight up unless you're arched. Then "straight up" is actually pushing towards the feet.

Do you recommend a lifter to arch?

No, but I promote angle of shoulder. "Crush the can" between the shoulder blades which



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MIKE GOING FOR 1035#

WHERE IT COUNTS

"WHEN YOU'RE IN FIGHT OR FLIGHT MODE WITH A HEAVY WEIGHT YOU NEED TO FIGHT, AND ABSOLUTELY FIGHT. CONTINUE TO PUSH THAT WEIGHT AND THE LONGER YOU GRIND, THE BAR FINDS ITS OPTIMAL PATH AND THE BODY RECRUITS EVERYTHING ENABLING YOU TO FINISH THE PRESS."

pinches the shoulder blades together, then drive yourself back so that the back and even the arch of the neck all make contact with the bench. This creates what I call a "footprint" on the bench. Tuck the chin into the chest which gives the feeling of raising the head but creates tightness. You then have almost a "triangle" on the bench with the shoulders and neck tight forming the triangle points. The more weight on the bar, the more your shoulder blades

"IF YOU DON'T START WITH YOUR SHOULDER BLADES CRUSHED TOGETHER, NOTHING'S GOING TO HAPPEN EXCEPT FAILURE."

are pushed together, and the shorter the stroke becomes. It doesn't surprise me that someone says 600 is tough, but they put 700 on the bar and if they're set up right, it's almost easier because the upward stroke has been shortened by the shoulder blades being "crushed" together. If you take a tape measure to it, the 600 stroke might be 9", but with 700 it's now 7 1/2". So what's happening? They're bending their arms less so there's more power. If you don't start with your shoulder blades crushed together, nothing's going to happen except failure. If you start right, as you hold the weight you can feel the shoulder blades coming together while simultaneously engaging the lats.

How about leg drive?

I like to teach driving back, not up. Ideal ankle placement is under the knee, feet flat to drive back. The great part is while

you're driving back you get all the benefits of lifting your butt without actually lifting it!

So where do you drive from?

I literally try to rub the soles off my shoes. When I bench, I tap my toes into the front of my shoes. I've forgotten to do that and end up driving my feet out so hard that the shoe slips back and I can't lock out the weight. When you're in fight or flight mode with a heavy weight you need to fight, and absolutely fight. Continue to push that weight and the longer you grind, the bar finds its optimal path and the body recruits everything enabling you to finish the press. There's no sticking point – the body will put the bar in the right groove. You have to be all in to finish. When I'm sitting on the end of the bench getting ready to lift, I tell myself "I've done all the right things, now let's cash the check".



The single most important thing I tell myself is “short stroke, short stroke”. That triggers everything to set up right – foot placement, shoulder placement – everything comes together to create the shortest stroke possible. When I bench heavy my legs and lower body are really sore but my upper body rarely is sore. I’ve also learned to maximize the shirt’s potential through trial and error. I sew, so I can alter a shirt right there to test something. With wrist wraps I form a “backstop” on the back of the hand so that your mind thinks you’re wrist is rolling back like you’ve always done it but it’s rigid. Now you don’t have to think about keeping the wrist straight. It’s done, now you can work on other techniques instead of that one thing that used to always send the bar to your face. Move a roadblock that’s in their way and they can move.

What breathing advice do you have?

I like the valsalva maneuver, basically drawing in a big breath through the nose only and pushing it down into the diaphragm. What you’ll notice is that air in the diaphragm increases your fight time. Before I learned this method, I had about 10 seconds to finish a lift or I’d faint from all the pressure. There’s a YouTube video with me benching 911# and from the time I get the weight handed to me and the finish, it’s 18-20 seconds. I couldn’t do that without the valsalva method. You now have 3-4 extra seconds to stay in the groove to touch rather than lift your head to find the right spot. If you stay in that straight groove, you don’t have to push it fast. You also have more time to finish in the groove. In fact speed often gets people in trouble. The speed within the angle of the groove often gets lifters right in their sticking point. Here’s an analogy. If you secure a string to a tennis ball and nail the other end of the string to the floor and throw the ball toward the ceiling fast, what is the chance the ball will come straight down? Almost none. If you throw

the ball up slowly, there’s a much better chance the ball will come straight down. What gets people in trouble with speed is they often go beyond full extension. Two things cause the bar over the face – limp wrist and speed. They’ll start with the wrist angled toward the head and try and move it forward near lockout. That’s too much transition in the lift. Too many things are going on. This is technique. Now when the weight gets heavy, it’s heavy. For example, Greg Powell is 49 years old, 220 and was benching 700. He then hit 800, then 850 and is flirting with 900.

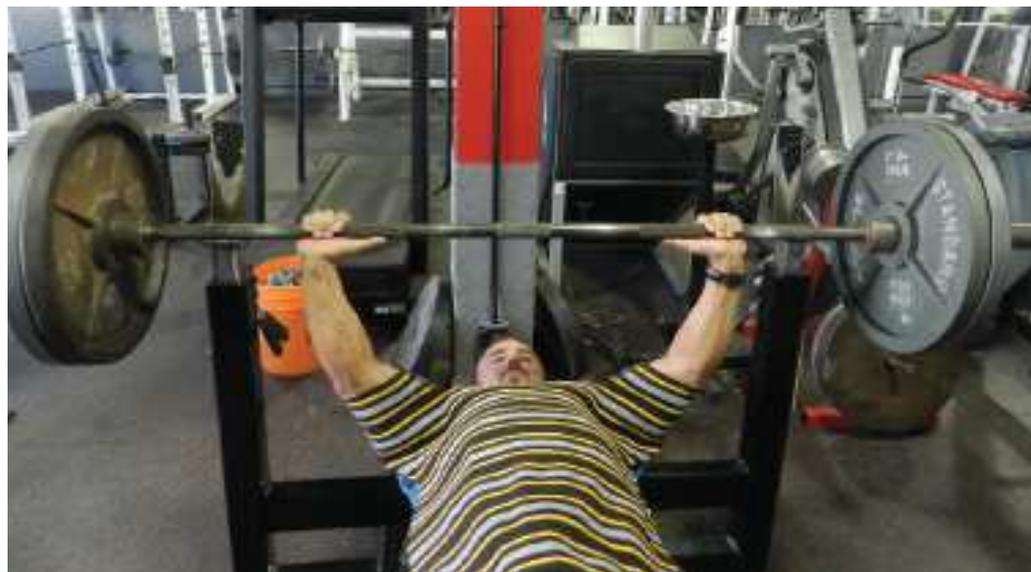
What are your favorite assistance exercises?

Single arm dumbbell bench is by far the most important exercise. Every rep start with an arch, crush the can, tuck the chin. I like to teach one thing that fixes five. When you lower the dumbbell all the muscle groups are activated in the right way. If they aren’t you’ll cartwheel off the bench, and the body knows what to activate to not do that. It triggers leg drive. I’m always sore in my lower body after a meet, but not upper body. I’ve had people start with pressing two 100# dumbbells, ease into pressing one 100 pounder, and a month later they’re doing a one handed DB press with 160. It’s leg drive being recruited and that’s why my legs are so sore after a meet. I also have some “forbidden” exercises that pertain to bench pressers only. No more bicep work. None. The biceps prevent a lockout as they work against the tricep. You’ve got the bicep pulling and



MIKE WOMACK AND SONS

the tricep pushing. Of course you want to look good so do high rep hammer curls to prevent tearing. Next is incline press. You don’t recruit anything from those muscles. It’s a long term injury that’s going to happen; shoulder impingements, surgeries and pain. You can do incline and decline but only a very slight angle either way. The core bench press muscle is the lats. Third, triceps. No skull crushers, because the shirt is the tricep. The lats do most of the work. Dips are another one you need to drop. The absolute worst exercise you can do is skull crushers because they isolate the joint at the elbow. Do tricep pressdowns but use the whole body instead of isolating the triceps. Lean into it and DON’T



LEFT: TEAM MEMBER IN A BENCH OVERLOAD DEVICE THAT WOMACK CALLS "THE KILLER B".

isolate the triceps. Use the core and back to press down. The Hammer Strength Incline machine is a good one because it's basically a partial, and you're pressing out instead of up. Lockouts with a wide grip are good back exercises, like pin presses.

How about side laterals for shoulders?

I don't believe any pulling exercise helps the bench. Not face pulls, lat pulldowns...anything. Grab the bar wide and do lockouts. If you do lockouts, people will say it's a tricep exercise. It's actually a lat exercise to shorten the bench stroke through time under tension. I can do a 6" inch stroke for 6 reps with 500# and get a tricep pump, or go really wide, "crush the can" and do one rep with 700 holding the bar for 10 seconds. You'll push it up an inch and after 10 seconds it's sitting on the pins. Why is that? You just gained an inch of flexibility in the shoulder blades. The weight literally smashed and crushed you. That's what you're after. My stroke with 700 is 8". My stroke with 900 is 6". I approach this from a different way than everybody else. I'm minimizing injuries, maximizing bar alignment – the strength comes in time. If technique and alignment are fixed, now we can get stronger. You should always bench in a bench shirt. If you want to compete at the highest level, you should bench in a shirt.

What about all the raw benchers that will beg to differ?

Really big raw benchers are mostly not drug free. Even a good raw bencher gets to around 400 and starts getting pec tears and shoulder injuries. Raw benchers need to go to gear. I used to lift raw and always had elbow pain. If you lift multi ply you must do a lot of raw work because you're fighting the shirt.. In single ply you can still recruit a lot of the same muscle that you use raw. I use my shirt to protect me and I can manipulate the single ply shirt to help me, but the raw stroke and shirt stroke are different due to the groove, kind of like a golfer will modify the club to fit their swing. The chest plate must be correct, i.e. looser or bigger. It's the arms that must be tightened down. If the chest plate is too tight it pulls the shoulders forward which you don't want. When you go wide and crush the can, then the chest plate will tighten. Stock shirts can be recreated. Most guys get a PR in their old single ply and then want to move to double ply. The single ply becomes their "opener" shirt. Why not leave it on and get the "home run" in it? Get one shirt and use it for a year, two years. I've taken guys from 600 to 700 in single ply in a short period of time and they want 800 so they go multi ply and they go back to 600. I know it doesn't make sense but it happens a lot.

What's with the dark glasses?

I used to wear the transition type

that darkens in the sun, but I prefer the dark glasses. I'm so used to it I even go to movies and drive at night in these.

So you do all your own alterations and for your crew? Do you do alterations for others and what do you charge?

Yes, I know what to do and I care about a lifter benching more weight. There's special thread that won't break, the arms have to taper...most seamstresses can't really get it right. I taught myself to sew out of necessity and one special stitch can put 20 pounds on a PR. I'm such a mean guy I'm tightening some of my competitors shirts tonight so they can try to beat me! (Go to the ad elsewhere in this magazine).

You've come up with a new product called the MRS (muscle recruitment shirt). Tell us about it and how people can order it.

Go to www.benchdaddy.com or see the ad in this magazine. These will be customized to each lifter. They're made of knee wrap material and there's a patent pending. The price is \$149.95 but keep in mind this is not a bench shirt but a bench press overload training tool.

Who would you like to mention or thank?

My mom, dad, wife and kids. Ken Anderson, Anderson Powerlifting and all my team members. **PLT**



real facts

"I SEW, SO I CAN ALTER A SHIRT RIGHT THERE TO TEST SOMETHING. I TAUGHT MYSELF TO SEW OUT OF NECESSITY AND ONE SPECIAL STITCH CAN PUT 20 POUNDS ON A PR."