

The BENCH PRESS

BENCH PRESS GAINS THROUGH MINI-CYCLES

by Mike Simpson

I have been bench pressing off and on since I was in the sixth grade, some 23 years, so I have experimented with about every routine imaginable. I have always felt that reps are very important and that going max should be restricted for meets or no more frequently than every month or so, but I also feel that doing heavy singles with about 90-95 percent of max about every three weeks is very valuable.

I did a 410 bench at a body weight of 198 in March of 1979, which is currently the Nebraska State record, but because of being in constant pain from a lower back injury, suffered ten years ago, I had back surgery in February of 1981.

During my convalescence, I had a lot of time to think about getting 'back to the iron.' My body weight dropped from 198 to 165 in about three weeks. Consequently, when I did get back on my feet, I was very weak. The first time I benched was about six weeks after surgery, and I could barely do 225 pounds.

I decided to try something new, so I concocted what I term 'three week mini-cycles.' The results have been astounding. Currently at a bodyweight of 180 pounds, I am capable of a bench in the 415-425 pound range.

Most benchers seem to favor a two-a-week workout with a light day and a heavy day, such as 4x8 or 5x5 followed by 6x2 or 6x1. I feel that this is a great workout, but I've come up with something that has worked well for me and may work well for most others.

The 'three week mini-cycle' begins with a very light 4x8 workout with about 65-70 percent of your max, then going to a 5x5 for the next workout with about 75-80 percent of your max. The following workout is still a 5x5, but adding five pounds if you can. This brings you to a 6x3, adding five pounds. Then you are ready for the last workout of the mini-cycle, which consists of 6-8 singles with about 90-95 percent of your max.

Throughout the three weeks you are building the foundation for a good singles session. Then you start over and add five pounds to your 8's, 5's, 3's, and 1's as long as you have completed at least four successful sets on the previous three week cycle. If you feel that the starting poundages are too light (they probably are) there is a reason for this.

The reason for starting light is two-fold. First; by starting light this routine lends itself to working through sticking points as opposed to meeting and being stopped by them every few weeks. Second; and probably most important, if the

weight is too easy, make it harder by employing many pauses on the chest, ranging anywhere from a competition pause to a 10-second pause. This is important regardless of which routine you currently use.

After each bench session, a strenuous tricep workout is in order. I think I have come up with one of the best movements for the triceps. I like to do strict tricep extensions on an incline with my head forward so that I get full range of motion from behind the neck to a full extension over the head. I like to do about 6-8 sets of 8-12 reps, and then follow this with some tricep pushdowns (on cable) for another 3-4 sets of 8-12 reps.

I really feel that the concept of getting a lot of rep work leading up to your singles is important, and working the triceps is important. I also believe that if enough benching is done, incline presses are not needed; they really seem to wreak havoc on your benching groove.

Using this routine, I've gone from 245 pounds for sets of 8 to 315 pounds, from 265 pounds on sets of 5 to 340 pounds, from 280 pounds for sets of 3 to 365 pounds, and from 315 pound singles to a recent 8 singles with 390 pounds.

That may not sound astounding, but at a bodyweight of 180 pounds and no drugs it's a pretty good set of gains for a five month period after major surgery.

A simplified look at the routine appears below:

(WARM UP FIRST)

	Monday	Thursday
Week 1	4x8	5x5
Week 2	5x5 (plus 5 lbs.)	6x3
Week 3	6x3 (plus 5 lbs.)	7x1

Also: 6-8 sets of 8-12 reps incline tricep extensions, and 3-4 sets of 8-12 reps tricep pushdowns on cables.

REPEAT CYCLE, BUT ADD 5 POUNDS TO EACH WORKOUT IF PREVIOUS CYCLE WAS SUCCESSFUL FOR AT LEAST FOUR OF YOUR SETS.

I have my wrestlers and weightlifters at Republican Valley High School in Indianola, Nebraska, on this routine for their benches and squats and I am expecting great results.

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Above...Mike Simpson pauses a heavy weight at his chest. (photos courtesy Mike Simpson)

Below...Mike demonstrates his tricep extension style.

