

FORCE TRAINING

by Jim Wendler and
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RAW BENCHING

Hot chick with no shirt = good.
Fatman County Fair (special
guest appearance by Bad
Company) with no shirt = bad.

Bench pressing without a shirt = your opinion.
I'm not going to debate the shirt/no shirt conundrum that has seemed to enrage the strength community. While some people are busy taking a hard and fast stance, I'm going to do something to help people.
Now the next obvious (and fair) question is, "What the hell does Jim know about benching raw?" I've used a shirt for all of my competitions and this has spanned almost 5 years. I've been lifting for over 17 years, so I'm going to make a very bold statement and say that I've done a lot more raw benching than shirted benching.

What you'll notice is that there are a few differences in benching raw, but not a lot. People seem to think that there has to be radical changes when shirt benching, but last time I checked you still lie on a bench and press.

Technique/Setup/Bar Path
I did an entire video on the correct setup and bar path on the bench press. Do yourself a favor

Lee Moran ... benched 600 lbs.
raw at the 1984 IPF World meet.

not easy to do. Most people get scared doing this with heavy weights so at some point you are going to have put your fears aside and just do it. A good way to do this is to make it a point every Max Effort day to concentrate on eccentric bar speed. But don't be sloppy.

Set up - By having a tight set up (again refer to the EFS Bench Press Index DVD) you will be able to confidently lower weights. I have done numerous seminars and when I show people what "tight" really is, they are amazed. I had several people approach me and say that they have never been so tired after benching. So if you think you are tight, get tighter.

Squeeze the bar - You must squeeze the bar as tight as possible when benching. This should be done on every attempt. Repetition breeds habit. Now how do you get a better bench grip? I have found that the best way is to train your finger strength. Do this by using hex head dumbbell holds, using the IronMind telegraph with your thumb and one finger, and also by putting a thick rubber band around your fingers and opening your hand. This exercise was introduced to me by C.J. Murphy and has also done a lot for people with elbow problems. There are a host of great grip exercises that you can do and most of them will help your bench press. Just don't overdo your grip training.

Strong Lats - Having strong lats will give you the ability to lower the bar correctly and allow you to lower quickly without disrupting the proper bar path. Developing this takes time, so be patient.

Practice - This is obvious but you have to put in sometime to learn how to lower a bar quickly but do it so it is done correctly. This is to statically hold a chest

that will help you in this area:

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supported row in the same position as you bench press. This doesn't have to be done all the time, but realize its importance in training.

Strong AND thick upper back - This can be accomplished by doing rows and chins (see above), seated DB cleans, face pulls, rear laterals and band pull-aparts. Like the lats, the upper back is held statically so this component must be trained.

Shoulders - Few people would argue that you need very strong front delts to be a good raw bench, but strong delts also help in controlling and stabilizing the weight.

Shoulder Strength

I mention shoulders before, but strengthening this area is going to be huge. This is the single best thing that I've ever done for my raw strength. Here is a list of exercises that need to be done. Pick one of these exercises and perform them once a week. Usually 5 sets of 8-15 reps are done. This should be done as a second exercise on either dynamic or max effort day. This is a huge priority, so don't slack.

Stabilization - Stabilization basically means that you are able to hold your set up position in the bench press without faltering. You have to be able to stay high on your upper back and have total control of the bar. This is easy to do, but it takes a lot of time. Stabilization in the bench press requires several things.

Strong AND thick lats - Do you want to know the trick of getting this stronger? Do a lot of work. It's not that hard to figure out. Do a ton of chest supported rows and pull-ups. These two exercises are phenomenal for strengthening your lats. These should be done twice per week - a minimum of 5 sets of 5-15 reps per workout. But you also need static strength in your lats. When you bench press your lats are held statically. The best way to improve this is to statically hold a chest

Bar Speed/Eccentric Control
This is huge and one reason why a bench shirt helps quite a bit. When bending for a max, whether it be raw or with a shirt, the bar must come down quickly but under control. This does not give you license to drop the bar or inch the bar down Poliquin-style. Both of these things will result in a poor attempt. A bench shirt allows you to have a fast eccentric phase while maintaining your tightness. Since a raw bencher is using his best 50/50 shirt, he does not have this advantage. Here are some tips

Max Effort Exercises
All of these exercises are gone over in our Bench Index, so I will not waste time on descriptions. I should point out that when doing the dumbbell work, I would lower the DBs under control, pause for a second and drive them up. I never thought to "push" or "press", but drive them up. I think this made a big difference in my bottom end strength.

Speed Work
Stick with these five exercises during your max effort cycles. Again these exercises are gone over in detail in the Bench Index.

Lockout Training

Notice I didn't say triceps. Locking out a weight is completely different. For a raw bender, lockout strength is important but not as much for an equipped lifter. This is because most people can lockout whatever they can get off of their chest. I should point out that lockout is about 3" to the top. This doesn't mean halfway up. Still if this is a weak point of yours, then you have to hammer it. Plus, if your technique is good, you should be able to manipulate the bar path and put it in the correct position to lock out whatever you get off of your chest. I would stick with 3, 4 and 5 board presses with a competition grip or slightly narrower. Do one of these exercises ONE time per week as a second exercise.

Day II:
Speed Bench - 8 sets of 3 reps @ 225 DB Bench - 60x10, 80x10, 100x10, 100x10, 100x6

Chain suspended push ups - 5 sets of 10 reps with an average band around my back
Pull ups - 5 sets of 5-8 reps

Max Effort Exercises
For more information regarding training, the most hardcore racks and equipment, apparel, Metal powerlifting gear, Force Training seminars and over 10,000 archived questions and answers visit www.EliteFTS.com.

does with a shirt, you will pleasantly surprised.
Maximize your training (prioritize).
The one good thing about raw benching is that you don't have to spend training time on learning the shirt. With that in mind your training needs to have these priorities.

Technique - Once you get the bar almost to lockout position, your strength should be enough to lock anything out. This is manipulation of the bar path and once you get the hang of it, you will be ready to go. So, this is a huge priority.

Off the Bottom - Strength off of your chest is a huge necessity and should be #2 on your priority list. This is part technique and part shoulder strength.

Stabilization - Get your lats and upper back up to par.
Max Effort Work - Lift heavy/Get Strong. If you want to increase your volume and your strength, do it by increasing the number of reps of 90% and above. Again, be careful as this can lead to overtraining. Refer to Prilipin's chart for optimal reps (3-10). When doing more total reps at or above 90% (5, for example) your assistant work needs to be cut down.

Example Workout
Here is an example workout of mine when I was training for a raw bench max several years ago. This is taken from my training diary. At the time I had a raw bench of 405.

Day I:
Speed Bench - 45x5, 95x5, 135x5, 185x5, 225x3, 275x2, 315x1, 365x1, 385x1, 365x1
Chest Supported Rows - 5 sets of 10 reps
Rear Laterals - 5x5

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Bench Press
This is odd, but how many times have you read about how tricky it is to learn a bench shirt? I can't count the number of hours I've spent trying to figure out what to do with a shirt. Raw benching is no different. If you invest the same time in figuring out how to maximize your technique as one

Pre-habilitation
Because you are not wearing a bench shirt, you don't have much

