

GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR BANDBELL BAR

BY JEREMY FRASIER



Bench Pressing using the standard setup - bands doubled-up with kettlebells.

Squeeze the bar. Drive your feet into the floor. Pull your shoulder blades together and remember, stay tight! I'm sure these are just a few of the phrases everyone hears from their training partners when they are under the bar getting ready to bench. I know they're right, but it's easier said than done when the weight really starts to get up there.

I'm not an expert bencher, and I don't pretend to be. I just like to pick up heavy things and put them down. At 40, I feel like I'm in the sweet spot of my lifting career. I live, work and train in Columbus, Ohio, but I've never been to Westside Barbell. I read everything I can get my hands on and built my own gym in my basement. I study, analyze and micro-manage every aspect of my training from diet to new, cutting-edge ideas. My training has changed quite a bit through the years, but I seem to adjust it more

as a result of injury rather than better training methods. Unfortunately, this seems to be a common theme with many powerlifters.

I can't say exactly when my right shoulder started to bother me, but it finally forced me to change how I trained my bench. It started out as a small twinge deep in the joint and developed to a point where it prevented me from locking out heavy weights. I'm not sure why, but my lockout suffered the most. I started doing more partial range of motion work, dropped the weight I was using, and increased my reps thinking it would come back. But it never did, and I figured my heavy bench press days were over.

I'm lucky that my wife is big into training, too. She reminded me that the best thing to do is to go with something that either helps me get stronger or aids in recovery. Two years ago, she did both.

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She bought me a Bandbell Earthquake Bar for our home gym. I half expected it to help the shoulder, based on what I read about it. And, yeah, it worked just fine bringing it back around to fully operational. But what I didn't expect — and hadn't read online or anywhere, for that matter — is what this article is all about.

TECHNIQUE

In a word, the big surprise is technique. The kind of technique most benchers don't think about until they're faced with stalled progress, forced cutbacks or injury. In my case, I had all three working against me, but the main culprit was still the nagging shoulder problem.

When you first start working with a Bandbell Bar, there's definitely a learning curve as your nervous system tries to deal with the crazy, chaotic energy being pumped into your upper body. You don't just jump under this bar and max out your first time. Like bull riding or base jumping, you had better work your way up. Take it slow and easy at first. Use light weight and high reps, especially if you're trying to rehab an injury. In three or four workouts, your shoulders will feel better and your ability to handle the bar will improve. This is using the bar in pure rehab mode: light weight and high reps, anywhere from 25 to 75 reps for sets of five or six. A 25-lb. Kettlebell or small plate is a good place to start, but be aware that Kettlebells kick out a lot more energy than plates, so adjust the energy dial accordingly. Again, this bar makes fast work of shoulder problems, but you have to stick to light weight, high reps and a max-energy setup like Kettlebells. When using the Bandbell Bar for shoulder rehab purposes it's very important not to let the bar touch the chest when benching. Like a high-voltage wire, the bar is a great conduc-

tor of kinetic energy and will lose some of its "juice," or energy, whenever it touches anything. Healing to the joint works best when the level of instability and chaotic movement is maintained at the highest level possible.

HOLD YOUR HORSES

Not long after the shoulder started feeling better, I wanted to add a lot more weight to see what this bad boy could do. But here's where the bar steps in and says, "Not so fast, dude! You need to fix a few things first." Hell, I didn't know anything was wrong, but the cold, hard reality is that as the weights get heavier, the bar begins to expose and pinpoint any weaknesses you have failed to correct. I saw this over and over again at this year's Arnold Classic Expo. There were literally hundreds of guys who were trying the Bandbell



Bandbell Bar using advanced setup with 25lb. plate. This configuration kicks off a lot more kinetic energy, especially when using kettlebells. Thread the ends of the bands through the center hole and loop the bands over the Bar.



Bandbell Bar with multiple sets of bands and kettlebells.



Bandbell Bar using light-bands and chains. This setup allows you to handle a lot of weight, but is super-easy on the shoulders.

Bar for the first time, some of them seriously strong benchers, but you could see technique problems come to the surface right away. How do you explain to someone, in 30 seconds, what's happening and what can be done to fix it?

Here's what Bandbell teaches you about bench technique with no compromise. For powerlifters, this bar has benefits beyond most other sports because it forces you to use good bench technique whether you like it or not. As you add weight with more and more bands, the bar becomes increasingly unstable. It quickly turns into a kinetic monster at heavy weight, so the lifter has no choice but to use near-perfect bench form. So, when I'm benching heavy with the Bandbell Bar, here are the rules I have to follow very closely:

- 1.)** Squeeze and grip the bar as hard as I can. This is a thick, fat-grip bar, so if I don't squeeze hard, it feels like it wants to jump out of my hands.
- 2.)** Concentrate on "pulling the bar apart" with each rep. This allows me to keep stability and fight the kinetic forces that are trying to throw me off the bench.
- 3.)** Don't let my elbows flare out. The bar will let me know when this happens, but rewards me with more control when I keep my elbows in.
- 4.)** Seriously plant my feet under me. Tighten up and drive with my legs. If not, I get rocked from side to side.
- 5.)** Get my body set, squeeze my shoulder blades together, arch up and lock down.

When I was training injured, I used to do power movements like boards, chains, floor presses, etc., using only a partial range of motion to protect the area. It happens slowly, but you lose sight of the fact that you are no longer comfortable with max-weight workouts and heavier weights in general. But with healthy shoulders and good technique, I got comfortable and aggressive with the bigger



The "Top-Hat" configuration is for extreme levels of kinetic energy and really makes the Bar highly unstable. It's a favorite with lifters who have trained with a Bandbell Bar for a while. They also add one or two more pairs of kettlebells to each side to make it totally crazy.

weights and then back to using full range of motion. The results were new PRs and now handling more weight than ever. **PM**

TRAINING WITH THE EARTHQUAKE BAR

1.) After a max-effort barbell workout, I do three or four sets of 15 to 20 reps with the Bandbell using moderate-heavy weight, followed by a 15-second "static hold" at the end of each set. Again, I'm squeezing the bar and trying to pull it apart at the same time.

2.) For a recovery day workout, I do a progression of 10 rep sets. After each set, the weight is increased by 25 lbs. until I have done a total of five sets, with the top-end weight being somewhere around 250 lbs.

3.) In a pre-workout warm-up, sometimes I'll do two or three sets, light weight, to warm up before a shoulder or triceps workout. Nothing warms the area up as quickly and safely as this bar. **PM**