

Trouble-shooting the BENCH PRESS

BY MARK BELL



Why use your lats on the bench? The best reason, in my opinion, is to create some crazy-ass blasting power off the breasts. (Yes, I said “breasts.”) You can become a human version of a hydraulic jack. As you bring the bar lower and lower toward your body, you’ll tighten up so much you’ll feel like a loaded spring. Even better, using your lats can save your shoulders by creating less shoulder rotation and less stress on the shoulders.

In powerlifting, there is a right and a wrong way to perform a bench press. But sometimes just knowing the right way is not enough. It can take months or even years to understand how to perform a lift with great execution. Here is the fast track to trouble-shooting a pressing issue.

I’ll tell you how to use your lats in a bench press. Remember, nothing works better than hard work. If you want mercy, go to church. If you want to lift big, hit the gym full speed ahead. After all, effort takes no talent.

BENCH PRESS WITH BOARDS

Bench press off three boards while keeping your upper back and lats tight until you get the hang of it. Then work your way down a board until you are able to perform the movement with full range.



HERE IS HOW THE EXERCISE SHOULD BE PERFORMED FROM START TO FINISH:

- 1.** Before you even think of un-racking the weight, make sure you set up on your traps by pinching your shoulder blades together.
- 2.** With a training partner holding three boards on your chest, un-rack the weight and hold the bar at arm’s length.
- 3.** Retract your shoulder blades in and down toward the bench. Bring the bar as close to the boards as you can without bending your elbows.
- 4.** Flex your upper back and lats. If you never “set” the weight into your lats, you’ll never be able to use them.
- 5.** Lower the weight with your lats.
- 6.** Stay tight as you make contact with boards.
- 7.** Press hard with your lats and push yourself into the bench as the bar shoots up toward lockout.

Repeat the above steps with one less board each week until no boards are needed.

Try adding this tip to your speed day. Do it before your speed work or instead of the speed work. Work up slowly using sets of five and make sure you get every rep right. Perfect practice makes perfect.