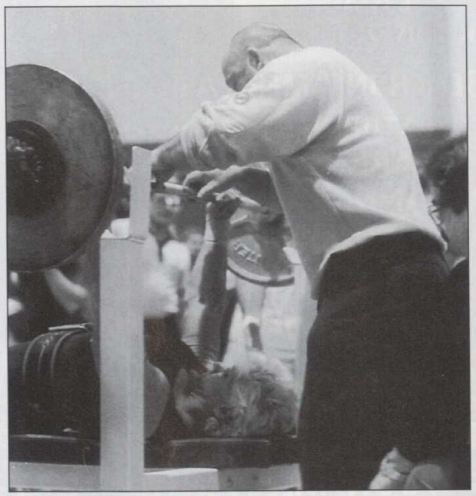
TRAINING

How to Bench Press 500 Easy

as told to POWERLIFTING USA by Louie Simmons



***Louie Simmons** has handed off a lot of big bench presses in his day, but he knows what to do when he's on the other end of the lift as well.*

Everyone strives for a goal, one of which may be a 500 bench. The problem is how do you achieve it? For me it was a mystery until I discovered a method of training known as the conjugate method. This is done along with the dynamic method with submaximal weights on a second day, 72 hours later. Today we have 29 people who have done at least 500, four who have done over 600, and the youngest person ever to bench 700. Here's how.

On Sunday we use the dynamic method. The weight is 55% of a contest max with a shirt. If for some reason you compete without a shirt, 60% is used. We do 8-10 sets of 3 reps. It's best to use three or more grips in a workout. Most of the sets are done with a grip inside the power rings on the bar, that is, with the little finger inside the ring. Using grips inside the rings will aid greatly in triceps and anterior delt development.

The reps must be very explosive. Lower the bar quickly, but under control. Lowering contributes to raising, or concentric, strength. Lowering a bar slowly will build muscle mass but not strength. Please, I beg you, stop reading bodybuilding magazines. They have contributed greatly to ruining strength training in the United States. After all, plyometrics is the energy gained by the body dropping and then responding to that dropping with reversal, or explosive, strength.

The bar should be pushed back up in a straight line, not back over the face. This requires strong triceps. This path is a shorter distance and requires no shoulder rotation, which is also much safer. The barbell will always seek the strongest muscle group; that's why most push the bar over the face. Their delts are stronger than their triceps. But it should be the reverse. One sees a lot of shoulder and pec injuries, but seldom do you see a triceps injury. Why? The triceps have never been pushed to their maximum potential.

We do approximately 20 reps out of 200 above our training weight. We may add only 30-50 pounds to the bar, mainly to check that bar speed remains high. If your bar speed, or reversal strength, slows, you have a problem. After all, this would still be a very submaximal weight if you bench press 500 and train with 275, or 55%. You could also do a few singles, but not with more than 90% and not very often. We found this interferes with the max effort day three days later.

After bench pressing, go first to triceps work. Basically 60 total reps are done with dumbbells, broken down into 6 sets of 10 reps or possibly 7 sets of 8 reps. The palms should be facing inward, toward the body, when dumbbells are used for extensions. When a barbell is used, 40 reps should be done, bringing the bar to the forehead, chin, or throat.

Paul Dicks presses with a regular bar or a Safety Squat Bar can be done.

We do a lot of J.M. presses, named after J. M. Blakely: with a close grip, lower the bar to 4-5 inches off the chest above the nipples, hold for a split second, and press back up. This is a very effective exercise.

After triceps, do front raises with a bar, plate, or dumbbells. Heavy weights used. Also do side delts with dumbbells or a cable, rear delts, 4 or 5 sets of lats, a few hammer curls. Do delt and lat work by feel, but continuously do more and heavier weight.

This workout is done on Sunday and should last no longer than 1 hour and 10 minutes.

On Wednesday, the workout is called the maximum effort method day. When using a barbell, do singles. Naturally, work up slowly, but always try a new max.

To become very strong, you must lift a very heavy weight on this day. It may take a second and a half or so to complete the lift, but this is how a muscle contracts maximally, which builds absolute strength.

We do many exercises on this day that resemble the bench press but are not regular bench presses. This is known as conjugate training. After doing an exercise with weights over 90% for 5 or 6 weeks, your strength will regress. We train at 100%+ all year long by changing a barbell exercise every 2 or 3 weeks. The major barbell exercises that we perform are as follows.

Floor Presses: Lower the bar until the triceps are completely on the floor and relaxed before pressing the bar up. By relaxing the arms you break up the eccentric/concentric chain. This will build explosive strength as well as the bottom part of the bench press.

Board Press: Board presses will build the middle part of the bench press. Lay two or three 2 x 6's on your chest, bring the bar down to the boards, and press back up. This is much different from a rack press because the weight is transferred into the chest, shoulders, and arms. When using three boards, use a close grip, with the index finger just touching the smooth part of the bar. With two boards, place your little fingers on the power rings.

Rack Lock-Outs: We use six pin positions, all at the top. The bar will move 4-5 inches on the top pin and 10-12 inches on the lowest pin. Always use a close grip. Never lower the weight. Instead, press the bar off pins concentrically.

Steep Incline with a Close Grip: Here we will do a max single and then drop down to a 5 rep record. This is only done on the incline.

Seated Press: We do these off pins set at chin level up to 2-3 inches above the head. Again, do singles. Grip width can vary. This exercise is done after one of the other exercises, about 7 out of 10 workouts, for instance, after board or floor press.

The following exercises are done for higher reps, for a rep record. When dumbbells are used for incline, decline, floor, seated, or regular presses, after a warmup, go to a heavy weight, for example, 110's, and try a rep record. The rep range should be 15-20. This is known as the repetition method. You must go to failure.

Weighted pushups with the feet higher or lower than the hands are done the same way. Warm up and max out with a 25, 45, or 100 pound plate on your upper back or have a training partner sit on your shoulders facing the same direction. Dumbbells and pushups also act as a hypertrophy aid.

Illegally wide bench presses, an inch or so outside the power rings, will act as a strength and muscle builder when a 6 rep max is established for a 2-3 week minicycle. Always keep the elbows tucked in. Note: a 6 rep max means the most weight one can get for 6 reps after a warmup.

Do one core (above) exercise per week, followed by four or five special exercises, total, for the triceps, delts, upper back, and lats. Always push up your special exericses.

Key Notes: It is not necessary to do a max bench press to develop absolute strength. All that is required is to place the muscles in a situation that involves strong contraction for a period of time that duplicates the time in which a max bench press is performed. This works best through maximizing a certain portion of the lift (bottom, midway, or top) using the maximum effort method.

Fast lowering, or the eccentric phase, of a bench press will produce momentum that is converted into kinetic energy that aids in raising the bar back to arms length.

Floor presses, like box squatting, will build explosive strength by overcoming a static position through active, or dynamic, work.

Don't pause the bench press in training; this builds mainly static strength. The stretch reflex lasts up to 2 full seconds, much longer than a legal pause. However, do pause when doing floor presses and board presses.

When doing rack presses, remember to press off a prescribed pin setting. This requires you to overcome inertia.

As your triceps get stronger, add chains to the bar for bench pressing. Use 5/8 chains that are 5 feet long, looped through a 1/2 chain that is fixed around the Olympic bar sleeve. Half of the 5/8 chain should be resting on the floor to start. When the bar is on the chest, all the chain should be on the floor. At this position, you have your original 55-60% of your 1 rep max on the bar, which is critical.

This program works. Six years ago, I did 530 at 242 by training with 365 for 8 sets of 3 reps. That was 70%. After a comeback from a serious injury, at age 49, I recently did 535 at 242 by training at 285 for 8 sets of 3 reps. That's 55% with 30 pounds of chain at the top. That's progress through sports science.

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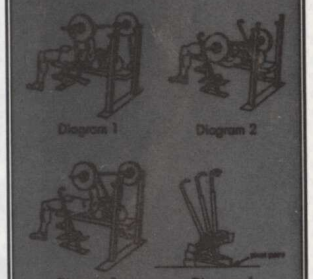

Diagram 1 Diagram 2 Diagram 3 Diagram 4

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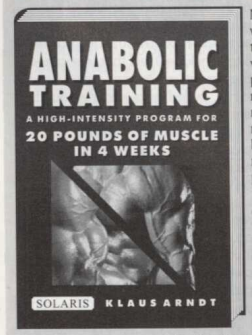

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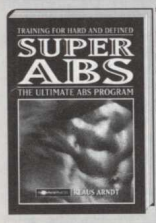

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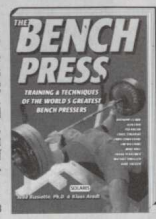

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