

Ted Arcidi, world record holder in the bench press at 666 pounds, recently presented a seminar at York Barbell. Arcidi answered a variety of questions, offering some of his own training methods and philosophy. You should find his answers informative and helpful.

Q: How do you become a successful power athlete?

A: Desire and hard work are two of the most important factors. No one ever became a successful powerlifter without wanting to be one. I think hard work has been the key to my success. Besides working hard, I maintain my regime, get plenty of sleep and eat right. If you do those things, I think you can achieve what you want.

Q: What's the best way to make strength gains?

A: I'm a firm believer in using heavy weights and little rest in all my exercises. I believe reps should be used for power. Too many reps and you aren't utilizing the power method. Don't smoke up 3-4 sets of benches. It only shows that you need to add weight. Don't be content to stay at one level. If the first set goes up extremely easy, add 5-10 pounds immediately. Don't wait for the next workout. If you can complete 3-4 sets, add five pounds. This applies to assistance work as well as benches. My philosophy is to increase weight whenever possible. Don't hold back and wait for the next workout. Go for it. The whole idea is to break barriers. Handling maximum weights is important even if you're only lifting in your basement. Remember, however, to keep your workout under control. Don't go all out unless



Ted Arcidi making a point about the right way to train at one of his recent well-received training seminars

THE BENCH

Training Tips from Ted Arcidi

by Barry Sparks

your routine calls for it. Another thing I have found helpful for strength gains are forced reps. I do 3-4 forced reps for my last set on a heavy bench day and I think it pays off.

Q: What lifting routine do you follow?

A: I lift five days a week, alternating light and heavy workouts, which last from 90 minutes to two hours. My bench press training cycle runs 13-14 weeks. Monday is my light bench press day while Thursday is my heavy bench day. Saturday is reserved for squats, deadlifts and behind-the-neck presses. On Monday, I use 150-180 pounds less than my normal heavy Thursday workout. By the end of my cycle I have worked up to four sets of five reps with 425, followed by 10 reps with 390. I also do sets of five reps in the behind-the-neck press. On Tuesday, I do lat pulldowns—four sets of 10 reps—with 240 pounds and stomach work. I repeat the routine on Friday.

Q: What's the most overlooked training aspect for the power athlete?

A: Without a doubt, it's assistance work. I concentrate on assistance exercises. I really go for them. I work my triceps, shoulders and arms to the maximum. I want them to contribute to my pectorals as much as possible. Too many bench pressers just concentrate on their pecs. I've seen too many pec tears and I believe that if you develop triceps, shoulders, arms and pecs, you'll avoid injuries. And so far, I have—thank goodness. You need good legs and a lower back for the bench. Your back has to be rigid to control heavy weights and you have to form a solid base with your feet. Many power athletes neglect training the whole body.

Q: What are some of your favorite assistance exercises?

A: I like doing close-grip triceps presses while lying down. I use a curl bar and bring it directly to my nose and chin area. Which is the most taxing area for the triceps. I use to do close-grip benches. But the problem was that my pecs had already worked hard in the prior exercise. Plus, I wasn't getting the full tricep pump—I was getting a lot of lat in there. To get the maximum benefit from the close-grip tricep press, you must bring the bar down to your nose and straight back up. Don't whoosh it down to your waist and then back up. You lose the explosiveness of the exercise. Keep the bar right over your nose and go straight back up. This isn't a bench press exercise.

I also like doing lat pulldowns. I feel the best grip is one wider than your shoulders. This helps develop the whole lat muscle group. The

closer the grip, the more muscle groups you are using to do the work. I do four sets of 10, alternating between the front and back. Front lat pulldowns help your chest and pecs while the rear lat pulldowns aid your total back. I try to do all my assistance work at high speed.

Q: What's the best exercise for the bench press?

A: For my money, it's the behind-the-neck press. It's great for the shoulders and back. The first millisecond of explosion in the bench press utilizes the muscles you work in the behind-the-neck-press. On Saturday, I work to my best three reps in the behind-the-neck press.

Q: How do you prepare for a meet?

A: As I mentioned, my training cycle runs 13-14 weeks. After a meet, I take two weeks off. Then I start with my best sets of 6 reps for three weeks. Then I cut to my best 3-4 sets of five reps. I do five reps for three to five weeks. I think the first six or seven weeks of the cycle are the most crucial. That's when I try to build my power and endurance. It's also when you build up your tendons and ligaments. You have to be conditioned to handle heavy weights.

Six weeks prior to the meet, I move to three sets of three reps for two weeks. By then, I'm starting to get in tune with the heavy weights. I believe you make your most strength gains the first two weeks of three sets of three reps. After the first

two weeks of three sets of three reps, I add five pounds each week. The whole idea of cycling is to cut your reps and increase your poundage.

During the training cycle, however, I maintain my same speed for my assistance exercises. And I like to do them quick. I know there's a tendency to overlook the assistance exercises, but don't. They'll pay dividends.

Q: How do you warm up prior to lifting in competition?

A: If I wanted to open with 500 pounds, I would do a set of five reps at 135, 2 reps at 225 and then I would do a single rep with 315, 385, 405, 425, 430 and 470. And I just do touch-and-goes. I don't pause on my benches during workouts or warmups because I think you can start to think about it too much.

I think eight to 10 minutes is plenty for warmups. I used to do a complete workout as a warmup because I was hung up about not being ready. I used to do three reps with the opener in warmups and then bomb on my second lift in competition.

But now I'm a firm believer in single reps as a warmup. Believe it or not, you'll be warmed up with singles. There hasn't been an incident yet where someone separated a shoulder from not being warmed up after doing singles. Single warmups give you restraint and discipline. They'll make you hungry for the weight you want. You'll feel much more explosive.

Q: What about the psychological aspect of lifting?

A: I believe lifting is 50 percent mental and 50 percent physical. You have to have the right frame of mind to be successful. I used to start to get psyched up about five minutes before a lift. But now, I wait until 30 seconds before I'm supposed to lift. That's when I start to go a little crazy. But 30 seconds is a long time if you are really psyched.



Handing off to Ted is George Hechter, for a demonstration lift in York.