

TRAINING

Assistance Exercises for the BENCHPRESS

as told by Louie Simmons, Westside Barbell

include triceps extensions on the floor, relaxing the arms on each rep. This builds explosive strength, which is required after a pause. On the other day, they are done in a regular manner, which provides continuous muscle tension, a key element of strength.

Triceps extensions on the floor are done by lowering a barbell behind the head while lying down. We use 10, 25, 35, and 45 pound plates. By doing this, we work the triceps at four different angles. It doesn't do any good to be strong at only one position when the arms travel through a full range of motion. The reps with a barbell are 3-6. Use heavy weights and work up to a rep PR with good form. Use a thumbless grip. Rest 90 seconds between sets.

Dumbbells can also be used. The palms should face inward, and the reps should be about 8 for 4-7 sets. This amounts to 32-56 total reps. The rest between sets is 15-30 seconds. This exercise will definitely get the triceps in shape, which

most lifters need. With the palms facing inward, most people can do triceps without pain.

Keep the bar or dumbbells close to the head; don't make it a pull-over. Don't lower the weight too slowly. Eccentric work contributes to muscle soreness, something we don't need: eccentric work does contribute to muscle size, but this is not what we're after. Concentrate on the muscles near the elbow; they are mainly responsible for triceps strength in the bench press.

The same rules apply to triceps work done while lying on the bench. Don't hold the elbows stationary. Rather, lower the bar or dumbbells straight down and then roll the elbows back toward the head. This method is similar to the seated French press. The stretch around the elbows is essential. We do a lot of bar extensions to the throat. This requires a high degree of elbow rotation.

I will briefly talk about the Paul Dick's press. It's similar to what was referred to as the California press.

Basically, it is a 75% extension and 25% press. The bar will land 1-2 inches above the nipples, and the elbows are rolled up and back toward the face. This stops shoulder rotation and places most of the stress on the triceps. The Paul Dick's press is a widely used exercise at Westside and has helped produce a 712 all-time record at 275, a 672 at 260, and a 617 at 306.

Good bench pressers lower the bar with their lats. When someone shakes when lowering the bar, he or she is not using the lats properly. A row is the opposite of a bench press, so when lowering a weight, visualize pulling the weight down with the lats. This is essential when using a good bench shirt. It also sets the lats in the correct stretch reflex position. When the lats are strong, they keep the arms pulled close to the body. With strong lats and correct triceps development (the triceps head on the inside of the arm), one will maintain good bench press form.

How important do we think lats are? We train them three times a week. Sunday, after benching by percentages, we do lats last, 3-5 sets. We believe one must work the upper body completely. That means upper back, shoulders, arms, lats, and chest (indirectly). This stimulates the entire group of pressing muscles.

Let's talk about pull-downs. We use a variety of handles, from very wide to a V-handle. All pull-downs are done to the front. Some are done with a reverse grip to develop the lower lats. We don't work toward wide lats, but rather thickness. The sets and reps vary from lifter to lifter, but we do roughly 6-12 sets of 6-15 reps. We do lats by feel.

Tom Waddie likes wide grip lat pulls the best, whereas Kenny Patterson prefers the V-handle for most of his lat work. It's just a matter of preference.

We also do a great deal of chest-supported rows. Our row machine has a double set of handles. The upper handles are used to build the upper portion of the back and lats. When using the lower handles, our middle and lower lats are stimulated. The closer the grip, the lower the lat is worked. The wider the grip, the higher the lat involvement. If you don't have a row machine, you can use a cambered bar or dumbbells while lying face down on an inclined bench. We don't do T-bar rows or bent-over rows. These stress the lower back too much. For those who use a chest-supported row machine or a regular T-bar row, you must pull down on the bar toward you as you pull up the weight. This will ensure your lats are worked fully.

Pull-ups and weighted chin ups will always be core lat exercises. All that is needed is an overhead bar. A variety of grip widths can be used. The palms can face toward or away from the body. Gary Sanger, who was #1 in the 1988 in 1984, would do heavy weighted chin ups with a reverse grip. This was primarily for deadlifting, but nevertheless very impressive. Gary was responsible for many of the methods we use today.

Next, I will talk about working the upper back. Let's go back to the lat machine for a few exercises. While standing, back away from the machine and pull a rope attachment toward your face while stretching the rope apart. High reps are in order; work to failure. A variety of bars can be used, but always do high reps. These will not only increase the size of the upper back but also prevent rotator injuries. Pull some high above the head

rear, and side not to mention the traps. I've never seen a great bench presser without a huge upper back. That's the foundation for a powerful blast-off.

Side delt raises are done on both bench press

days. Most are done rather a weak muscle group is holding you back. You must learn to find time to it. It is our opinion that after bench pressing the triceps are most important and should be trained first on bench press day. The shoulders and upper back are next and then the lats. On the other day, known as the max effort day, triceps are first, then delts and upper back, and finally lats, and lots of them: lighter weight on Sunday, bench press day, 3-5 sets, and heavier weight on Wednesday, assistance bench press day, 8-12 sets. I hope some of these exercises will help you as they have helped Kenny Patterson. In September 1994, Kenny made a PR 560 in Pittsburgh. In September 1995 at the Greatest Bench Press in America in Dallas, he did 712 at 271, a 152 pound increase. I believe Kenny may be the first junior to hold an open world record. Who will be the next?

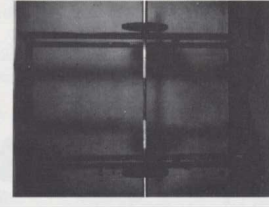
Kenny Patterson does chest supported rows, in front of the Westside Barbell Club record board. (Photos by D. Black)

rotating system of two or three exercises after the main workout exercise. They are also done by feel; only you know how much to do.

We live by special exercises like these and countless exercises like bench press itself does not stall, rather a weak muscle group is holding you back. You must learn to find time to it. It is our opinion that after bench pressing the triceps are most important and should be trained first on bench press day. The shoulders and upper back are next and then the lats. On the other day, known as the max effort day, triceps are first, then delts and upper back, and finally lats, and lots of them: lighter weight on Sunday, bench press day, 3-5 sets, and heavier weight on Wednesday, assistance bench press day, 8-12 sets. I hope some of these exercises will help you as they have helped Kenny Patterson. In September 1994, Kenny made a PR 560 in Pittsburgh. In September 1995 at the Greatest Bench Press in America in Dallas, he did 712 at 271, a 152 pound increase. I believe Kenny may be the first junior to hold an open world record. Who will be the next?

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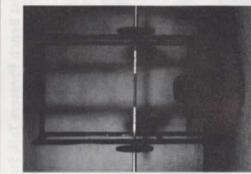
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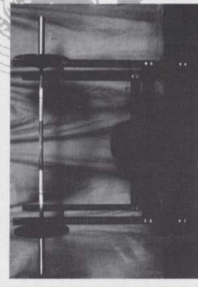
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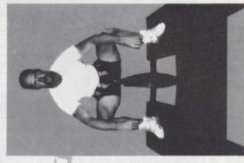
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I study the progress of most of the top powerlifters in the United States. One reason is that if a lifter's body structure is similar to one of our lifters, we may duplicate his technique.

For example, John Inzer uses a particular rocking style to start his deadlift. Because John is an exceptional deadlifter, I tried to duplicate his style, but I was unable to because I had shorter arms and lacked flexibility. However, I had Chuck Vogelpohl and Mark Marinelli try it, and they both immediately broke personal records. My observations had produced a positive training effect for two of our best lifters.

A lifter who is not only incredibly strong but also very innovative in his training methods is Jesse Kellum. When he stalls, he always finds a way to progress. Why does Jesse continue to make gains while others stall for years? Like us, he realizes that, for example, it is not the bench press that stalls but a particular muscle group.

There are lifters that can out-bench some of our lifters, but there isn't a group that can out-bench Westside Barbell. The 10th best bench press, by the Schwartz formula, at our gym is 501 at 181. This was done by Arnold Coleman at the 1994 WPC Worlds.

Now let's talk about training. We believe that the triceps, followed by the upper back, lats, and delts, are the most important in the bench press. We don't do any direct chest work.

I will outline several triceps exercises that we do on a regular basis. We rotate these exercises every 3-6 weeks. Triceps are trained twice a week. One workout may



Angelo Berardinelli does those Westside Barbell recommended triceps extensions lying on the floor.