

WORKOUT

of the Month

"CONTROLLED CHAOS" The Bench Press Workout Philosophy of Glenn Buechlein MS., BS, C.S.C.S.

I know you're thinking that the title of the article is an oxymoron, right? Well, you are correct. I must say that I thoroughly enjoy oxymora such as jumbo shrimp, civil war, and one that is extensively thrown around in the current political climate, religious tolerance. Yeah, it is oxymora, not oxymorons. I was not terribly pleased to discover that either. While on my working vacation, I contemplated what to call my current bench program. I settled on 'controlled chaos' to describe my current workout strategy, because when I sat down to write a typical training cycle, I realized that I have no set attack, yet things typically fall into place in a quasi-controlled manner. I guess my workout can be described as spontaneous, but with a prescribed method to the madness, even if it exists only in my mind and is only brought to the surface once the workout begins. I do have a set of guidelines I try to follow, but the exercises are not usually filled in beforehand. This may sound chaotic, and at times it is, but often a given workout hinges on my level of injury as well as other extraneous factors. Ultimately, I lift by feel and experience. I see lifters getting burned out, stagnant, and frustrated because they choose to follow a sample workout to the letter. In essence, some lifters create a self-fulfilling prophecy because they do what is written into a program regardless of whether the program suits their individual needs or can enable them to reach their potential. Confucius - who said that learning without thinking is useless, and thinking without learning is dangerous - best sums up this mentality.

Many people search for the perfect workout with the same exhaustive perseverance as seekers of the Holy Grail. I tend to believe that the quest or belief that there is one correct way to train is similar to Fermi's paradox involving the existence of extraterrestrial life. In a galaxy supposedly teeming with intelligent life, Fermi simply asked, "where are they?" if there are so

many advanced civilizations then they should be here. If there is one correct way to train, where is it? With our advanced level of science, there should be a simple definitive answer to the question of what workout regimen is best. The key to working out in my mind is not a question of what to do, but rather what to do with it. As Bernard Ebunich said, "millions say the apple fell, but Newton was the one to ask why." Often, I ask some of my lifters why they are doing what they are doing? They cannot give an answer or else they quickly laugh embarrassedly and realize their choice of exercises is pretty ugly. The longer I lift, I realize that constructive criticism or simply questioning a novice lifter, including myself, is a productive approach. You really do have to be cruel to be kind.

Science is said to be the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition. However, I believe enthusiasm, drive, and heart can go a long way within the realm of lifting. An overriding factor is to do whatever program you choose with an intensity and fervor that would make Tony Robbins froth at the mouth with bubbling pride. Too many lifters literally get paralysis from too much analysis. How many reps per set? How many sets? Should I do this with that, and this with the other thing, in Week One or Week Three, in a seated or standing position? Good grief. Come on. Just do something and do it hard.

I like the guys who write to experts, who exhaustively and graciously answer questions on a volunteer basis, and somewhat verbally accost the expert because they changed something in their workout. Here is a common exchange: *Yeah, Johnny Elite, I saw where you said to do 3 sets of 15 reps of d-bells every 3 weeks for hypertrophy work and now you said that you only do this every 6 weeks. What gives? It's like these guys were told that 2+2 now equals five. A wrench has certainly been thrown into their engine of life. My*

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Glenn Buechlein was ranked Number One on the TOP 100 list for 2425 published in the April 2002 issue of Powerlifting USA. (photograph provided by courtesy of Glenn, taken at the 2001 IPA Nationals where he set an IPA Submasters World Record with 585 @ 242 lbs.)

This plan of attack is based on several main ideas. I only bench once per week and it is on Saturday which I call max effort day. A prerequisite for any max effort day is loud, death metal music, not the soft rock stuff. As far as the actual workout, I try to alternate a full movement on the first exercise during max effort day followed by a partial initial movement the next workout. That is, the workout in Week One will begin with a ME movement such as green reverse band presses in the power rack. By full movement I mean that the bar is brought to the chest for a full ROM. The next week's first exercise will be a partial movement such as a 3 board press. I try to continually alternate a full with a partial on my first movement which always culminates with a max single. That is, an attempt for 1 rep, and hopefully it will be for a PR.

The second exercise will generally be a lift that focuses on the triceps, but still mimics the bench press. Examples include reverse cambered bar presses, 5 board presses, lying log presses, etc. I tend to perform 5 reps for these sets. The battery of exercises done second in the rotation of movements generally involve the utilization of a close grip in order to build triceps strength for the lockout. The third movement involves the use of a close grip and emphasizes

sizes higher reps. A great example would be what I call tricep death. We employ all the boards we have in the gym. We do 5 reps off the chest immediately followed by 5 reps off of one board, two, three, four, five, and finally five reps off 6 boards. This is done with no rest between sets (boards) and results in the lifter completing 35 reps before being allowed to vacate the bench. Other favorites in our scheme involve various push-ups with chains and bands and timed speed reps. These simply are sets done in 10 seconds with the goal being to accomplish as many reps in 10 seconds as possible. You may notice that we do not do a lot of extensions in our training. Why?

The rest of the workout centers on the training of the back (lats, traps, and anything else you can't see when facing a mirror) and muscle groups that each individual believes need attention or rehabilitation. I hope you enjoy the workout. Choose the stuff you like and believe will be beneficial in order for you to fulfill your own unique goals and toss the rest out like the Christmas fruitcake. No, I don't mean the uncle everyone is afraid to go near. The exercises in my gym's video are demonstrated in my gym's video entitled 'Power B's Homemade Hard-core Training: The Bench

press'. This video is available through my gym or at Elite Fitness Systems run by Dave Tate. Also, for a little fun, the first reader to e-mail me at buech@custom.net with at least 7 oxymora contained in my article will receive a free copy of the video.

Sample 6 week workout for the bench press

Week #1: 1. green reverse band presses - do sets of three rep until bar speed diminishes and then strive for a 1 rep max. 2. half benches with band behind back - do 5 reps for 3 sets. 3. plyo - push-ups off plates or boards - do 3 sets to failure. 4. back work

Week #2: 1. 3 board presses - do 3 reps until bar speed slows, then go for a max single. 2. log floor presses - do sets of 5-8 reps adding weight per set until you cannot get 5 reps/ if you have no log, use heavy d-bells with a palms facing grip. 3. speed benches - take a weight that you normally can do 10 reps with and try to do 10 reps in 10 seconds. The timer should start the watch when you begin your downward movement on the first rep. Do 3 sets of 10 reps. 4. back work

Week #3: 1. Close-grip chain presses - load the bar with at least 2 sets of chain (I prefer 100 lbs.) and do sets of 3 until bar slows and then

go for a single record. 2. 5 - board presses - simply do sets of 5 reps off of 5 boards until 5 reps is not achieved. Try to stay tight and tuck the elbows. 3. Beekers - these are board presses and full range presses in combination. Do a full rep and the do a rep off of a board in an alternating fashion, so each set involves 5 reps off the board and 5 full reps. We prefer using 3 boards. Do 3 sets of 10. 4. back work

Week #4: 1. 2 board presses with minis - do 3 reps per set until you slow and then do reps striving for a max single. 2. rug or carpet presses - roll up and old rug and duct tape it so it sits approximately 4 - 6 inches off your chest. Do sets of 5 reps focusing on pausing on the rug and keeping the elbows tucked. 3. chain push-ups - load chain on the back of the lifter after each rep is performed. We use up to 100 lbs. of chain. Once the lifter does all the chain or fails on a given rep, start to de-load or take off sets of chain. So, do a rep, then add a set of chain until failure and then do a rep and take a set off. Depending on the amount of chain on hand, this can be an exercise that involves up to 30 reps per set. Do 2 sets. 4. back work

Week #5: 1. Wide or competition grip benches with multiple minis. We use a set of monster

minis and a set of regular minis which I would guess equal approximately 170 lbs. of resistance or about 215 lbs. counting the bar weight at the top. Do 3 reps per set and then try for a max single. 2. heavy d-bell floor presses using a palms facing grip. Do sets of 5 reps consistently using heavier d-bells until you cannot get 5 reps. 3. tricep death - take a weight that you normally can do 20 full reps. Do 5 reps off the chest immediately followed by 5 reps off 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and finally 6 boards. So, there is a total of 35 reps per set. Do 2 sets. 4. back work

Week #6: 1. reverse cambered bar presses - do 3 reps until the bar slows and then try for a single PR. These somewhat mimic a 2 or 3 board press, but are more difficult and bring in more stabilizers. 2. lockouts in the rack - do sets of 9 reps alternating between 3 different grips. Do 3 reps close, 3 medium, then 3 wide. Do sets of 9 until failure, then go for a max single focusing on your weakest grip. 3. weighted push-ups with a 100 lb. plate on your back. Do sets of 10 or until failure. Do 3 sets. 4. back work

If you do not have access to the chains, bands, etc. try to overcome by substituting exercise that are similar. Good luck and have fun.

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