

The forced reps principle of training has probably been used by 99% of all serious lifters and is one of the most popular training methods in existence. Forced reps can enable a lifter to raise his training intensity to higher levels, and hopefully realize an increase in size and strength. However, even the best practices can be improved and many lifters stand to gain by re-evaluating what they are currently doing.

Let's start with a quick explanation of the forced reps principle. When using forced reps, a lifter completes a rep (or reps) of an exercise with assistance from a training partner. For example, you may get 5 reps on the bench by yourself, but on the 6th one, you get stuck just off the chest. Your training partner would grab the bar and provide just enough assistance to enable you to complete the rep. Of course, more reps can be done with increasing help from your partner. This method enables a lifter to work past failure, thus adding intensity. The amount of assistance needed can vary from an ever so slight finger touch at the sticking point to an all-out effort from every lifter in the gym to get the bar back in the rack.

Unfortunately, some lifters want too much of a good thing and push beyond extremes that may not be effective and may very well prove to be detrimental to their health. Let's expand further on the bench press example above. Upon attempting the 6th rep, the lifter is able to complete the bench rep with just a little help from his partner, but he continues on for more reps. With each additional rep, his training partner must lift more and more of the weight as the lifter's strength rapidly declines. This can continue until the assisting partner is lifting almost the entire weight from an awkward position. This creates a potentially dangerous situation for both the lifter and his helper. As the lifter tires, he has less and less control of the bar and could easily suffer an injury. The partner is also at risk as he must upright row the bar from an awkward bent forward position, which could result in a muscle pull or back injury. This could result in not being able to get the bar back in the rack, which could spell trouble for both lifter and helper and even lifters nearby. This could happen at any time so the helper has to be alert and ready to take full control of the bar at the blink of an eye.

A popular forced reps variation is using a weight over your max single to exploit negative or eccentric resistance when lowering the weight. In this example, a 250 lb. max bench would load 300 lb. on the bar for a forced rep set. His goal in this case is to lower the bar slowly

STARTIN' OUT

A RETAKE ON FORCED REPS as told to Powerlifting USA by Doug Daniels

to get negative resistance and then try to push the weight off the chest and finish the rep with a partner's help. What usually happens in this scenario is the bar is lowered slowly at first, but as it reaches the midpoint of its descent, the weight of the bar is too much for the lifter to lower slowly and it crashes down to his chest. The resulting press or bounce goes maybe 1/2 inch up off the chest, dies, and comes back down. The helper must react quickly and "upright row" the bar to the rack. In reality, the helper did far more actual work than the bencher. In my opinion, if the lifter is not lifting at least 80-90% of the weight, stop the set immediately. Continuing after this point greatly raises the potential for injury. There's a guy at my gym that subscribes to this principle, but most gym members scatter so as to not be around when he needs help to force some reps, for

obvious reasons.

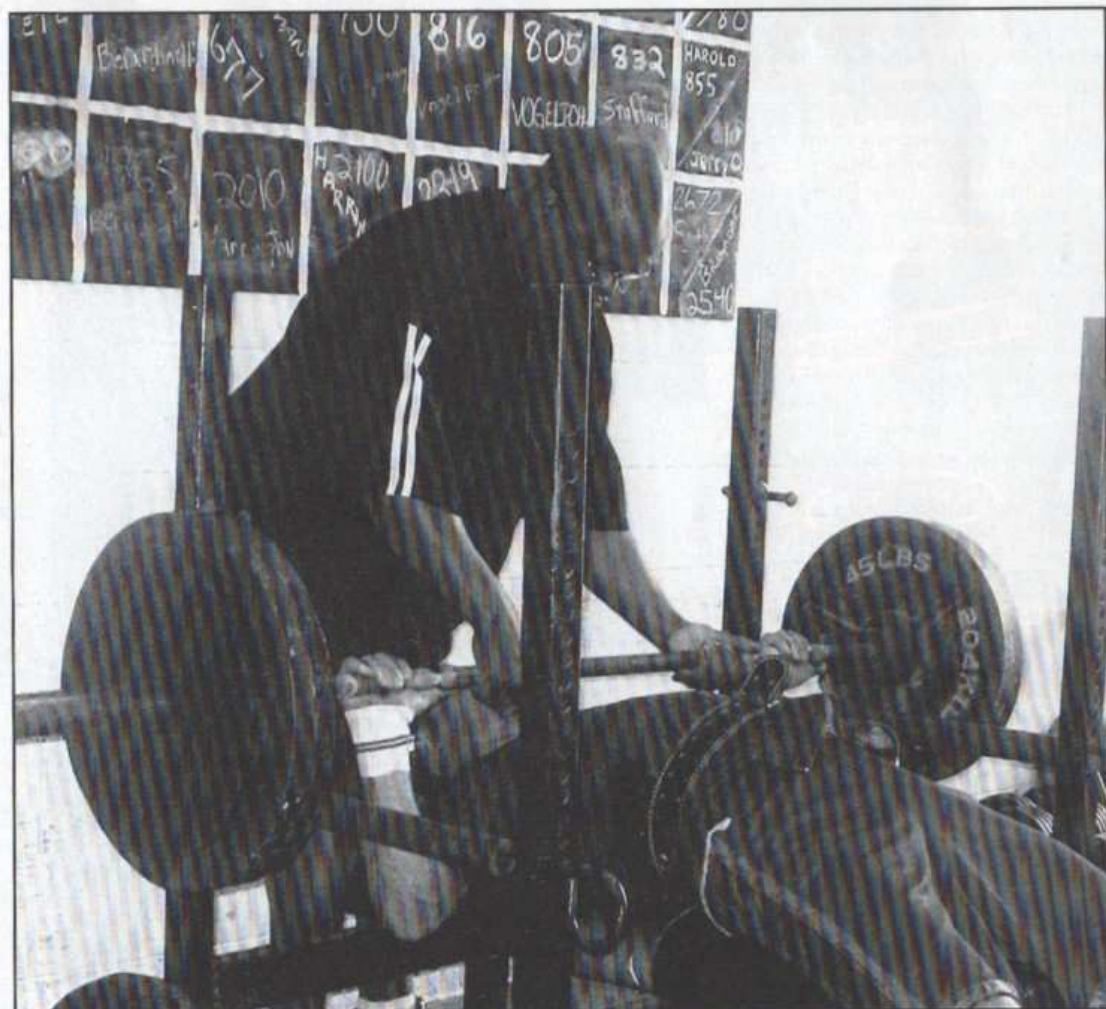
A better scenario of the above example would be to use less weight, no more than 100% or perhaps 10% less than max. Using a lower weight, as I suggest, allows the lifter to focus on lowering the weight slowly and under control, from the top to the bottom. This will help develop more power off the chest, in the case of the bench, instead of essentially working only the top of the lift when using a heavier weight. If you still feel you must use a weight over max, I recommend you not add more than 10%. Using any more weight than this for forced reps increases chance of injury and compromises the execution and benefits of the set; not a good idea.

Some lifts are good fits for forced reps like benches, overhead presses, chins and pulldowns. Other lifts like the squat and deadlift just don't fit the scheme due to their

complexity and inherent danger. Use common sense to determine what lifts you can apply forced reps to. Don't "force" a lift into a forced reps mode. Use of a power rack can add a great deal of safety as the pins can be set to catch the bar if the lifter or helpers fail to lift or control the weight.

Finally, because of the high intensity involved with forced reps, limit their use to not overstress your recuperative abilities. Recuperative ability varies from individual to individual. Some lifters might be able to push the level of intensity harder and longer than others before they overtrain. One or two sets per exercise using forced reps is more than adequate. I suggest dropping forced reps training 2 weeks prior a contest to avoid being overtrained on meet day.

If you are not getting results from forced reps, do a re-think on your current practices versus my suggestions. When you feel yourself not lifting at least 80-90% of the weight during a forced rep, stop the set. Your safety and the safety of your helpers and other gym members should be foremost on your mind. If fellow gym members scatter when you come to bench, do a retake on forced reps.



Wayne Stover hitting some forced reps in a safety rack at Westside Barbell (courtesy of Wayne Stover)