

Those of us who have been exposed to and practice Coach Louie Simmons' style of training, realize that on the dynamic upper body day (Sunday) you perform the bench press for 8-10 sets of 3 reps with approximately 55-60% of your best competition lift. While performing these lifts you vary your grip width throughout the sets. These widths are closer than your competition grip.

I have personally had a tremendous amount of success with the "varied grip bench press" cycle, as have the powerlifters and football players I have trained. By using these closer grips and varying the distances, the athletes are getting a great workout because of the slight angle and leverage changes per lift. Also, as we all know closer grips on the bench press put a greater emphasis on the triceps so your competition bench will become stronger at the lock out. For football players this is also important, especially for linemen so they have the additional strength to lock out their opponents which I refer to as "finishing strength" (using chains and bands are also great for finishing strength).

I have spoke to numerous people and have been on several Internet forums reading posts about varying grips. A lot of times people are trying to compare their lifts to others. I maxed 350 for a close grip, I maxed 500 with my hands 18" apart etc. The problem with these comparisons may be that the grips given are too broad. In example 1, how close is close? In example 2, were your hands 18" apart measured from your pinky or your index finger?

In the past, with our football athletes we would have a close grip bench press day and would have 10 or more grips that the athletes thought were a close grip. For the most part they were right because all of them had a grip closer than their competition grip. I have also taped the bar for various grips but either the tape would not stay on after a week, or too much tape made the bar uneven to grip.

To make things simpler for all of us, coaches and athletes, I deter-

# TRAINING

## Grips by the Numbers

as told by Joe Kenn, MA, CSCS, Director of Strength and Conditioning, University of Utah

mined the grips we primarily use in our strength facility and developed a numbering system for our athletes to refer to on the majority of their upper body presses. We will use this system for the barbell bench press, incline press, and standing overhead press.

The numbering system accounts for the 8 most utilized grips that we have utilized in our program. It has been a great implementation because it has taken away any of the guesswork for athletes as to what grip we are looking for them to perform.

### THE GRIPS

**Competition Grip** - the competition grip is simply defined as to the grip the athlete utilizes when he is performing a maximum effort on test day. This grip will vary from athlete to athlete (some athletes take the maximum allowed distance, some are slightly closer). Note: As a collegiate strength and conditioning coach for football and a former collegiate offensive lineman, I understand that football is played with the hands inside the framework of the body. Yes, a closer grip would be more beneficial as far as the sport goes, but I want the athlete to have the opportunity to bench press

the most weight he can possibly handle with strict technique. This will lead to increased self-confidence in the weight room and on the field.

**Grip 1** - grip 1 is what we consider as an athletic grip. To perform the grip 1 press the athlete places his pinky finger on the outside knurl line (points A-B, figure 1). We do a tremendous amount of Incline Presses using grip 1.

**Grip 2** - grip 2 is termed modified full thumb grip. To perform the grip 2 press, place the tip of your thumb on the inside knurl line (points C-D, figure 1) and extend your thumb along the knurling. The length of your thumb is the determining factor for your grip. Unless you have extremely large hands your grip 2 distance between index fingers should be closer than your grip 1 width.

**Grip 3** - grip 3 is termed the modified 1/2 thumb grip. To perform the grip 3 press, place the mid-joint line of your thumb on the inside knurl line (the upper portion of your thumb will be on the smooth section of the bar). Extend the rest of your thumb along the knurling of the bar. The length of your thumb that is on the knurling of the bar is

your grip width. This is the grip we will have our athletes take heavy singles at after performing there varied grip work out.

**Grip 4** - grip 4 is the modified index grip. To perform a grip 4 press, place your index finger on the inside knurl line.

**Grip 5** - grip 5 is the close index grip. To perform a grip 5 press, place the index finger on the smooth part of the bar.

**Grip 6** - grip 6 is the close middle finger grip. To perform the grip 6 press, place the middle finger on the smooth part of the bar.

**Grip 7** - grip 7 is the illegally wide grip as termed by Coach Simmons. To perform the grip 7 press the athlete's index finger is approximately 1/2 to 1" wider than the outside knurl line. We primarily utilize grip 7 presses during the post season and late spring training cycles.

The main difference between the modified and close grips is that the modified grip has your hand placement with all your fingers on the knurling and the close grip you do not.

When we are writing a program out for our athletes the majority of the time there will be a grip number that goes with the press. For example, the athlete would perform a Grip 1 Incline Press on Monday and a Grip 3 Bench Press on Friday. If there is not a grip number listed in front of a press the athlete can use his competition grip.

When we are performing our varied grip bench press cycle we usually will put the grip in front of the goal repetition.

This has cleared up a lot of confusion in our facility. We have a chart posted on our wall with all the grips and their definitions so if an athlete forgets or does not know what a particular grip is he can refer to the chart. I am a firm believer in exercise variation and by changing grips you also change the exercise. I hope this will be of help and possibly bring some uniformity to grip comparisons on the forums.

Table 1 - Varied Grip Bench Press Work Out

Set #	Percentage	Grip x Rep
1	55%	G2x3
2	55%	G3x3
3	55%	G4x3
4	55%	G6x3
5	55%	G2x3
6	55%	G3x3
7	55%	G4x3
8	55%	G8x3

Figure 1 - Bench Grips - Hand Placement

