

POWER PROFILE

a detailed PL USA
look at some of the
best lifters in the world

Resurrection of a Bench Press

Dr. Fred Hatfield has been a standout performer in several sports. In his college days he was a champion gymnast. He had significant success as an Olympic lifter and has even won major regional physique honors which qualified him to compete in the Mr. America contest. In Powerlifting, he found the sport that was truly his niche, and has made great strides, as readers of Powerlifting USA well know, and is now poised just short of Senior National and World Championship victories. His tremendous performances in one specific lift have earned him the title 'Dr. Squat', but his totals have also been very impressive, and that means he can produce on the other two lifts as well.

Recently, he has made rather profound progress on the bench press, a lift that has often been his weak link, and with good reason, as the man has gone through major corrective surgery on both shoulders. Yet, now he is benching more than ever before. He's learned some very important lessons about the lift and training in general, which I hope will prove very valuable to the readership of PL USA.

Fred has always been a very confident and aggressively successful athlete. The same fierce determination that characterizes his lifting now was also a factor in his gymnastic career, which he pursued up until 1970. Naturally, with dislocates and other such moves being part of the program, some shoulder difficulties were experienced, but young Fred charged ahead with little concern, feeling as many athletes do in the early years of their careers that a little pain never hurt anyone. Indeed, he did seem to get away with this philosophy for quite a while, but aggravations began to accumulate in the rotator cuff attachments of his shoulders, particularly on the left hand side.

In 1970 Fred threw himself into Olympic lifting. He trained ruggedly and competed often on the East Coast, and, as he puts it 'tore hell out of my shoulders'. Locking out in the snatch, with the bar behind the neck, became an excruciating experience. He continued his drive for national honors in Olympic lifting despite the realization that he had probably suffered several small tears in the rotator cuff attachments, which were becoming progressively worse. Specifically

because of the tremendous trouble he was having with his shoulders, he bombed out of the 1976 Olympic Team trials. He just couldn't hold a snatch properly anymore.

In 1976 Fred tuned out on Olympic lifting, and tuned in on Powerlifting. The sport turned out to be ideal for him, and he rapidly rose to national prominence and became particularly known as a good squatter and deadlifter. In the bench press, he was adequate... 'just enough to stay with the pack' as he would say, hitting around 375 or so in the 181 pound division. His shoulders (now the right side was beginning to show some wear and tear) were still bothering him, but he had developed some useful techniques that compensated for his problem. As the left shoulder was causing the most difficulty he would lower the bar more on the right side at the chest. This shifted some of the stress and he was still able to lock out the bar evenly at the top.

In 1978, Fred came into the Seniors loaded for bear. He nearly succeeded with a World Record squat, and was looking to do well in the bench press, having hit a 450 plus effort in training, but in that contest he tore completely loose all four rotator cuff muscle attachments on his first attempt at 391. People in the back of the auditorium later told Fred they could hear a 'crackling' sound, like that dry twigs being stepped on as the injury occurred. The bar came down on Fred's chest with a crash and two ribs were broken.

At this point, surgical repair was Fred's only alternative. The doctors made a crescent shaped incision over the top of the deltoid, and a lateral one down the side to expose the torn attachments. Fred was administered a nerve block for the affected area and was able to observe the operation as it progressed with the aid of a mirror. Part of the operation involved an acromiectomy, where part of the acromion-clavicular joint is removed, but the major effort was the reattachment of the torn tendons. This is accomplished by threading the tendons through holes drilled in the bone and suturing them in place. As Fred watched the operation, the most striking aspect were the damaged tendons themselves. After years of minor tears, inflammation, and abuse, Fred said that they looked remarkably similar to pieces of old,

by Mike Lambert
as told by
Dr. Fred Hatfield

frayed rope.

Recovery from the operation represented another major effort for Fred. To eliminate all stress on the healing attachments, Fred was fitted with what is known as an 'Airplane' brace, which requires that the arm be supported while sticking out straight to the side. He wore this getup for 3 long months and had no choice but to fall asleep



The Year of the Big Bench for Dr. Fred Hatfield, at least, was 1981. At the Hawaii meet in March, he hit a 468 (upper photo). At the Seniors in July, he got a 484 (middle photo), and at the World Games he got his first 500 plus bench, with a 501 (bottom photo).



sitting upright, as he was not allowed to lay down at any time. You can imagine what fun it was to do things like take a bath, etc. During this time Fred refrained from nearly all exercise, something which hindsight later convinced him was not the proper course.

In early 1979 the pieces began to fall back in place and Fred trained for the North American Championships meet where, at 181, he had his finest performance in that class. He drove his bench all the way up to 450 in pre-meet sessions, but began to feel that sickening old feeling once again and ended up with considerably less at the contest. Fred was still stubbornly training 'on the edge' in the bench press; as many heavy, low rep sets as he could stand and now the other shoulder began to deteriorate rapidly. Still, there were periods when he could train very effectively and before the 1979 Senior Nationals in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi he hit 450x3, while over the 181 limit. He bombed out of the meet (after squatting 750x3 in training) when a bone chip mysteriously appeared in his knee and shot down even his relatively modest opening attempt. One day later he was training the bench with Larry Plumlee when the right shoulder attachments tore completely loose, just as the left side had done a year earlier. Fred had the bone chip and shoulder operation taken care of simultaneously. It turns out that the right shoulder was even more seriously degenerated than the left side had

been, and the operation was only partially successful. Even today, his range of motion has not come all the way back. For example, he can't even come close to scratching his back with that arm. This time Fred did not idle himself during recovery. He did lots of free squats, leg extensions, leg curls, but more importantly, he kept training the left arm with dumbbells. It turns out that there is actually a phenomenon known as 'bilateral transfer' by which training one side of the body actually keeps the other side from atrophying quite as much as it would otherwise, and Fred took advantage of this possibility.

The more severe condition of the right arm complicated Fred's recovery efforts and by the time that the initial World Cup came around in early 1980 he was committed to going while knowing that he wasn't in the best of shape, so he basically concentrated on the squat and deadlift. A storm of ugly politics surrounded the World Cup that year, and Fred ended up going to the World Series of Powerlifting meet, directed by Tony Fitton in Alabama, instead. Fred actually had only 3-4 weeks to prepare for the contest, and took it very tentatively in the bench press, ending up with a conservative 248 at 181. Later in the year, Fred lifted at the Juniors in his new weight class, the Middleheavyweights. His bench was not completely back, but at this meet and at the following Senior Nationals, he moved it up to

around the 400 level. Progress in this lift was very frustrating. Fred would frequently have to offset his grip on the bar considerably to compensate for the weakness on the right side. The normally ever-confident Fred began to lament that he might never do a respectable bench again, but in 1981 a remarkable comeback was about to take place.

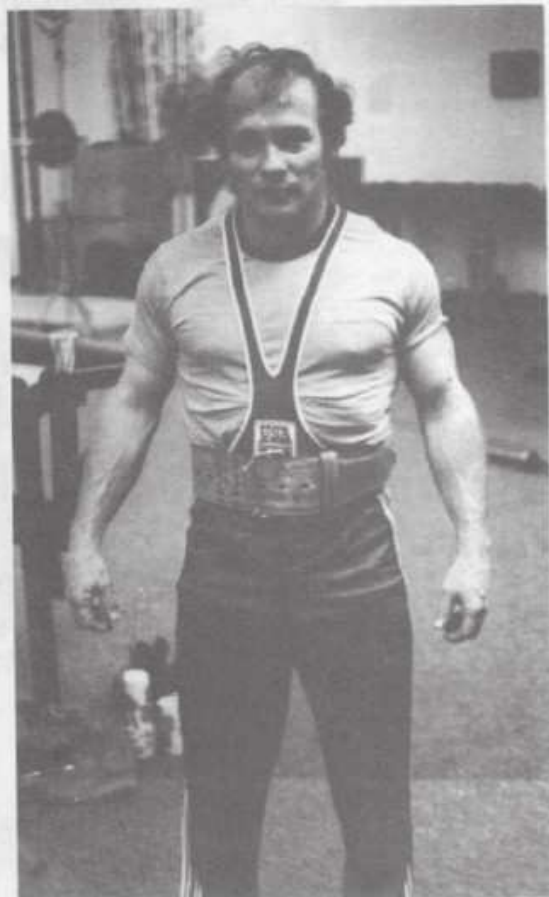
Fred decided to move up another bodyweight class, to the 220 lb. division, and he concentrated on adding many of those pounds in the upper body with some heavy, intense bodybuilding movements. He worked up to 4-5 heavy sets of 8s, and particularly emphasized the use of dumbbells. Dumbbells, unlike barbells, bring in the smaller, synergistic and stabilizer muscle groups which do not receive much stimulation from regular barbell work. Moves like seated dumbbell presses, dumbbell bench presses, front dumbbell raises, bent dumbbell rows solidified the entire area around his beleaguered shoulders. In the regular bench press movement, Fred emphasized heavy sets of eights in his training on the normal bench press movement, and only when peaking for a meet would he do sets of fives and under no circumstances would he handle a poundage which would limit him to less than that number of reps. (In other words, NO SINGLES, NO DOUBLES, NO TRIPLES). In fact, his whole philosophy of bench pressing has, of necessity, become very conservative. Whenever he

feels any pain (occasionally the right side will still bother him) he backs off quickly. In fact, it almost makes some of his training partners sick to watch how easy he takes it, usually handling much less weight than they all know he is capable of. As an added dimension to the dumbbell work, Fred sometimes intentionally throws in a slight out-of-the-groove imbalance in the movement, so that those smaller, synergistic and stabilizing muscles in the shoulder girdle will learn how to fight the lift.

The results of Fred's hard earned wisdom in bench pressing have been very exciting. From a rock bottom effort of 248 in April of 1980, he has gone to a 468 in March of 1981 at the Hawaii meet, a 484 at the Senior Nationals, and a great 501 at 220 bodyweight at the World Games only 2 weeks after the Seniors. As great as that is Fred speculates that if he had treated his shoulders right from the beginning of his career he would be capable of 550 or more now. That a man can come back to 90% of his best of all circumstances, ultimate lift after two major shoulder operations is more than amazing, but the real lesson to be learned is that you shouldn't abuse your shoulders in the first place. Fred could have avoided both his operations (which cost around \$3500 each), he feels, and so could you young lifters out there who are just starting to feel those rotator cuff twinges, or perhaps the even wiser beginners who don't have any shoulder problems and

don't want any at any time. Fred feels the basic key is heavy bodybuilding movements for the upper body, even in the early years, and specifically, you should always emphasize exercises utilizing dumbbells, which work angles your 7 foot bar could never reach.

Sometimes top lifters will tell you things that they only wish they were doing in their training and then go back to less desirable methods when it's time to actually tighten the belt up in the gym, but Fred really puts his carefully analyzed philosophies into practice, to a degree perhaps unmatched by any other lifter around today. At the World Games meet I saw him absolutely blast his 501 up. His final attempt at 507 seemed a certainty for him to make. Fred later said that he knew he could have finished that lift, but he felt a tiny twinge and knew that such a short term moment of glory would not be worth the damage it could create. He wisely backed off. A greedy lifter would have went for it, but a greedy lifter won't be around as long as Fred Hatfield has been and will continue to be. Look for Fred to get that 900 squat he's been looking for, perhaps a 520 bench, and a respectable 775-800 deadlift in 1982 and listen to what he has to say in this article or if you get a chance to talk to him personally. He's looked up the pointy end of the surgeon's scalpel and offers some very weighty experience on what you should be doing in your own personal training.



April, 1980... a 248 bench at 181 at the World Series of Powerlifting meet, after a shoulder operation that Fred was not certain he would ever recover from.



March, 1981... up to a 468 bench at 220 in the Hawaii meet with vastly enhanced musculature, Fred confidently went on to more PRs as the year went on.