

# The BENCH

## ADDING POUNDS TO THE BENCH PRESS

by Ted Kurlowicz

Let me start by stating the purpose of this exercise and provide a brief background on my lifting experience. I've been asked about my bench press training by a lot of lifters and I hope that an article like this will help as many as possible.

About myself: I think my bench pressing surprises people at contests because: (1) I certainly don't look strong (I'm 5 foot 9 inches at 181). (2) I don't have great natural leverage or short arms, (3) I don't maximize any technique advantages such as excessive bridging or a maximum width grip, (4) and still, I usually make the best or one of the best benches in my weight class at local contests. My first contest experience came in the fall of 1977 when I made 350 at a bench meet. I had been training exclusively on universal type equipment at a spa until one month before this event. Since I had made such quick gains, I predicted a 400 lb bench within a year. I reached my goal, but was off by 3 years. As you can see, I have not been one of the lifters who seems to gain on any and every program he tries. In fact, it once took me over a year to get from 365 up to 370. In the last two years, my bench has gone from 370 to 420 without any gains in bodyweight. This article will focus on my training during this period.

The program that originally got me started was George Elder's Strength Training Series (PL USA, Vol 3 No. 1, July 79). What this program did for me was to add a high rep conditioning phase to my cycle and to cut my bench training to twice a week. Those were both important.

Unless you don't have difficulty making weight or are using drugs, you can't bench heavy weights three days a week without overtraining.

I used Elder's advanced program, but only followed it for 5 weeks. The timing of the first scheduled maximum attempts should be the targeted contest.

The program is simple for any lifter to follow since it uses percentages of personal maximum. It follows sound training principles since it starts with moderate

60 percent weight for high reps and progressively moves to high intensity (90 percent) low reps (4). Best of all, it peaks you quickly. I had to adapt this program slightly when I began missing lockouts. The close grip benches the program requires became too light (70 percent) for the triceps to get the necessary lockout power. I modified the program by doing a close grip single with 20 lbs under my heaviest regular grip set of the day and the problem disappeared.

I rode this program from 365 to 400 over about 18 months until I stagnated. After missing 395 in my next contest (May 1981), I decided this program became intense too fast and that I needed some long term conditioning. The program that follows, is how I trained for my last two contests, August 1981 (405) and December 1981 (420 - a PL USA Top 20 lift).

### Conditioning and Flexibility Phase (4 weeks)

Cambered Bar only - Wednesday and Saturday. Warm-up - do 3 sets of 6-8 reps with a chosen weight. (I started with 260 when my bench was 400)

Weeks 2-4, same workout, go up 10 lbs a week on the work sets (I

reached 290x8x3).

### Training Phase (4 weeks)

Regular bar - Wednesday and Saturday. Pick an arbitrary weight (70-80 percent) and work up to 3 sets maximum reps. Don't change the weight on these sets, just go for more reps each week. Do these benches with the 'Hatfield' training style. Purchase *Powerlifting, A Scientific Approach* by Dr. Hatfield for more info. Force the elbows out to 90 degrees from the body while doing the reps and take a wider than normal grip. In my last cycle, my best was 300x12, 300x11, 300x11. On the last week of this phase, begin tricep training with 2 sets of light close grips 60-70 percent for max reps.

### Competition Phase (3 weeks)

Competition grip benches - Wednesday and Saturday. Start 3 weeks before the contest picking a training single as a goal and cycle back 5 lbs per workout. In my last cycle, I chose 395 as a goal and started this phase with 375. Following the single each workout, drop 15 lbs and do a triple. Then close grip up to a single (choose a goal here too - 50 lbs under projected contest maximum). Do one down set with the close grips with 80 percent for max reps. To make some sense out of this, I will indicate my exact training during this phase as an illustration.

Sat. Nov 14 - warm-up, 375x1,

360x3, close grip 315x2, 330x1, 315x5.  
Wed. Nov 18 - warm-up, 380x1, 365x3, 315x2, 340x1, 320x5.  
Sat. Nov 21 - warm-up, 385x1, 370x3, CG 315x2, 350x1, 320x6.  
Tues. Nov 24 - warm-up, 390x1, 375x3, CG 315x2, 355x1, 320x4.  
Sat. Nov 28 - warm-up, 395x1, 380x3, CG 315x1, 360x1.  
Tues. Dec 1, train down - warm-up, 395x1 paused, 385x1 paused, 375x3, CG 315x1, 350x1.  
Thurs. Dec 3, 133x5, 199x5x3.  
Sat. Dec 5, contest, 385x1, 410x1, 420x1.

Bench Assistance - each workout of all phases except contest week.

Lat work - 4 sets of 8-12 reps varying between pulldowns and seated cable rows. On the pulldowns, I vary my grips on almost every set. Arms - close grips as specified. Curls - 4 sets of 6-8 reps. I vary these also, from hammercurls, concentration curls, and preacher machine curls.

Some final notes: (1) During phase one, do not force the elbows out while doing cambered benches.

This caused an extreme stretch in the pectoral insertion and I developed some pain in the shoulder that hasn't gone away since. (2) Don't add assistance work unless you sense a weakness somewhere. I haven't done any inclines, overhead presses, tri-extensions, etc. in three years and I'm making gains without them. Most of the lifters I've seen who do infinite sets of benches and upper body work have a bench that's gone

nowhere. (3) Naturally, try to bench on the same type of bench you expect at the contest (height, width, etc.). (4) Practice taking handoffs at the contest. Some competition benches have lower weight standards and will necessitate taking handoffs at the contest. (5) Don't give up on the BP when you hit a plateau. Try another program. You won't always be able to pick up the slack on the other powerlifts.

I've tried my best to include everything in my program as clearly as possible. To get closure on this article which I feel is already too long, feel free to write me about my ideas here and let me know if it worked for you.

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Ted Kurlowicz...blasting a 385x4 in the gym a week after his 420 PR at the South Jersey Championships