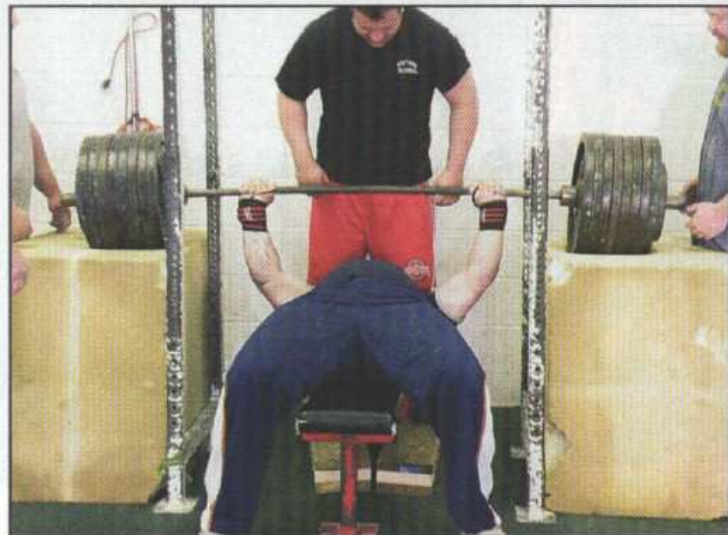


WESTSIDE TRAINING

BENCH LOCKOUT

as told to PL USA by Louie Simmons



Benching Off Foam Blocks at the Westside Barbell Club. (L. Simmons)

Have you been to a bench meet lately? There are a lot more misses than benches made. How can this be when all they do is bench? In my own gym at the last two meets the statistics are as follows.

At the first only 1 of their 12 attempts was good. A week later four were good out of 22 attempts. How can someone who only benches be so inconsistent? I watch all workouts at Westside. I see what works and what does not. One group of bench-only lifters will use bench shirts every Sunday or max effort day. They work their way up in weight, as they use lower and lower board presses. For example, George Halbert made 870 off a half-inch board. At 198 Jason Fry made 700 off the same half-inch board. Two weeks later George missed 800 pounds at the very top, about 1/2 to 1 inch from lockout three times. Jason missed 700 pounds at the very same place. How can this be possible? By the way, they were 0 for 12 at that meet. For one thing, they seldom if ever touch their chest while training with bench shirts. They set the shirt to touch 3, 2, or 1 board. This is how they do an unheard-of number of board presses.

We are not the only ones guilty of this. I know everyone practices the same methods. How can someone bench 870 a half-inch off his chest, yet fail to lock out 800 pounds at the meet? One reason I believe is the fact that after they do board work they go home. No lats,

triceps, no nothing. The second reason is deceleration. If you can press with max force for 15 inches and you lower the bar to the chest,

which is 1 or 2 inches lower than the board, for the first time, you may stop pushing 1 or 2 inches from lockout. Why else would your lockout disappear on the day of the meet?

In physics, work is defined as the product of the net force and the displacement through which that force is exerted, or $W = Fd$. If you can run full speed for 100 feet and you move the starting line back 20 feet, you will stop running full speed 20 feet from the previous finish line. I watched a lifter miss 788 pounds at the top in the meet, yet lock out 855 pounds on two boards a week later.

How many times do you see a lifter roll the bar onto his stomach at meet time? Madonna said it the best. "Like a virgin, touched for the very first time." After months of training and almost never touching their chest, what do you expect?

Jason Fry was having trouble at meets

either touching the chest or locking out. I suggested he replace his shirt that he was breaking board press records with and use a more manageable shirt for the meet. Jason changed from a 47 double Rage X to a 49 double Rage and set the 181 bench record with 707 pounds. Congratulations Jason. I am in no way responsible for Jason's record; his hard work and better judgment was the key.

A second key was to bring up his raw strength. I saw him do a 405 raw bench like an empty bar in the warmup room before his world record 707-pound bench. I suggest doing board presses raw before going to board presses with a shirt. Jesse Kellum re-introduced board pressing to me back in 1993. Then through my articles in *Powerlifting USA* everyone started doing them, but I think they lost track why we do them. Remember, your arms have to extend to lock out, right? Then it makes sense to do extensions: roll-back dumbbell extensions with your elbows out to the sides and triceps extensions. The late, great Jim Williams made them popular in the early 1970s, and they still work. Sometimes we use bands behind the back to do them, with a straight bar or curl bar, or triceps extensions to the forehead, nose, chin, or throat. J.M. presses were a favorite of mine, as well as very steep inclines with a close grip. This one kills the triceps.

I can go on and on, but you know a lot of exercises for the triceps.

George Halbert has said if your upper back is weak, you can't use your triceps to the fullest. Chins, rows, power cleans, face pulls, rear pec deck, and inverted flies can be used. You cannot let your raw bench go down when you continuously use a stronger and stronger shirt; it's a dead-end street. Remember to use a manageable shirt. What happened to getting 300 pounds out of your shirt? Push your raw bench with a bar or dumbbells; don't forget to try all angles and switch them regularly. It's not only Westside that has this problem. The next time you go to a bench meet keep track of how many attempts are good compared to how many are not. I am in no way criticizing but analyzing the problem. Westside has held world records at 132 (Heath), 181 (Fry), 198 (Halbert), 220 (Halbert), 242 (Halbert), 275 (Patterson), and 308 (Fusner). This shows that we have been very successful, but there is a lot of competition out there. With two 198 full powerlifters out there doing 800+ benches (Frankl and Coker) at 198, can anyone take it easy? I don't think so.

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