

Bench shirts are much more complex compared to when they first came out. Lifters have become quite creative in getting their shirts ready for competition. I remember being at an IPF meet overseas and watching some lifters using a vice grip device to help set the shirt. I've also seen lifters use special gloves to help properly fit a shirt.

Many of the lifters I see now use boards to break in their shirt. Starting with 4 or so boards, and then decreasing the number of boards as the bar gets closer to the chest allows the shirt to slowly stretch enough to let the bar finally get to the chest. I have two problems with this technique. First of all, I want to have my shirt broken in prior to the meet and secondarily, I don't believe that this technique trains the correct groove for the bar to travel. This method is, however, portable - you can take it to your competition.

## TRAINING

### Breaking In Your Bench Shirt as told to *PLUSA* by Dr. Larry Miller

I know a number of lifters who will take their new shirt out of the bag and use it for the first time at a particular meet. This works in an ideal world, but I don't feel comfortable going this route. I also have an issue with those lifters who are afraid to change shirts between lifts.

I prefer to have my shirt broken in prior to the meet. The first thing I do is use my competition shirt at my competition bodyweight. If you've

been using a shirt at a bodyweight that is 10 lbs. above your competition weight, that shirt will not give the same as it does at your competition bodyweight.

I recently experimented with "Jump Stretch" bands in order to break in a bench shirt. It's been quite a few years since my Physics class in college, but hopefully this will make some sense. I use the light purple bands folded in half and place them high up on the power rack as seen in the picture. Using the bands and the shirt at the same time will allow you to handle more weight. The goal of setting up this way is to use speed to develop your groove in a particular shirt. Do a few reps, moving the weight as fast as possible. The forces provided by moving that heavy weight quickly will allow you to get the bar closer and closer to your chest without tiring you out. If you do fall outside your groove the bands and shirt will quickly bring the bar back up and allow you to try again. After I feel comfortable that the bar is coming to my chest in the correct groove, I'll then move over to another bench and go heavy without the use of the bands to make certain that the shirt has now been broken in correctly.

Make sure you have safety pins placed in the power rack and make sure your bands are in good shape. You should do 3 or so reps as quickly as possible. Do not go slow. Each rep should bring the bar closer and closer to your chest while maintaining your correct groove. If you are still unable to get the bar to your chest, keep adding weight. Since you are using both the bands and a shirt, you'll be able to handle much more weight than normal.

I used to have trouble with the bench shirt pulling the bar towards my abs. The force provided by the shirt was greater than the force provided by the weight on the bar. The speed benches with the shirt and bands provide a greater force than that of the shirt and helps create the correct groove all the way down to your chest.

I have seen lifters do a number of things to their shirts to get more out of them. Many will pull the front of the shirt down so that the neck seam rides lower across the chest. This, they feel, will allow the shirt to provide more resistance. You can also change the position of the sleeves on your arms, but the problem I have with both of these methods is that they can change your groove. Believe if you don't bring the bar down to the right spot on your shirt, you will have difficulty completing the lift. On occasion, I will use one shirt on all three attempts, but if I have trouble lifting a weight in a particular shirt and it wasn't due to a major technique problem, I change shirts. If I have to, I'll change shirts three times during a meet, although, that is not my preference. Psychologically speaking, I have to believe I am going to make a lift and if I am convinced that a particular shirt doesn't have the ability to help me, I had better find a new shirt that I believe will help me get a lift.

The only drawback to breaking a shirt in with the bands is that it has to be done prior to a meet. You might have some luck and find a power rack at the meet site, but I prefer to have my shirt broken in prior to the competition.



Using Jump Stretch Bands to Break in a Bench Shirt in a power rack, is one of Dr. Miller's ideas.