

I remember during my earlier years of powerlifting making a 5 lb. gain in my bench press during a one year span. Looking back, I imagine that I was either overtraining or maybe working through an injury. None the less, it is difficult to continue to make progress in our sport without, for instance, moving up a weight class or going with a better piece of equipment. Periodically, we will come across a routine or exercise that has a significant impact on our progress. I am always looking for something new to help elevate my bench press numbers. Training with a group of lifters allows me to see how we all respond as a group to a given program or exercise.

I have been training with "Jump Stretch" rubber bands for a few years now. Since day one with the bands, I always thought that the bands were one of the greatest strength devices around. In the bench press, it is relatively simple to hook up the bands to help the lifter with his/her lock out. I wanted to find a way to use the bands whereby they would provide resistance off my chest as opposed to the lockout. About 6 months ago, I came up with a plan. Unfortunately, it won't work unless you have the proper equipment. I would imagine that there are many different ways to work around

not having the right tools, but that I will leave up to you lifters. Ideally, you need two things from your bench to do this exercise. First of all, you should have a bench that has a second set of uprights that are positioned a few inches above your chest (Picture #1). With the bar positioned closer to the pad, it allows you to add more tension to the bands by easily adding loops. Depending on your bench, you'll need to get the right type of bands. If you are benching between 425-500 in a single ply shirt, you should be able to handle 4 heavy blue bands. The 2 of the heavy blue bands together and loop one end around the bar. I would start with a 45 lb. plate on each side and position the bands outside the plate. Take the band under the support under the bench. This is criteria #2. Our support bar is about 1 inch off the floor. We center the knot in the band under the support bar and hook the other end of the band to the bar. Again with the bar in the lower upright, double loop one side of the bands around the bar. Repeat this to the other side. We add one more loop, so now the band is triple looped. When you loop the bands around the bar, alternate how you loop the

TRAINING

The World's Greatest Bench Press Assistance Exercise

as told to Powerlifting USA by Dr. Larry Miller



Picture #1: Notice the support bar one inch from the floor and the bar positioned on the lower set of uprights. (both photographs were supplied by Dr. Larry Miller)



Dr. Larry Miller doing his "Miller Band Benches" with his spotters (left to right) - Vince Tarantino, Steve Spinelli, and Steven Petrencak.

band. If on the second loop, you take the band from the back to loop it, on the third loop, take the front of the band to add the third loop. Both sides of the bar should be looped exactly the same. Now, take the second set of blue bands and repeat the steps as outlined above. You should now have a total of 6

loops. I would recommend that until you adjust to the bands, you start out with one set of blue bands and add loops. Then add the second band and continue to add loops until you have reached a total of 6 loops. At that point, if you need more resistance, take another set of bands. We have added a pair of

green bands without a loop to the 2 sets of blue bands. With this particular exercise, we only have a bar weight of 135 lbs. Because of tremendous amount of band tension, we lift off from the side and spot from the side. We bring the bar to the lifter's chest. We try and go to lockout for as many reps as possible, usually between 5-8. We pause at the chest and then push the bar as fast as possible to get to lockout. When the lifter is done with their set, return the bar to the lower upright. With 2 sets of triple looped

blue bands, and one set of green bands, we have somewhere around 300 lbs. of band weight plus 135 lbs. of bar weight at lockout. The lift will be hard throughout the motion. I have always had trouble with my sticking point a few inches from lockout. Since I started this exercise, I have found that I can now push right through to my lock out. We do the rubber band exercise after our flat bench. We normally do 3 sets of 5-8 reps. We will alternate this exercise with decline benches and power rack rubber band lockouts. I recently spoke with George Halbert and if I am not mistaken, they are finding that utilizing more bands than weights is a great way to build strength. Another way to add band weight is to take

a smaller band and place it in your hands and around your back. You can do this in addition to the bands that are already in position.

Some of my friends, who are exercise physiologists, have cautioned me about overtraining with the bands. I use the bands twice a week. On Thursdays we use a pair of blue bands and hook them under and around the support bar to add a little extra band tension. We go to about 185 lbs of bar weight and do between 20-30 reps. At age 47, I do not feel that I have been over training. My bench has gone up 20-30 lbs over the past year with an official 498 lb. bench at 163 lb. bodyweight. I also did a 510 in training. Both lifts were done in a single ply polyester shirt.

All my training partners will agree with the following: the 6 loops of bands are a very, difficult exercise and you should be cautious. You need to have spotters on the side and you must work your way up to the proper amount of band resistance.

If you need to order Jump Stretch rubber bands, you can call Dick Hartzell at 1-800-344-3539.

Larry (Dr. Bench Press) Miller