

# STARTIN' OUT

A special section dedicated to the beginning lifter

## Bench Press Primer, Part II

as told to Powerlifting USA by DOUG DANIELS

or chins. On the second workout do a pullback move like barbell or one arm dumbbell rows. Use a machine that supports your lower back if you have access to one. Do 3-5 sets, 6-12 reps. Above all, use proper form. Don't sacrifice form for weight. If the weight is too heavy to hold on to, use lifting straps. On the pull-downs or chins, pull in front of the neck. Try one workout with a wide grip, the next with a hands-together, palms-facing-your-face grip.

There are a few pieces of lifting gear that most competitive benchers use. The first is wrist wraps. They are used to add support to the



97 Silver Medalist Wade Hooper shows how a good high arch reduces the distance necessary to press the weight to a complete lock out.

In the last issue I covered various aspects of the bench press from the muscle groups used to body positioning and I outlined an 8 week off season routine that could be followed to build some muscle size and build a base of power to be used in the contest phase. With this article I wish to expand on the bench press further by getting into some competitive aspects.

In the off season routine, the reps tended to be in the 5-10 range, which are preferable for overall gains. Now we'll turn to lower rep schemes as we aim to increase our max single in the bench press. Gen-

erally, as a powerlifter enters this stage of his training, he will drop his total reps down to allow recuperation, which will be taxed because of the heavier, more intense weights being used. Not only are these maximal weights taxing on the body, they also tax the mind as greater concentration and focus are required to get these low rep sets. Here there is less room for error. On a set of 8-10 reps, some reps may not go as well as we'd like, but because the two makes high, messing up on one or two weights are high and the reps are at three or less, it can make all the difference in the world. At worst, you could injure yourself.

Some experts feel that no great amount of strength is actually built using such low rep schemes, while others feel low reps are the only way to max size and strength. I'm not smart enough to know the per-

fect amount of reps to deliver max gains for every lifter, so to cover all the bases, I believe that max size and strength can best be gained by using all types of set/rep schemes over time. This causes the body to never be complacent to any one type of stimulus. It's kept off balance and must grow and adapt to survive.

As with any weight exercise, especially with the bench press, always keep safety tops on the list. Don't bench alone. There's a story in the papers every year about a lifter who gets stuck at the bottom of the bench while training alone and chokes to death. Always use a spotter and make sure the spotter is alert. I've seen spotters totally ignore the plates slipping off one end of the bar and they crash to the ground which causes the bar to fly out of control, creating a potentially serious situation. Use collars and

triceps, especially when the weights are heavy, as with reps of three and under, but some lifters misuse them. I feel that they should only be used when reps go to three and under benches and don't forget to use a sturdy, well constructed bench that will bear your weight as well as the weight of the bar and plates.

In addition to the pecs, delts and triceps, the lats are heavily involved in the bench. They act as stabilizers and launching pads for the bench. Most big benchers possess wide, thick lats and this is no accident. They do specific work to develop this showy, yet functional muscle. There are two functions of the lats. One is to pull the arms down, as in the pull-down or chin and second, to pull the arms back, as in rowing. Beginners are advised not to do both types of exercises at once. The best alternative is to train the lats twice a week, once doing pull-downs

last set of close grips. This is all that is necessary for your chest and triceps. Include 2-4 sets of barbell presses, 6-12 reps on the heavy day, for shoulder work. That's it. Drop the presses after week 6.

If the last week is easy, take one more week and up the max single 5-10 pounds. If that's easy, go another week or two until your max single levels off or decreases. After that, take one week entirely off from weights and start a new cycle with your poundage adjusted for your new, and hopefully, higher max bench. If your max didn't go up or, at worst, went down, examine other factors like your lifestyle, nutrition and state of mind for that period. Of all the lifts, the bench is the most affected by any change in bodyweight. I bench about 5-10 pounds more when my weight goes up only 1-3 pounds, vice versa, if I lose weight.

Earlier I stated that the rules require a lifter to hold the bar motionless at the chest until the referee gives the press signal. That doesn't mean the bar just rests on your chest, crushing you. As you lower the weight for a 'paused' rep as it's called, think of your arms and chest as a coil spring. Lower the bar under control and relatively slowly, or as the lifters say, 'get tight.' When the bar meets the chest at the nipple area, the chest should only bear about 30% of the weight. The arms and chest should support the other 70%. That way, when it's time to press up, you will get extra drive as you 'uncoil.' Practice this on light reps, starting on week 5. On weeks 6-8, pause at single rep sets for 1-2 seconds on the chest. If you use a bench shirt, start using one on week 6 after the third set. The shirt will add substantial lightness and spring to the bottom. Have your training partners give you the oral 'press' and 'rack' signals. This will get you accustomed to waiting and responding to these verbal cues (when appropriate).

I hope I have given you some useful info on the bench press that you might not have come across before. It also helps to go over the basics from time to time to re-establish your current practices. This may be especially helpful while your lifting is in a slump. For more information, I also suggest attending a power meet near you to see some of the things I described. The bench press is by far the most popular exercise, so make sure you leave no stone unturned to achieve your goals by getting as much information as possible on how to perform the bench efficiently.

(author Doug Daniels WEB page address is members.aol.com/ddani12345/def/ault.htm)

the chest with the bar, but no signal from the referee to press)

Now let's outline a sample 8 week routine that will end in a max single. We'll use a lifter who presently makes out for one rep at 250 pounds. You can use percentages to make it fit your own strength level. For the first five weeks we'll bench twice a week. On weeks 6-8 we'll bench only once. We'll aim at adding 10 pounds to this lifter's max which is realistic. Remember, at this pace you would add 65 pounds in one year which is too much to ask, but 10 pounds is a good goal for this time around. Your gains will fluctuate over time. During weeks 1-5 we'll have a heavy day and a light day. The heavy day follows. The first two sets each week will be 135 x 8, 185 x 5. **Week 1:** 200 x failure, 185 x failure, 175 x failure. **Week 2:** 210 x failure, 195 x failure, 185 x failure. **Week 3:** 200 x 3, 220 x failure, 205 x failure, 195 x failure. **Week 4:** 205 x 3, 225 x failure, 210 x failure, 195 x failure. **Week 5:** 205 x 3, 230 x failure, 215 x failure, 200 x failure. **Week 6:** 205 x 2, 225 x 1, 250 x 1, 250 x 1, 225 x failure, 200 x failure. **Week 7:** 210 x 2, 230 x 1, 255 x 1, 245 x 1, 225 x failure, 205 x failure. **Week 8:** 215 x 2, 235 x 1, 260 x 1, 255 x 1, 240 x failure, 215 x failure.

As you can see, the last three weeks (6-8) we do more sets. This is because we are only benching once per week at this time so a little extra work is possible on the heavy day and some extra warm-up sets are needed. Take 2-10 minutes rest between all sets. We're aiming at power/size here, so extra rest will help insure we have the energy and strength to get these heavy, low rep sets.

On the light days in weeks 1-5, use 80% of the weights used on the heavy day and put out a 80% effort. As I explained last time, we are interested in recuperation. Most powerlifters follow a heavy/light approach similar to this. This light workout is not meant to be taxing, but we can get more results by exercising our best form on these lighter weights. On both days, finish with two sets of close (shoulder width) bench presses. On the first set, use 20 pounds less than what you used on your last regular bench set. Drop 10 more pounds on the second and



Tony Harris bombed in the bench at the '97 IPF Worlds in the Czech Republic

don't cover any portion of your hand where you grip the bar. Another piece of equipment is a lifting belt. I feel they are not beneficial or needed for the bench press. You choose to wear a shirt, unless you choose to lift at one of those 'raw' meets where little if any supportive gear is allowed.

Before we get into an actual routine, let's look into some of the rules of competition. Lay on the bench with your feet flat on the floor. Your buttocks must remain in contact with the bench once you start the press. The spotters will help you get the bar out of the rack and you then lower the bar to the chest and hold it motionless there until the referee gives you the 'press' command which can take anywhere from an instant to two seconds. You must press it upward and lock out both arms evenly. The bar can stop on its way up, but if it goes down after the press up, the referees may signal a bad lift. Then, at the referee's 'rack' signal, you put the bar back in the racks, again with the spotter's help. If you don't wait for either the press or rack signal, you will get red lights from the referees. There are three referees for each lift, one in front and one on each side. They commonly use a red light to signal a bad lift and a white to signal a good lift. Two or more refs mean no lift, two or more whites mean good lift. You may use a grip no wider than 81 centimeters or about 32 inches, measured between the forefingers. Most bars have a ring marking on the knurling at this point. There are more rules but these are the major ones. All meets have a briefing prior to them to go over rules. It's a good idea to attend and listen as rules may vary with all the new organizations popping up. (Editor's Note: IPF style competition requires a pause at