

On May 8, 1993 in Elkhart, Indiana, Craig Tokarski gave a seminar that was both rich in useful information and highly motivational. He began with a detailed explanation of his technique while he warmed up to a 600 and then 625; this is at the starting point of his cycle. The first thing that he stressed was the importance of taking the shirt off between attempts. He said that when you leave it on, it stretches the shirt out and gets it into a loose groove. Taking it off between attempts really helps to keep it tight. He sets up with a wrestler's bridge, really: back arched radically, feet tucked way under the bench, and then he brings the bar down to the highest point of his abs and tucks his elbows in against his side. He wants the bar to go up in a straight line, feeling that a stair-step technique is inefficient. For all the world, it looks like a close grip bench, kind of the mirror image of Anthony Clark's reverse-grip style. It's a radical departure from his old Texas-T style and one of the things he credits with his rapid rise to success.

The belt and wrist wraps are also important elements in his technique because when used properly, they help to maintain tightness. The main secret with the belt is to notch it again once you lay down on the bench because your stomach is flatter then and you can get another notch or two, which will keep the shirt pulled down tight. The key with wrist wraps is to have them up on the bottom of the hand to create a cast-like effect, thereby adding a great deal of stability to the wrist. The last thing he emphasized was to get a huge breath of air at the start of the lift to stay tight, expand your rib cage and have plenty of oxygen.

The second most important



Major Sponsor of Craig's lifting has been Joe Rizza of Rizza Ford

THE BENCH

Craig Tokarski Seminar as told to PL USA by Jon Smoker

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Craig Demonstrates the proper form in the bench press (photo by Brian Hurley.)

to success was employment of the cambered bar in his training. He started using it and changing his technique when he was benching 600, and a year later he was up to 700. He cautioned, like all the experts, to not go too heavy with it, because of the risk of injury; he goes around 315-365 for 4 sets of 5. This, of course, is mainly a pectoral exercise, and he also uses flyes and dumbbell benches to hit that muscle group, pausing at the bottom of both movements. On Mondays he does the flyes, usually using very high reps, 16-20 with 50 pounds, as he does on most of his bodybuilding exercises, to keep his muscles tight and injury-free, while not over-training. He believes mass and strength are attained through adequate nutrition and heavy benching. Also on Mondays he does tricep pushdowns for 4x20 with 120. He also works the biceps because it's a stabilizer muscle, once again hitting 16-20 reps. For back work he goes a little heavier, going 12-16 reps for 8 sets. He prefers pull-downs with 210-225 pounds and a narrow, reverse grip, because it mimics his bench press style. For shoulder work he prefers side lateral movements because he feels that the front delts take enough of a beating from benching. He does some behind the neck pressing, but works it very light, never going over 225.

He believes squatting is essential since his legs really get into his big benches, but once again, he doesn't believe in going very heavy,

usually settling for 4x5 with 365-405 on Wednesday. He doesn't go real heavy because it takes too much out of his shoulders. He also does leg curls in the 16-20 rep range with around 180 pounds. In general, regarding bodybuilding movements, he tends to do more of it right after a contest, and then he gradually eliminates it as he goes through a cycle, dropping all assistance work when he's 4 weeks out from a meet.

When training for a contest, he likes to start concentrating on a cycle about 12 weeks out. For the first 4 weeks, he does sets of 5, which he, along with Ed Coan and a lot of other experts, thinks are just about perfect for developing size and strength. He usually does 3 to 5 sets on Monday, his heavy bench day for the week. Eight weeks out he goes to triples. The final 4 weeks he uses doubles and a few 95% singles to finish off his preparation, hitting his last heavy workout two Mondays before the meet. He also takes a lot of time between sets when training heavy, waiting up to 10 minutes between sets so that he can handle more weight. Anything less and he feels you're getting too close to bodybuilding again. Friday is his light day and he sticks with 365 for 4x5 the entire cycle. Anything more doesn't allow him to recuperate enough and he comes back still sore somewhat on Monday.

For supplementation he takes vitamins and minerals to hit anything his diet might be deficient in. He also takes a weight gain powder when he's trying to gain weight, partly because he's lactose intolerant. He believes one should have an adequate food intake

so that you're just over your weight limit, so you don't get in a position where you have to eat like a bodybuilder. He also likes to eat just before he works out, because an empty, uncomfortable stomach is a distraction. Other than that, he believes in getting plenty of rest (eight hours per night plus a nap) and taking it easy on weekends, if powerlifting is your main interest.

The two main points Tokarski emphasized when addressing the subject of motivation, were to surround yourself with positive people and to never put limitations on yourself. If someone he comes in contact with in the gym or out, tries to say something negative about his lifting, like it's a useless endeavor or he could never hit a certain lift, he'll turn a deaf ear to them and no longer associate with them. Psychologically he thinks it's of utmost importance to have positive influences in your life and positive thoughts in your head. "Never say to yourself 'I could never lift X amount of weight'," he stressed. With time, effort, dedication and a scientific training program, there is no telling what you might do. He said that if he had said to himself early on, "that I could never lift 700 pounds" that it would have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. And too, to maintain a positive state of mind, he said you should not carry daily stresses into the gym: "a part of life is that we all have problems, but park them at the door." He concluded his seminar by saying that the most positive influence that anyone can tune into is God, from whom all strength comes.

Jon Smoker



Craig in his supportive benching shirt (Hurley)