

TOP FIVE PT. 2: BENCH PRESS

as told to Powerlifting USA by Louie Simmons » 614.801.2060 » www.westside-barbell.com

I wrote an article in 1993 entitled “Three of a Kind.” Westside was the only gym to have three 600-pound benchers: Kenny Patterson, George Halbert, and Jerry Obradovich. Things have changed since then. Today Westside has developed 32 men who have benched over 700 pounds, and a 525-pound bench by a 165-pound female, Laura Phelps. We also have five who bench over 800 pounds, with Dave Hoff at 900 pounds at 257 body weight with a 2,770 total. The top five average 852 pounds. All of these lifts were performed by members who have gym bags, not visitors with suitcases. But how?

Just like our squats, there is a plan we must follow. It has three parts, consisting of biomechanics, physics, and mathematics. There can be no guesswork, but rather a calculated long-term plan. The speed day is somewhat different from squatting due to the fact that we never use any supportive gear on speed day. The weekend is devoted to speed development only. The bar is very light, around 40% to 50% of a 1-rep max at the chest, while the use of chains or bands raise the top weight to around 60% through accommodating resistance. This is essential, as it builds the ability to display a fast rate of force development. It also will perfect form. For the best results, use three grips: the index finger on the smooth, the index finger two inches out from the smooth, and the pinkie finger on the power ring. This ensures extra triceps work in the workout. Nine sets of 3 reps work great during contest training. When you are not training for a meet, 12–16 sets of 3 reps can be done. This will build muscle mass by raising the total volume while maintaining the same intensity zone for speed benching. For those who raw bench 300 pounds, one set of 5/8-inch chains or a set of mini-bands will provide accommodating resistance. For those who bench 400 pounds raw, two sets of 5/8-inch chains are used. We have lots of 500-pound raw bench pressers, and they use up to three sets of 5/8-inch chains or a mini-band that yields 85 pounds at the lockout. A combination of chains and band tension can be used. Many use chains with choked bands to give an abrupt load at the top end of the bench. An alternative to bands or chains is to hang a kettlebell on the bar with a mini-band; this causes an erratic bar path, which improves stability.

Below is outlined several three-week waves. You will note the weight does not change, but rather the combinations of accommodating resistance.

300 RAW BENCH MAX:

Week 1	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	Mini-bands, 85 lb. band tension
Week 2	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	Mini-bands, 85 lb. band tension
Week 3	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	Mini-bands, 85 lb. band tension

Week 1	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	2 sets of chains, 80 lb. band tension
Week 2	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	2 sets of chains, 80 lb. band tension
Week 3	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	2 sets of chains, 80 lb. band tension

Week 1	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	2 sets of chains, choked with a mini-band
Week 2	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	2 sets of chains, choked with a mini-band
Week 3	150 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	2 sets of chains, choked with a mini-band

Note: Two sets of chains loaded correctly is approximately 60 pounds at lockout plus the choked mini-band gives 25 pounds. This system causes a strong lockout.



Laura getting ready to bench (Simmons photos)

400 RAW BENCH MAX:

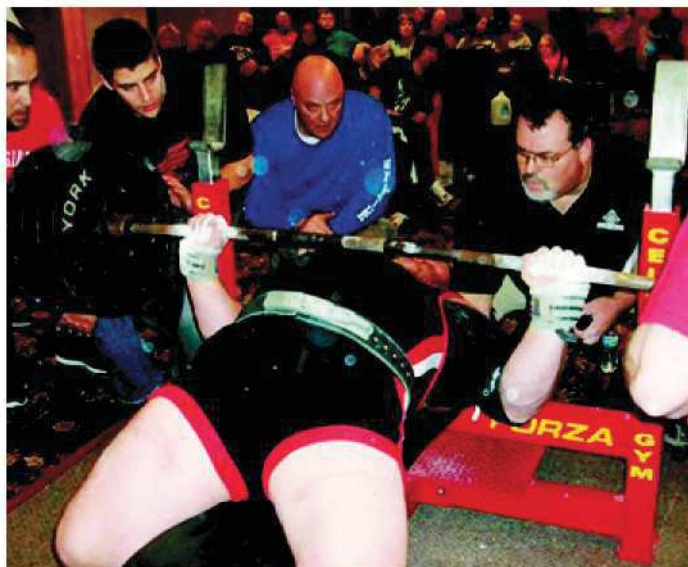
Week 1	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	1 set of chains
Week 2	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	1 set of chains
Week 3	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	1 set of chains

Week 1	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	2 sets of chains
Week 2	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	2 sets of chains
Week 3	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	1 set of chains

Week 1	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	3 sets of chains
Week 2	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	3 sets of chains
Week 3	205 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	3 sets of chains

Note: When two-thirds of a set of 5/8-inch chains are lifted off the ground correctly, the weight at the top will be 30 pounds.

TOP FIVE PT. 2: BENCH PRESS »



Dave Hoff benching at the Luke Edwards Benefit Bash



Jay Fry board-benching at Westside Barbell



Tony Bolognone putting up some serious weight at a meet

500 RAW BENCH MAX:

Week 1	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	mini-bands
Week 2	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	mini-bands
Week 3	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	mini-bands

Week 1	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	monster mini-bands
Week 2	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	monster mini-bands
Week 3	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	monster mini-bands

Week 1	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	light bands
Week 2	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	light bands
Week 3	225 lb.	9 sets	3 reps	light bands

Note: A mini-band yields 85 pounds at the top, a monster mini band yields 125 pounds at the top, and a light band yields 200 pounds at the top.

There are countless three-week waves to choose from. If you are getting stronger, a light to heavier wave will work. If you are looking to get faster, go heaviest the first week and reduce the accommodating resistance each week.

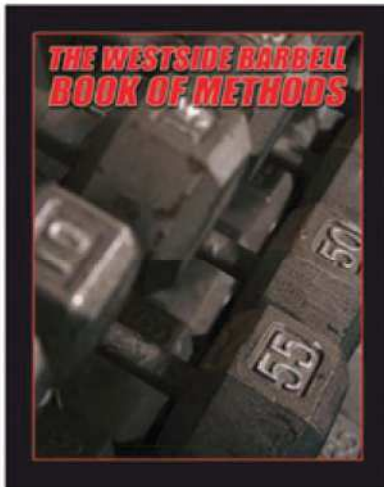
We use an assortment of specialty bars to do speed work with. A bow bar that is 2 inches thick and has a 2-inch camber provides a 2 inch longer range of motion.

Using a cambered bar builds not only a stronger start, but also a stronger lockout due to pressing an extra 2 inches. A 3-inch cambered bar is also used. A football bar is used that has three different grips to choose from. A T-grip barbell is very popular at Westside. It has a neutral grip that works the triceps very hard. A bench bar that is 2 3/8 inches thick, such as a Mastodon squat bar, is commonly used for the dynamic day. By using different bars your body must constantly adjust to a new stimulus. The bars are used on max effort day as well.

There is no circa-max phase at Westside for benching. The reason is simple: no supportive gear is used on this day. When people fail doing this system, it is always due to training too heavy on speed day, which leads to a decrease in performance on max effort day. After the speed day workout, we suggest you do two sets of dumbbell presses. Use a weight you can do a fairly easy set of 15 reps with or 2 sets of 15 reps

THE WESTSIDE BARBELL BOOK OF METHODS

Finally Westside presents **THE BOOK OF METHODS**. 236 pages full of training advice. A collection of information thru experimentation of some of the greatest lifters, Olympic sprinters and NFL Players. A must for anyone who wants to reach the top.



**The Book
Of Methods**
retails for
\$49.95
plus \$7 shipping &
handling in the U.S.

**GET
YOUR COPY
NOW!!!**

www.westside-barbell.com
3884 Larchmere Drive Grove City, Oh 43123
Phone (614) 801-2060

with a barbell. Do one set ultra-wide with a grip 1 inch outside the ring and one set close grip. A 500-pound raw bencher would use 205 or 225 pounds. A third alternative would be 2 sets of push-ups for high reps, around 25-50. Then move on to triceps extensions (roll-backs or elbows out to the sides) and dumbbell rows.

Westside does a lot of barbell extensions. The dumbbell extensions are done for 8-12 reps for 6-8 sets on average. Next up are lats: chest-supported rows, T-bar rows, barbell or dumbbell rows, or lat pull-downs with several different bars, with close or wide grips, for 4-12 sets of 10 reps on average. Some shrugs and a few hammer curls and you are done.

MAX EFFORT

A max effort workout is done three days later, which for us is Wednesday. We do just what it sounds like: we max out but try not to miss. Each week we rotate a barbell exercise. Why? When doing the same barbell exercise for three weeks in a row, you will have a decrease in performance. This is accommodation. Most athletes will change their training program each year, but we found that a better system is to switch a barbell exercise each week. Strength is measured in time, due to the work, not the amount of weight being lifted. Each special strength has its own velocity that you must understand in order to develop it. The max effort exercise will move slowly, but it produces a large force.

Let's start with a plan for four weeks. Tony Bolognone would use this plan. Tony is an 800-pound bencher. Week 1, work up to a max single in the floor press (his record is 550 pounds); week 2, try a new record with 200 pounds of band tension for a 1-rep max (his record is 425 pounds bar weight plus 200 pounds band tension with no shirt); week 3, do steep incline press with a moderate grip (his record is 490 pounds); week 4, take a record on two boards or one board (just before meets, try a record off one board). What Tony makes on two boards he then benches in a bench shirt.

A.J. Roberts, who is an 820-pound bencher, does the following. Week 1, use a three-board press with no shirt (his record is 675 pounds); week

TOPPER SUPPLY COMPANY
2108 S. HIGH STREET
COLUMBUS, OHIO 43207

**THE SEARCH STOPS HERE!!!
THE COMPLETE POWERLIFTING
ASSEMBLY!**

**ELITE AND PROFESSIONAL
POWERLIFTERS**
5/8" SET \$143.90 1/2" SET \$119.90
TO ORDER CALL TOLL FREE
866-4CHAINS (866-424-2467)
ASK FOR LARRY, IVAN OR RON
MONDAY THRU FRIDAY 7:30 AM TO 4:30 PM
SATURDAY: 7:30 AM TO 12:00 PM EST.

WWW.TOPPERSUPPLY.COM

**LOUIE SIMMONS
TRAINING SECRETS**

MasterCard
VISA

2, floor press with 160 pounds of chains (his record is 495 pounds); week 3, seated press off pins at shoulder level (his record is 405 pounds); week 4, use two boards with a shirt (his record is 900 pounds).

Dave Hoff, who is a 900-pound bencher, does the following. Week 1, two boards without a shirt (his record is 615 pounds); week 2, floor press for a 3-rep max (his record is 530 pounds); week 3, board press on two boards (his record is 900 pounds, the same as his best meet bench).

As you can see, what the Westside lifters do on two boards, they bench on meet day. They don't jack up the shirt for boards. This makes it almost impossible to touch the chest when it counts. Also, you see they use a shirt about every fourth week. Other cycles could look like this:

Week 1: lightened method with 155 pounds off the bottom for a max single; week 2: close grip bench with 120 pounds of chains; week 3: max 6 reps with an illegal grip.

This is done for three-week waves. This is not intended for max effort work, but for muscle hypertrophy. The volume is much higher for a three-week wave, which can shock the system and is known as shock training. There are other barbell exercises that must occur on max effort day. It does not matter if you are a raw lifter or a shirt lifter. The training is the same with the exception of doing more dumbbell work. Remember, a shirt can give you only so much.

Travis Bell has raw benched 550 pounds at about 250 pounds body weight. George Halbert raw benches 550 pounds at 198 pounds body weight. The late Nick Winters made a 700-pound raw bench. Many at Westside have at least a 600-pound raw bench. So as you can see, it does not matter raw or shirted. The special exercises are the same on both dynamic day and max effort day with the emphasis on triceps and lats. The rear and side delts are next. Westside lifters use Inzer's Rage X and Super Phenom for their meets. Remember, use fast benching on one day for high volume, low intensities, and low volume, max intensity on max effort day. Always have the hand-off man lift the bar out over the upper abs, then lower in a straight line and press upward in the same line.

I hope this helps you reach your fullest potential. ☺