

THE BENCH

Plateau Busting Bench Press Routines "Traditional Methods" - a New Approach for Masters Lifters as told by Greg Reshel, POWER EXCEL

In a recent article we examined several different bench press routines. These routines sparked quite a bit of interest in our somewhat non-traditional methods of strength training. Some of the interest was generated by master lifters that have adopted traditional "simple and heavy" routines into their programs. These athletes have invariably been plateaued for a number of years and are looking for an opportunity to break through their respective limits. Many of them cannot lifters believe that they cannot take the high volume and/or fast pace of the majority of the routines that we write. They believe that these routines are for youngsters. Their validation lies in the fact that they have increasing difficulty recovering from their own simple and heavy workouts. Quite often they find that if they skip a week of training they are stronger when they return to their program. Therefore, the feel that they need less work and definitely not more work more often like the programs we included in the last article.

The master lifters' observation that they are stronger after a week that they are weaker is correct and on the money. Their conclusion from the evidence that they need less work, not more, is also correct and on the money. What they neglected in their logical extension of the observation of inadequate recovery that was that they need less of their particular "simple and heavy" program. All athletes, but master athletes in particular, can take very little simple all-out training without peaking quickly and succumbing to the overtraining demon. Training routines employing all-out fives, triples, or singles push the body very hard and force a peak in the athlete's strength level. This peak usually occurs within four weeks. If the athlete using this low-rep all-out routine fails to back off and perform a lower intensity routine three things happen. If the athlete is a master athlete these three things will happen very quickly.

First, the athlete will decondition. An athlete's ability to recover from intense training is dependent on their biochemical energy and healing systems. These systems are kept at high levels by mixtures of high volume training, fast pace, and rest. Low volume "heavy simple" training will bring an athlete to a strength peak determined, in large part, by their current level of conditioning. If an athlete wants to raise their peak performance they must extend the potential peaking cycle by getting in a higher level of conditioning. A master athlete is particularly susceptible to a lack of conditioning because of their biochemical

spense hypertrophy type training into their peaking cycle to extend the cycle and to try to increase the eventual peak.

Thirdly, when a peaking cycle has taxed our systems to their biological limits then overtraining occurs and our body naturally decreases our strength level until it balances with the lower level of conditioning and hypertrophy caused by an extended "simple and heavy" training program. At this point an athlete's strength is as high as it can be under the current conditions but it is a long way from the true strength peak that they could have under better training program conditions. That is why I am very confident that everyone fitting the general conditions of the athletes described with our programs will most certainly make gains and should have enough strength on an average day to break the barriers listed with the programs.

In summary, we at Power Excel believe that:

1. Simple and heavy training programs will last no longer than four weeks for a master lifter without a decrease in performance.
2. Peak performances are largely dependent on an athlete's level of conditioning and hypertrophy (muscular size).
3. Conditioning and hypertrophy decrease during simple and heavy peaking programs.
4. Conditioning and hypertrophy (muscular size) increase with proper balance of high volume training, fast pace, and rest.

The following two programs are

cal systems: decondition more rapidly due to the results of aging and lack of growth hormone. While an athlete is peaking, their recovery systems are taxed to the limit. An athlete that is peaking their strength is avoiding the high volume, fast pace training needed to sustain conditioning. Therefore, we find ourselves in a "Catch 22".

1. Our peaking cycle is limited by our level of conditioning.
2. Our level of conditioning decreases while peaking.
3. Master athletes decondition more rapidly than young athletes. Peaking routines for master athletes must last longer than three or four weeks. Alternatively, a master athlete must be careful to intersperse conditioning type training into their peaking cycle to extend the cycle and to try to increase the eventual peak.

Secondly, an athlete's strength peak is dependent upon the hypertrophy (size) of key muscles involved in the movements. Like conditioning, hypertrophy (muscle size)

ter athlete must be careful to intersperse conditioning type training into their peaking cycle to extend the cycle and to try to increase the eventual peak.

1. Our peaking cycle is limited by our level of hypertrophy.
2. Our level of hypertrophy decreases while peaking.
3. Master athletes lose muscular size more rapidly than young athletes.

Peaking routines for master athletes must last no longer than three to four weeks. Alternatively, a master athlete must be careful to intersperse conditioning type training into their peaking cycle to extend the cycle and to try to increase the eventual peak.



Master Power... how many lifters over the age of 40 have benched 600. Count Gil Thompson as one



Gil Thompson, chatting above with referee Randy Blackmon at the '92 Baddest Bench in America, is a former champion swimmer. Also, anyone else besides Gil in the 242s; to both squat 800 and bench 600?

designed for master athletes that are looking for a more traditional approach to increasing their performance potential. The more closely you fit to the athlete described in each program, the more likely that you will be able to succeed in breaking your personal best and establishing a new performance level.

Our first athlete is a very large master athlete approximately 50 years of age. This athlete is in the six foot, 300 lb. size range and builds mass very easily. He is solid and has been training simple and heavy for at least six years. The athlete has good leverage in the bench with a large barrel chest and moderate to short arms with thick joints. This athlete benches presses in the 420 to 450 lb. range and has been lifting that much weight for more than 5 years. He wants to break the 500 lb. mark. This first program may get him to 500 lb., but will most surely train two times per week with a light day and a heavy day. Usually the light day will be Tuesday and the heavy day on Saturday. The program is 12 weeks long with three four-week phases.

Light Day: First four weeks - Behind neck press, warm up with 2 sets of 5 reps and then perform three sets of 5 reps with heavy weight; Decline press, 5 sets of 8 reps with a moderate weight; Flat Bench/Dumbbell press, 4 sets of 10 reps with moderate weight. Weeks 5 through 8: Wide Grip Incline Bench press, 6 sets of 4 reps increasing weight with each set; Bench press with wrist locked forward, 4 sets of 8 reps with moderate weight; Competition bench press, 3 sets of 6 at 265 (60%). Week 9 through

Light Day (always use light to moderate weight - no strain): The light day will be the same for 11 weeks and will be limited to two light sets per exercise on week 12. Reverse Grip Bench: Weeks 1, 4, 7, and 10 - 6 sets of 8 reps with light weight; Weeks 2, 5, 8, and 11 - 6 sets of 6 reps with moderate weight;

Pullovers - 3 sets of 9 reps. Heavy Day (3 or 4 warm up sets, then the sets listed. No accessory work): Week 1 - 5 Decline Press only; Week 1 - 5 Decline 4 sets of 4 reps at 155 lbs. (65%); Week 2 - Decline 3 sets of 4 reps at 170 lbs. (70%); Week 3 - Decline 3 sets of 3 reps at 185 lbs. (75%); Week 4 - Decline 4 sets of 3 reps at 185 lbs. (75%); Week 5 - Decline 4 sets of 4 reps at 185 lbs. (75%). Weeks 6 through 12 are competition bench press. Week 6 - 5 sets of 3 reps at 165 lbs. (68%); Week 7 - 5 sets of 4 reps at 165 lbs. (68%); Week 8 - 5 sets of 5 reps at 165 lbs. (68%); Week 9 - 6 sets of 3 reps at 175 lbs. (72%); Week 10 - 6 sets of 3 reps at 185 lbs. (75%); Week 11 - 3 sets of 3 reps at 205 lbs. (85%); Week 12 - Open 230, 2nd 260, 3rd (280-300 lbs.).

The first training program is very traditional in that it targets a particular exercise and peaks it over four weeks and the last movement to peak is your bench. The second program is somewhat less traditional but very direct and very effective. Try them out and let us know how you make out.

Call or write us at Power Excel: 2809 South Superior Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53207, 414-769-1211.

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Dawn Sharon - Asher Sharon - Greg Reshel