

Westside has 30 members who bench more than 700 pounds and four who bench more than 800 pounds. We also have Laura Phelps, with a 505 at 165 body weight, who has the greatest female bench coefficient ever. Five members have held all-time world records in the bench. They all use a speed day, commonly referred to as the dynamic method. The weight is relatively light, but force = mass x acceleration. You must use bands or chains to accommodate resistance. This develops a fast rate of force development, which is essential to develop a fast start. This is done on the weekend, and 72 hours later is max effort day. Here, a max weight is lifted in a variety of special exercises.

Here are some of their workouts: floor press with weight, bands, or chains; rack press off pins at different heights; band press with three band tensions; board press using 1-5 boards, doing incline, wide, or close grip; decline presses with a wide or close grip; flat presses with a max 6 reps close grip while constantly changing the weight or the amount of bands or chains or weight releaser weight; three sets of dumbbells to failure (for example, use 100, 125, 150, and 175 pounds. Westside uses heavy dumbbells every 3 or 4 weeks.)

This system is built on special exercises. Our best benchers use a bench shirt every fourth week, on average.

Let's start with Tony Bolognone, who has a 2700-pound total at 325 bodyweight and an 860-pound bench. He explains some of his workouts: speed bench for 8 sets of 3 reps with 225 pounds of bar weight and a light band for the first 4 sets. Add choked monster mini-bands for the last 4 sets. Starting hand grip is close, working all the way out to competition grip for the last two sets. He believes that adding the monster mini-bands for the last 4 sets teaches you to push through all the way to the top. Before adding the mini-bands, he noticed in his speed sets he was letting off three-quarters of the way up, so he would not over-extend his elbows. This caused him to mimic that in a bench shirt and get stuck three-quarters of the way up, trying to grind the weight out as he forgot to keep pushing. This problem seemed to go away after he added the mini-bands, and he consistently pushes all the way through the lift in his speed sets and with a bench shirt. After he started this, he hit his biggest benches of all time.

His favorite bench accessory exercises are all types of triceps extensions and skull crushers. One of his favorite skull crushers is using the football bar with hanging

WESTSIDE TRAINING

BENCH WORKOUTS

as told to Powerlifting USA by Louie Simmons



Jason Fry has benched 750 lb. at 181 (courtesy of Doris Simmons)

kettlebells. He believes this helps him build stabilization and hits his triceps very well. Another one of his favorite triceps exercises is dumbbell extensions off his chest. When he does these, he tries to keep the dumbbells touching and use nothing but triceps. This is one of his personal tests to see where he is in his bench. He knows if he can do 120-pound dumbbells strictly for 3 sets of 10-12 reps, his lockout should be strong and well over the 800-pound range.

One of his favorite max effort exercises is benching off of foam blocks. When he does this, the weight comes real close to, if not touching, his chest and clears the foam blocks by about 2 inches at lockout. This usually gives him a good idea of what he can lock out in a bench shirt. For example, when he did his first 830-pound bench press at a meet, he did 815 pounds off of the foam blocks. He did 855 pounds in the gym in a bench shirt.

He always tries to set personal markers to tell where he is on his bench. His favorite is when he is

warming up; he goes up to 500 pounds in a t-shirt full range. He knows if it goes up easy, it should be a very good bench day. If it is slow or sluggish, it is probably not going to be a very good day. The last workout prior to going to a meet he tries to pick something like a floor press and goes up to the 500-pound mark with straight weight. If it feels bad or slow, it usually tells him that training has been good and he should be healed and ready to compete by meet time. If it feels good, it's a good guess that he is peaking at the wrong time.

For both workouts, on max effort and speed day, he tries to do at least three triceps isolation exercises. He usually does 3 sets of 10-12 reps per set on these exercises. After he is done doing these triceps exercises, he does a triceps burnout usually on the lat machine with a push-down bar; he tries to do 40-100 reps depending on the weight. If he is using a bar, he moves his grip every 10 reps.

For a typical speed workout, he does 8 sets of 3 benches. Next

he does 3 sets of 10 skull crushers, then 3 sets of 10 triceps extensions. Sometimes he does push-downs on the dip machine. He normally increases the reps to 15-20 and still does 3 sets. Then he would be burned out on triceps. Next he would do some shrugs, different delt work, light pecs, and biceps. This would be a basic speed day or max effort day. He tries to never repeat exercises twice in one week. Occasionally for volume he will do a cycle after speed sets at maximum reps with straight weight starting at 315 the first week, 365 the second week, 405 the third week, 455 the fourth week, and 495 the last week.

Next up is Mike Wolfe, a bench-only SHW with an 859-pound bench. His speed day is 225 pounds with a mini or monster mini or light bands much like Tony's. Both have a 600-pound raw bench. Mike likes 9 sets of 3 reps, with 3 sets with the index finger touching the smooth, 3 sets 2 inches out from the smooth, and 3 sets with the little finger touching the ring. After speed benching he will do 2 sets of dumbbell presses with a moderate weight or 100 or 110 pounds for 15 reps, then do triceps extensions. Mike likes dumbbell roll-backs and extensions with the elbows out to the side. Mike uses 125 pounds for a lot of his dumbbell extensions. You have to have a strong upper back to handle 800 pounds in the bench. Lots of rows with dumbbells or a barbell, chest-supported rows, and low-pulley rows are rotated in and out during the weeks of training. Shrugs, side and rear delt work, and hammer curls round out the speed day.

On max effort day some of Mike's favorite exercises are raw two and three-board press, two and one-board presses with a shirt, reverse band press with and without a bench shirt, max 6-rep ultrawide benches, and heavy dumbbell pressing. Mike has undergone a huge weight loss from 420 pounds to 255 pounds bodyweight. So the next chapter is yet to be written for Mike.

Dave Hoff has a 2615 total at 260 pounds bodyweight, a 1005-pound squat at 19 years old and 252 pounds bodyweight, and an 825-pound bench at 262 pounds bodyweight. On speed day he does 205-275 pounds for 9 sets of 3 reps using the three grips Mike Wolfe uses. The band tension ranges from 85 with mini-bands to 125 with monster mini-bands and 200 pounds with light bands, and he also will use 120 pounds of chains on occasion. A lot of work on speed

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day is with the football bar, with the palms-facing-in grip and a lot of board presses on boards. A lot of rep work is done with kettlebells hanging under a special bar that vibrates or a regular bench bar for no less than 10 reps. He does a lot of dumbbell extension roll-backs and with elbows out to the sides and shrugs for the upper back and side and rear delt raises. He finishes with hammer curls.

On max effort day he does a lot of board presses with close grip and no shirt or regular grip with a shirt, rack lockouts on high pins with a 6-8 inch lockout, lightened method benches and floor presses with 200 pounds of chains, and a large amount of upper back work three times a week to support those 800-pound-plus benches and his 800-pound pulls. He constantly changes special exercises. I believe he will bench 900 pounds in a full meet in two years' time.

Greg Panora, who totaled 2630 at 242 pounds bodyweight, has a world record total. He also pulled an 815-pound deadlift. His speed day is very similar to Dave's. Both raw bench around 550 pounds. Greg does a lot of his speed work wearing a 10-pound weight on his wrists. He does 9 sets of 3 reps with three grips. The weight is 225 to 275 depending on the amount of chains or band tension he is using. After speed sets he does a wide-and close-grip bench for 15-20 reps. The weight may range from 185 to 250 pounds. This cannot be done at the end of a workout. Next he does triceps extensions with a football bar. The reps are 5-8 per set, sometimes supersets with light push-downs on a lat machine or a Jump-Stretch band hung over the squat rack. He also does front plate raise, light for high reps, lots of heavy shrugs, incline and decline dumbbells for delt and chest development, and always hammer curls. He continually changes all small exercises when necessary for further progress.

On max effort day his favorite core lifts are floor press with chains or band tension, board press (two or three boards without shirt and one and a 1/2 boards with a shirt), and some heavy close grips with a 2-inch foam pad on the chest. About 2 1/2 years ago Greg had a 600-pound bench and a 2255-pound total. What's in the future for Greg? Time will tell.

Jason (Jay) Fry has broken the 181 all-time record twice with 707 and 725 pounds. He has now made 750 pounds at 181 and is in hot pursuit of Jason Coker's 771 pounds. Jay's best is 770 pounds

at 198 pounds bodyweight. He has jumped 250 pounds in three years. Here's how: on speed day he does 9 sets of 3 reps with 205 pounds plus bands, chains, or both, with three grips, like many at Westside. After the speed work Jay will do 2 sets of push-ups with his feet elevated or 2 sets of moderate dumbbell presses, each week changing the angle from flat, seated, incline, or decline, and lots of upper back and lat work. For his triceps Jay does triceps extensions of all kinds, dumbbells, barbells, push downs, and also board presses with and without a bench shirt. And speaking of bench shirts, Jay will use a variety of shirts to do his board presses and full-range benching, unlike many who break world record board presses but can't touch their chest when it counts at a meet. For his max effort work his favorite is floor press of some kind. He also does lightened method, board presses, incline barbell press with a close grip, and foam pressing.

Travis Bell shares his workouts that have taken his raw bench from 430 to 540 pounds at 260 pounds bodyweight in about two years:

Speed Bench - Bar x warmup: add doubled mini-bands or monster mini-bands. Bar x 3 reps: 135 x 3 (start using close grip, index finger on the smooth); 185 x 3; 205 x 3; 205 x 3; 225 x 3 (start using moderate close grip, thumb length from the smooth); 225 x 3; 225 x 3; 275 x 3 (pinkie on the ring or competition grip); 275 x 3; 275 x 3.

Floor Press (for accessory) - All sets done with close grip: 225 x 10 reps; 315 x 10; 315 x 10; 365 x 10.

Dumbbell Press - 120 x 15 reps; 120 x 15; 120 x 15; 120 x 15.

Pulldowns with the Back Bar - 160 x 12 reps; 200 x 12; 230 x 12; 230 x 12.

Chest-Supported Rows - 2 plates x 12 reps; 3 plates x 12; 4 plates x 10; 4 plates x 10.

Hammer Curls - 45 x 10; 45 x 10; 45 x 10; 45 x 10.

This is what a normal speed bench session looks like for Travis. The speed-training really helps him develop momentum in a bench shirt. Teaching your muscles to fire as quickly as possible and all at the same time is imperative. The other thing that he feels helps his bench the most is floor press. I asked George Halbert a long time ago what the best thing to do to get his floor press up is, and he said close-grip floor press for reps. Floor press greatly helps him develop mid-range power. Many people think of the floor press as a max effort exercise, but forget to use it as an accessory exercise. The second thing

is lots of upper back work. Upper back strength helps him maintain the position of his shoulder blades at the bottom of the lift. When your shoulders come out of position, it changes what angle your elbows are at in relation to the bar, as well as increasing your range of motion because you are flattening out.

For his max effort day Travis will rotate from floor press with 200 pounds of chains to full-range or two or 3-board pressing with 200 pounds of band tension, lightened method with 150 pounds or 95 pounds lightened in the bottom, lots of close-grip benching off his chest or off power rack pins, plus dumbbell pressing of all kinds. He does upper back work three times a week and triceps extensions of all kinds, sometimes supersets light push-downs for 15 reps with barbell or dumbbell extensions for 5-8 reps. He always does some hammer curls. What's next? 800 pounds I am sure.

Laura Phelps-Sweatt benches 505 pounds at 165 pounds bodyweight, which is unbelievable. How does she do it? Let's look at her speed day. Laura's raw bench is 335 pounds, so her speed work is 165 pounds plus mini-bands or two sets of chains for 9 sets of 3 reps, 3 sets with index finger touching the smooth part of the bar and 3 sets with little finger touching the power ring. She rotates from doing 2 sets of moderate dumbbells for 15 reps to 2 sets of push-ups for 30-50 reps and sometimes one close grip and one wide grip set of

benches for an easy 15 reps. Then she does lots of dumbbell extension roll-backs or with elbows out to the side. She works upper back at least three times a week. Laura is the world record holder in the squat and total in two weight classes, so the upper back work is a must. Rear and side delt work of all kinds is done in both bench workouts. For max effort work some of her future exercises are the lightened method with 200 pounds of chains for lockout strength in a shirt, bands over the bar on boards or chest with a shirt, total weight at lockout close to 600 pounds, the same two exercises without shirts, and floor press with 120 pounds of chains.

All of Westside max effort exercises are done at some time during the year. Laura has the number 1 coefficient in the bench and the total for women. Many of our top benchers at Westside are or were full powerlifters. All have at least an Elite total. The system will work for everyone, and all you have to do is follow the 2 days that wave every 72 hours from low intensity, high volume on the speed day, to low volume, high intensity, which is hopefully over 100% or a new all-time record. John Stafford had the all-time push-pull total, and now Greg Panora does, with 805 and 815 pounds, respectively, at 242 pounds bodyweight. It's tough to compete with a bench specialist, but we try and so can you.

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