

**J**eremy Hoornstra is the strongest bencher I have ever seen. He's got the formula for getting the best raw bench out there. We can all follow his advice, especially raw lifters, for a more powerful bench. He is not overly massed like yours truly, and that rules out mass leverage.

If you are banged up like an ex-football player, chances are your raw bench is limited to how you handle pain and your ability to recover. Add to that shoulder surgeries, lower back herniations, upper thoracic nerve damage and a few pec tears, chances are you will not be out lifting Hoornstra anytime soon. This article is for those who squat first and deadlift last.

Most powerlifters will never realize their bench potential. However, there are some benching strategies that may help you squeeze out the maximum poundage to help your total aggregate.

First of all, countless heavy squats beat your shoulders up. Unracking extremely heavy weights, especially those that are banded heavy, is shoulder abuse. You don't even realize it because you are so used to the feeling of beat-up shoulders that you think it's normal.

After you tax your central nervous system with heavy squat night, the bench gets what's left over. And for some strong squatters, it ain't much. Add to that the stress your elbows are under, plus the bicep tendon. It is a wonder we even make it to the bench.

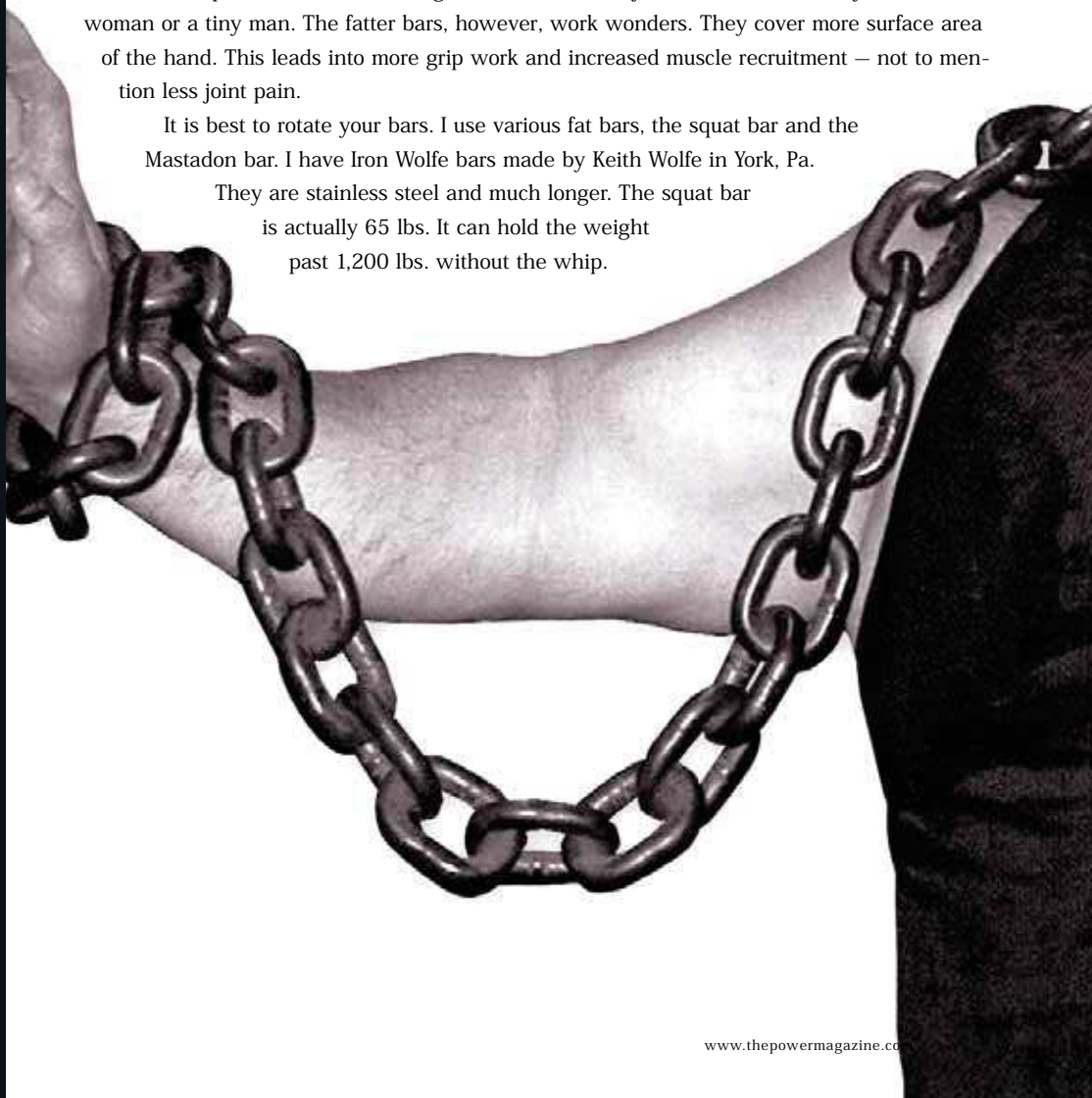
Powerlifting is three lifts. Try to concentrate on moving up as much poundage as you are capable of per event. It may be less than superstar benchers, but much more is needed from your body for three events than one. One thing I like about bench-only lifters is that they push the envelope in training. We can all learn from them. All of their techniques, like practicing with the shirt and boards, have been very helpful.

### THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT FOR THE JOB

At The Compound, I never use a regular bench bar. They are worthless unless you are a woman or a tiny man. The fatter bars, however, work wonders. They cover more surface area of the hand. This leads into more grip work and increased muscle recruitment — not to mention less joint pain.

It is best to rotate your bars. I use various fat bars, the squat bar and the Mastadon bar. I have Iron Wolfe bars made by Keith Wolfe in York, Pa.

They are stainless steel and much longer. The squat bar is actually 65 lbs. It can hold the weight past 1,200 lbs. without the whip.



# BENCHPRESSING FOR THE POWERLIFTER

No 1-inch standard fitness bars should touch your hands. The only exception to this is the deadlift bar. All my attachments for my pull-down machine and seated rows are fat-handled. The vertical grip bar, straight bar, triceps bar and V handle are all fat.

It is very important to have a fat pad for the bench. It should measure 14½ inches across. The pad should be thick. Gone are the days of the 10- to 12-inch wide benches. They cover a larger area of the back and control the shearing forces much better when lowering and pressing the weight. If you are interested in a custom-made fat pad, call Anita at Custom Designs 803-669-0269.

You should have a rack with a minimum 7-foot height. This is good for reverse-band pressing and banding the bar from around the base. Stand-alone benches that have the band attachment bar running vertical on the bottom are fancy but nice to have also. If you have the money, try the self-spotting bench from Richard Sorin. The bar is directly over your upper abs and lower chest area. The j-

hooks go back to post when the bar is lifted out, using the same concept as the mono-lift. I still think this bench will be the bench of the future. Go to

[www.sorinex.com](http://www.sorinex.com) for a look.

Weight releasers are great. We use them for the bench quite a bit. You will have to get them fortified by a welder because they are built cheaply. Of course, you need all the bands and chains you can afford.

If you have nothing but a bench, you can afford these two items.

Side note: I don't feel one bit sorry if you have to buy equipment with your own money. All powerlifters who are serious should invest \$10,000 to \$20,000 in a hole-in-the-wall facility. Every good powerlifter owns his own gym. Remember that. It is easy to whine and complain and leave a place when you have nothing invested in it.

## SPEED DAY

Louie always said, "speed reigns king." If you are not fast, you can forget benching big. In most training cycles, my maximal effort (ME) bench training may be down. Squats contribute to this by destroying the shoulders. However, if you can increase your speed on your upper body light day or dynamic effort (DE) bench, you will PR bench at the meet.

Let's focus on speed day. Most of the time it precedes my heavy squat day. I may stick with the same stimulus for about three weeks. But I suggest rotating your lift every week for best results. For instance, banded fat-bar benching. You can use a myriad of bands for this. Jumpstretch bands have micro-minis up to average bands for this.

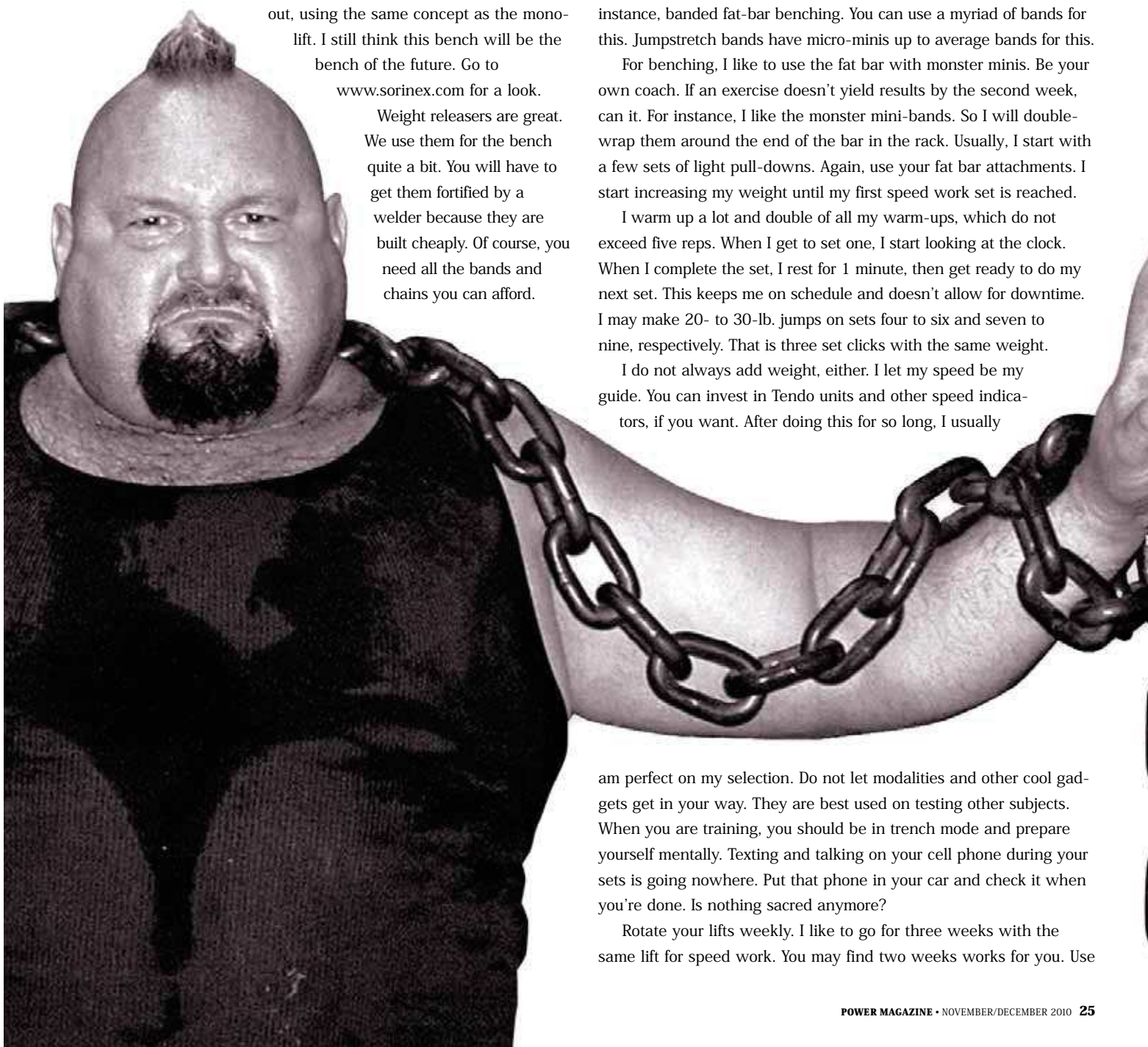
For benching, I like to use the fat bar with monster minis. Be your own coach. If an exercise doesn't yield results by the second week, can it. For instance, I like the monster mini-bands. So I will double-wrap them around the end of the bar in the rack. Usually, I start with a few sets of light pull-downs. Again, use your fat bar attachments. I start increasing my weight until my first speed work set is reached.

I warm up a lot and double of all my warm-ups, which do not exceed five reps. When I get to set one, I start looking at the clock. When I complete the set, I rest for 1 minute, then get ready to do my next set. This keeps me on schedule and doesn't allow for downtime. I may make 20- to 30-lb. jumps on sets four to six and seven to nine, respectively. That is three set clicks with the same weight.

I do not always add weight, either. I let my speed be my guide. You can invest in Tendo units and other speed indicators, if you want. After doing this for so long, I usually

am perfect on my selection. Do not let modalities and other cool gadgets get in your way. They are best used on testing other subjects. When you are training, you should be in trench mode and prepare yourself mentally. Texting and talking on your cell phone during your sets is going nowhere. Put that phone in your car and check it when you're done. Is nothing sacred anymore?

Rotate your lifts weekly. I like to go for three weeks with the same lift for speed work. You may find two weeks works for you. Use





warm-up. Stick with a range of 90 to 120 lbs. for the total weight releaser weight, 40 to 80 lbs. for lighter benchers. Hammer out eight sets of three reps. You may use a one board for this if you are in some pain.

## ASSISTANCE WORK: TRICEPS

Close-grip benching. Using the boards is wise on this one. Years ago we were ripping our

the bands and chains. Find the rotation that works for you. Do not over-weight your loads on DE day. You can lift all the weights in the gym you want on ME day. Don't let your ego hold you back.

## EXAMPLE SPEED WORK ON DE DAY:

### WEEK 1

Fat bar with chains. If you are strong and benching 400 to 500 lbs. raw, use double- to triple-chains. Make sure you are hanging the chain properly on the ends of the bar. Some of the 5/8-inch logging chain should still be on the floor at lockout. The crab hook holding the chain should still be upright, with tension at the bottom of the lift when the bar is on your chest. Your bar weight is heavier the lighter the chain you use. Bar weight will range from 40 to 50 percent of your 1RM of that setup. This is not a shirted bench! Nine sets of three reps are standard. Throw in a single at the end if you're feeling frisky.

### WEEK 2

Floor presses. Use a mastadon bar with chains. Place chains over the bar or use the crab hook. Use about 2 inches of cushion under your upper body to allow scapula movement. Never perform this lift on a hard floor or you will be injured at some point. Using the cushions, work up to your set weight and get nine sets of three reps. Between 40 and 50 percent is used again for your 1RM floor press. Take a 1-minute rest between each set.

### WEEK 3

Banded bench with fat bar and bands. Stronger guys use the monster mini-bands and up. Lighter benchers use the mini-bands. Ladies use the bench bar and micro-minis. Doesn't matter what size fat bar you use, just remember what weight you used with it. When using bands, unrack the bar and hold at lockout for 3 seconds and 35 to 45 percent of that 1RM. After your three reps are done, hold it again for another 3 seconds.

### WEEK 4

Bench with bands and chains. Set up the bench in the rack again. Double the monster mini-bands around the bar. Warm up with it for a few sets, then put a 2½-lb. plate against the band. Put your chain set-up on next. Start with one chain. Maybe add another. This is a lot of tension. Get to your set weights and hammer nine sets of three reps. This is one of my favorites. The small divider plate keeps the band from being chewed up. Use 30 to 40 percent of your 1RM.

### WEEK 5

Benching with weight releasers. Use a bar that is not a bench bar. Go to 45 to 50 percent of your shirted max. Put the weight releasers on your last

shoulders up trying to come down to the chest. Jesse Kellum introduced us to the board press, and the rest is history. If you have short arms, stay with the three-board. You real long-armed dudes can do the five- and six-board. Bring your grip one of your hand widths in from your bench grip. That's it. Your elbows will thank you, and you will get strong. The close-grip gives too much torque on the joints; something will hurt or snap one day. Try different rep schemes here. Five reps do well. Keep escalating up in weight until you fail. Get a good 15 to 20 hard reps in overall. Clicks of three to five reps are good. I usually go straight weight on these.

Extensions with bar. If you need a break from close-grips, try these. Use the same grip as the close-grip. Lower the bar to your face while lifting the elbows slightly. I use chains for this one. Do not let your elbows drop. This will de-stress the triceps tendon and muscle. The bar will travel linear. You may use DBs, too, but they're not as effective.

Banded pushdowns. Get creative with these. I have bands hooked up on both side of the rack about 7 feet high. I grab opposite and extend down with the bands crossing. Some use just one band. You can use an old band that you cut and do pushdowns with that. High reps are good. I do three clicks to failure. My reps go 23 to 25 in the first set. The second set is around 17 reps and the last is around 15. Toast after that.

Assistance work: back, shoulders and arms

Follow the triceps with some upper back work, then some shoulder work and biceps last.

Back. One-arm DB rows are wonderful. Do not go crazy-heavy on these. Moderate to heavy is fine. Let the bodybuilders use straps and heave ho the 200s. You have a total to worry about. A chest-supported row may substitute. Use chains on this for added horror.

Shoulders. I like the double-KB overhead military press. Get about four sets of 10 to 12 reps. Start with the 24k and go up from there. Use DBs if you want. Either way, go for volume work with

weight that is a hassle. Side DB laterals and shrugs may be substituted for the military press.

Biceps. Be a man and curl the fat bar. It is hard, and a very angry bar that wants to roll out of your hands. Get around four sets of eight to 10 reps.

Substitute the heavy DB hammer curls for the regular bar curl. Reps are always 10. You do not have to use strict form because this lift is not for a peak in your biceps.

This is just a sample training regimen. There is so much more to choose from, but the blueprint is here in this article. **PM**

