

Lockout Work that Works

BY ROB LUYANDO



The first 10 years of my training I never worked on improving my lockout strength on the bench. My younger brother was a big Westside Barbell fan and bought all of its videos and books on powerlifting. I just kept training and laughed at him. I was strong — no way in hell was a book or a video going to make me stronger. We trained at the same gym but never really trained together. He did all these crazy exercises, while I just did what I thought worked for me: full-range raw benching. I was benching 500 lbs. raw pretty easy; he was struggling with 400 lbs. I thought I must be doing something right.

In 2004 I started training with Team Carpenter and learned a lot about wearing equipment. Carpenter introduced me to the concept of using boards. I saw some improvements in my strength, but still wasn't sold on all those fancy exercises my brother was doing.

In the summer of 2004 my brother and I both competed at an APF meet. I was in the 242s and he was in the 275s. He's eight years younger than I am, so no way in hell was he out-benching me. Well at that meet I hit my first 611-lb. bench. I was feeling pretty good

about myself. My little brother was in the next flight. He opened up at 500 lbs. and jumped right to 645 lbs. His technique wasn't dialed in, so the shirt locked up about 1 inch from touching and he just pressed the weight to lock out like it was nothing. He took another 30-lb. jump and I knew if he touched he was going to lock it out and make me look real bad. I was lifting off for him and had to fight the urge to give him a helicopter handoff. Again he took the shirt 1 inch from touching, the shirt locked up and he pressed the weight to lockout with little effort. I just shook my head in disbelief.

I decided to take lockout work a lot more seriously. I incorporated four- and five-board lockouts religiously. My bench continued to climb, and I was sold. My brother faded away from powerlifting, so I didn't feel the need to try any other of the fancy exercises he had learned from reading books.

In 2006 I met Paul Key and we hit it off. He trained out of Westside Barbell for some time and is a huge fan of using band resistance for lockouts. I was pretty bullheaded about trying bands, so I let him talk me into trying chains. I stole my brother's chains and



rigged them for speed benching.

Around 2007 one of my training partners bought a full set of bands and brought them to my gym. Having no idea how to use them correctly, I almost killed myself. I had to swallow my pride and call Key to ask him how to use bands and get the most out of them. Thanks to his pointers, I started throwing in bands from time to time. And my bench continued to climb.

LOCKOUT TRAINING

In my current training routine, lockout work is as important as shirt training. I like to do four-week phases of lockout and speed work. The phases look something like this:

Four weeks of straight-weight four- and five-board lockouts for sets of three, holding each rep for a three count. I do as many sets as possible, increasing weight each set until I can no longer get

three reps. Once I hit failure, I add 20 lbs. and jump to a five-board. As soon as I am done with heavy lockouts, I move right into speed benching with a low board and chains for five sets of five reps as fast as I can.

Four weeks of heavy-band tension four- and five-board lockouts for sets of three, dropping the weight and exploding to lockout as fast as I can. For speed work I use straight weight for five sets of five reps as fast as possible.

I do floor presses with straight weight in sets of three until I can't hit a triple. Then I do two sets of singles. For speed work I bench with doubled mini-bands with low boards and do five sets of five as fast as possible.

Each week I try to increase the weight of my last three sets so I am finishing with three personal records each week. It doesn't always work that way, but that is what I shoot for. I increase the weight on speed benching every few weeks, making sure I am still hitting good speed.

I keep things pretty basic, but I have found that cycling my lockouts works best for me and doesn't beat my body up too much. The bottom line is, change things up once in a while to keep making progress. For me, keeping it simple works the best.

Powerlifting has been an ongoing learning experience for me, and the best advice I can give a young lifter is to keep an open mind and never be afraid to try something new. You never know. It may work for you. You think you know it all? That's when you stop making gains. **PM**



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