

Researching Resistance

By: Louie Simmons

There are many things about strength that I don't understand. One, in particular, is how the heck did the father in *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* turn into the Incredible Hulk? Even Vladimir Zatsiorsky, Lazar Baroga, and Alexsei Medvedyev could not help me with this. However, these men have taught me many things, most of all to think.

At Westside, we do not specialize in the bench press, yet we have 7 men who have officially done over 600. Our fifth strongest bencher is Jerry Obradovic, with 644.

On March 7, at the Arnold Classic, George Halbert benched a world record 657 (298 kg.) weighing 220. George dropped to 220 on October 18, 1997, and made a 600 pound bench. In 5 months he made 657 by doing special work with bands and chains. On speed day, which is Sunday for us, George does his benches with 335 for 8 sets of 3 reps. This is slightly over 50%. The reps are very explosive; the 3 reps are completed within the same time frame that his max single requires.

Chains or bands are used to accommodate resistance (40-60 pounds of chains, 100-160 pounds of resistance with bands). If one does the power or Olympic lifts with only a barbell, his or her potential to create additional speed or force is limited by the one-dimensional weight on the bar. If one is to do speed work, he or she should use no more than 60% (based on a no-bench shirt record or 55% or your best meet bench with a shirt) for the 8-10 sets of 3 reps. This is for explosiveness, strength, and acceleration. This is exactly why you must use bands or chains to accommodate resistance. Without them the bar moves too fast at the top. My data come from not one or two lifters, but 14 men that can bench at least 551 at Westside.

George knows his minimax, or sticking point, is about 2-3 inches from the top, so after speed work, George hits the triceps first, then delts and lats. George also will do a small amount of lat and triceps work on Monday and Friday.

On max effort day, Wednesday, George has a favorite exercise. He will use a bar with a 5 inch camber. He places two 2 x 6's on his chest. By doing this, the bar descends only 1-1/2 inches below his chest, not the full 5 inches, which would be too stressful for our lifters. He will use Flex bands, which add 160 pounds of tension to the bar. He will either work up to a max single or do 3 sets of 3 reps. His best is 475 for 3 triples. With the Flex bands, it is 635 at the top.

Please note that we never use a bench shirt on our speed day or our max effort day.

The Flex bands provided added eccentric overload, which not only builds muscle size but also increases reversal, or starting, strength. Because of the added tension, George will use the bands for only 3 weeks because of the additional muscle soreness.

George also likes to do floor press with chains. Because the bar rack is so close to the floor, the chains are dropped over the sleeve of the bar. George will warm up with the bar and then add chains ; until he has 200 pounds of chain. Then weight is added, and he works up to a max single. His best is 445 plus 200 pounds of chain. George will always go for a new max, and many times he misses. As the chains come off the floor and the weight accumulates at the top, he sometimes falls at his minimax, or sticking point. He will push as hard and as long as possible at this point, about 3 inches from lockout. By doing this, he is working at his weak point and devoting valuable time to it.

At the Arnold Classic when the 298 kg. hit his sticking point, he blew past it to lockout. How? First, by developing a tremendous start and, second, by increasing the bar speed on speed day.

On max effort day, the chains develop and teach acceleration merely through trying to outrun the chains. Also, when George misses at his minimax, he is performing functional isometrics in the best possible way. As the chains add to the weight of the bar, we can determine the precise point at which George fails; now we know where his weak point is with a particular weight. Conventional isometrics - that joint-jarring pressing against immovable pins - is unnecessary.

The bands work in the same way, but with added eccentric work, from the bands pulling you down. This additional eccentric work also builds muscle mass.

After each workout George will try to increase his triceps work, in volume and weight. The triceps are worked first after the main exercise, the delts second, and the lats and upper back third. Remember, this is done after the dynamic day work on Sunday and after the max effort day work on Wednesday.

You must bring up your weaknesses through special work as well as develop special strength such as starting, accelerating, eccentric, and concentric strength. We do primarily slow work on the stability ball. Always try to cover everything.

Let's talk about Mickey Tate. At 41, Mickey did a strong 650 at a body weight of 285. He also concentrates on speed work and works the muscles in the same sequence as George, but on max effort day, he does more mini cycles of incline press than, let's say, floor press. You will have to find what exercise works best for you, and you should use it closest to the competition.

Jerry Obradovic also does a lot of incline work.

J.M. Blakely likes to do the same max effort work as George but also does a lot of J. M. presses.

Kenny Patterson, our biggest bencher with 728, does board presses off a 3 inch board the first week, then off a 2 inch board the second week, then floor presses without chains. Every fifth and sixth week, we suggest high-rep work with dumbbells or with a barbell using an ultra-wide grip.

Rob Fusner was our sixth 600 pound bencher. He likes to use extra-wide benches for a max 6 reps. This particular exercise took Billy Master's bench from 523, where he was stuck for over a year, to 584, which he smoked at the 1997 APF Nationals.

At 50 years old, I benched 600 on February 1, 5, 1998. I like to do 3 sets of heavy (155's or 125's) dumbbells to failure on a stability ball. This is commonly known as the repetition method.

We will throw in Weight Releases on speed day or max effort day and get a good response for a few weeks and then switch to something else.

Using chains, bands, or Weight Releases is known as the contrast method, where the weight is different at different points of the lift. Remember, you must work at all angles of a lift.

Good equipment is important. This is 1998; don't get left behind. Learn how to use a shirt. In the, immortal words of the Road Warriors, "if you are going to a knife fight take your guns." That is precisely what we do. Don't let resistance stop you in your tracks; use it to your advantage.