

Chains and Bands

By: Louie Simmons

There are many keys to success, but two invaluable ones are accelerating strength training and accommodating resistance by add-ing chains or bands or sometimes both.

Chains and bands are used in all of our training, be it the dynamic method for speed strength and acceleration or the maximum effort day to develop absolute strength.

In the bench press, bands and chains have helped 17 of our lifters achieve 550 or more and 7 lifters have done 600 or more. When I talk about bench training, I am referring to my lifters with a 550 bench or better; that's who we experiment with.

On speed day for the bench, while doing the 8-10 sets of 3 reps, the chains are attached in the following manner. Loop a 1/4-inch-link chain with a hook around the bar sleeve to regulate the height of the 5/8-inch-link chain (5 feet long). Run the 5/8 chain through the metal loop and adjust it so that half of the 5/8 chain is lying on the floor while the bars in the rack. Use 60% of a no-shirt max on the bar. For example, if your max is 500, put 300 pounds on the bar. When the bar is on your chest, only the weight of the bar should be on your chest; that is, all the 5/8 chain should be on the floor.

If your best bench is 250 pounds or less, use one pair of 1/2-inch-link chains; these weigh 23 pounds a set, so you are locking out an extra 11.5 pounds. A 350 or more bencher should use one pair of 5/ 8-inch-link chain. By doing this, you will be locking out an extra 20 pounds. (They weigh 20 pounds each, but half is on the floor at lockout.) A 500 pound bencher can use both the 5/8 and 1/2 inch chains for a combined added weight of 31 pounds. A 600 bencher uses two 5/8 chains and sometimes adds a 1/2 inch chain, for 40 or 51 added pounds at lock-out.

You can experiment on your own, but remember this process is to build bar speed and acceleration. It also teaches you to launch the bar off your chest. A special note: Lower the bar fast and try to catch and reverse the weight as fast as possible. Never pause.

On max effort day, warm up to 315, then do a single. Next, add a 5/8 inch chain on each side and do a single. On the next set, use two sets of chain, then three sets, and so forth. This is similar to how a bench shirt works: the weight is less at the bottom and much greater at the top. The chains build not only acceleration but also a fast start and a strong lock-out.

For floor pressing, simply drape the 5/8 inch chain over the sleeve of the bar and you're ready. J.M. Blakley and George Halbert do a lot of floor presses like this. George will use 200 pounds of chain (5 sets of chain) and works up to a single. His best at a bodyweight of 220 is 440 plus 200 pounds of chain, which is 640 at the top.

J.M. uses a different combination of weight and chains. J.M.'s best is 400 pounds on the bar with 7 sets of chains, for a combined weight of 680 at lockout. Try any weight-to-chain ratio. Feel free to experiment. A cambered bar can be used as well.

These are a few methods to add to your max effort day.

Bands are a little tough for some on speed day because of the added eccentric properties they create. Also the weight resistance is much more radical at different positions: much less at the bottom, but much greater at the top. Remember, the bands are literally pulling down on you.

There are three bands with different strengths: pink is the least strong, for 300 pound benchers and below; green for 300-450 pound benchers; and blue for 500 pound benchers and above (shirtless max).

When using bands, be careful not to overdue it. The bands produce a large amount of eccentric overloading and can cause excessive soreness, but they are more than worth it. They build the lockout as well as the start. One realizes very fast that you have to outrun the bands, so you develop a fast start to enable you to lock out a heavy weight.

The most popular methods using the bands are as follows. On max effort day, do board presses with four 2 x 6's. Loop the bands through the bottom supports of the bench and then around the sleeve of the bar. When using four boards, the tension is never released. Because of this, a quick start is impossible and locking out a heavyweight is really tough. To make it even tougher, use a cambered bar. 'J.M. presses' with bands are very popular at Westside. To make it as tough as possible, use several bands. Lower the bar straight down, aiming between the nipples and chin, stop 4-5 inches off the chest, and press back up. Use a close grip.

Bands and chains are often used for triceps extensions. This will radically change the strength curve of the movement by accommodating resistance (lifts are usually easier at the top).

A Westside supporter who constantly bugs me with some of the craziest ideas actually came up with an exercise that really works. So thanks to Doug Ebert for the following band exercise. Attach a blue band to the bar and start with 95 or 135 pounds because this is tough. Then take a pink or green band, depending on

your strength, twist it once, and place it around your upper back so the tension is pulling back your hands. Now lie down on the bench, stretch the band to grab the bar, and start benching. This 'double' tension is unreal.

Also try the 'lightened' method, recommended by Carl of Jump-Stretch. Attach a set of blue bands to the top of the power rack with a slip knot. Load the bar to 135. It should be almost weightless at the chest. This way you can bench 135 pounds more than normal. This builds tremendous power at lockout, which is perfect for bench shirts.

Bands and chains have helped to increase our list of 550 benchers at Westside to 17. George Halbert recently benched 688 at 235 to capture the world record at 242. George also holds the 220 world record. Only two people can claim to hold a world record bench in two weight classes: George Halbert and Dave Waterman.

Now on to squatting. With an army of 800+ squatters, 22 to be exact, when we experiment and establish results, they are sound and proven. We also have a 755 squat-ter at 165 and a 782 squatter at 181. They all use chains and bands. Here's how.

First use a set of 1/4-inch-link chains that attach to the bar sleeves. We suspend a metal ring from the 1/4 inch chains, which regulates height of the 5/8 chain from the floor. Loop the 5/8 inch chain through the metal ring so about three chain links are lying on the floor when you are standing. When you are sitting on the box, slightly below parallel, half of the chain will be unloaded onto the floor.

How much chain should you use? If you squat 350 or less, use one set of 5/8 inch chain, equaling 40 pounds at the top. If you squat about 600 pounds, use about 60 or 70 pounds of chain at the top. If you squat 800 pounds, use 80~120 pounds of chain at the top. As you can see, about 10% of your squat weight should be added with chain. If you are doing sets with 400 on the bar, you will be standing up with 520. An 800 squatter whose top training weight is 480, or 60%, will add 80-120 pounds of chain to the bar, equaling 600 at the top.

To use bands for squatting, if you squat 650 or less, use green bands. If you squat more than 650, use blue bands. Here are two ex-amples of 900+ squatters. Billy Masters and Dave Barno used a top weight of 500 pounds and 150 pounds of tension with blue bands. Billy did 909 and Dave did a perfect 925. Neither train at Westside, but they use our methods.

When squatting, wave your training weights from 50% to 60% in a 3 or 4 week cycle. Do mostly 8 sets of 2 reps with 45 seconds rest between sets.

For max effort work, one can choose a bar weight of, say, 400 or 500 pounds. Do a single and then add a set of chains. Keep doing singles and adding a second and third set of chains until you break a PR or miss. You can do the same with Flex bands. Good mornings are a great exercise to do with chains and bands. High pulls with the pink or green bands are also great.

I have seen one of our lifters with a 600 deadlift go to 670 in 6 months by using bands on the deadlift. Bob Young would use 275-315 on the bar, with about 200 pounds of tension from the bands. We use the platform that Jump-Stretch sells with their bands to do this exercise.

If you want to excel at powerlifting or any sport, then you must develop speed strength, increase acceleration, and gain absolute strength. Bands and chains can be instrumental in developing these aspects of strength. I highly recommend that you try them as soon as possible. For chains, call Topper's Supply at 614-444-1187. For bands, call JumpStretch at 1-800-344-3539.