

A Closer Look at the *BFS UNILATERAL POWER PRESS*

Taking your athletes to the next level with this valuable exercise machine



Photos by Steve Kinslow

Are you someone who thinks that machines have no value for an athlete? While BFS believes that most of an athlete's training should be with free weights, there are many machines that do have value – not just in rehabilitation but also in performance. One such machine is the BFS unilateral power press.

The inspiration for standing bench press machines possibly arose out of criticism about the bench press. First, there is the problem of sport specificity, because the bench press is performed while lying on your back, whereas most sports are performed on your feet. The unilateral power press machine not only allows the user to exercise from a standing position but also allows the use of the muscles of the legs, hips and torso.

Another criticism of the bench press is that it is hard on the shoulders. During a bench press the shoulder blades are not allowed to move freely because they are pinned against the bench. This unnatural motion places unnatural stress on the shoulders, and for many individuals this stress may result in overuse injuries over time. (This problem is one reason the bench press is performed only once a week in the BFS program; and if additional bench press work is desired, then the exercise is performed through a

limited range of motion in the form of a towel bench press.) With the unilateral bench press, the shoulder blades are allowed to move freely; and as a result the exercise can be performed more frequently. Also, it has the added safety value of not requiring a spotter.

Besides offering a better alternative to the bench press, there are several other exercises performed with the unilateral power press that may be less stressful on certain joints than regular machine exercises or even free weight exercises. In fact, we decided to put this theory to the test by having BFS President Bob Rowbotham try the standing military press. Coach Rowbotham has a chronically injured right shoulder that prevents him from performing many exercises, such as bench presses and the military press with a pronated grip (palms facing away from you). However, he had no problem performing these exercises on the machine.

When purchasing exercise equipment, especially for a facility with limited space, the best approach is to look for apparatus that enable the user to perform a variety of exercises – more “bang for your buck” exercises, so to speak. With that prerequisite in mind, here are some of the exercises that can be performed on the unilateral power press.

Unilateral Power Press. Named after the machine, the unilateral power press is the basic movement performed with this machine. Stand inside the machine and grasp each handle. Step forward with your right leg while at the same time extending your left arm – the motion may feel a bit awkward at first, but after a few sets it will become a natural movement. Repeat with the other side, and continue alternating between sides. Of course, you can perform the exercise without using the legs – in effect performing a standing bench press movement.

Unilateral Power Press with Hip Extension. This is a popular exercise with sprinters, as it simulates the follow-through that occurs in running. It is performed just like the unilateral press, except at the top of the movement you lift your front leg while flexing the knee – your front leg never touches the floor. Return slowly and repeat for the other side. To increase the difficulty of the exercise, use ankle weights.

Bilateral Power Press. With this variation, your feet do not move and you extend your legs and arms at the same time (as if you were performing a push press with a barbell). Stand inside the machine and grasp each handle, then move forward so that your knees are flexed. Perform the exercise by simultaneously straightening your legs and arms; slowly return to the start and repeat. As with the unilateral press, you can perform the exercise without using the legs to focus on just the upper body.

Unilateral Trunk Rotation. Although the unilateral power press works the muscles that rotate the trunk, you can increase the involvement of these oblique muscles by performing the rotations for one side at a time. Stand inside the machine and turn 90 degrees to the left. Grasp the handle with your left hand and place your other hand on your hip. From this starting position, twist your trunk while extending your arms; return slowly to the start. Perform one set for this side and then face the other way to work the other side.

Military Press, Supinated Grip. Arnold Schwarzenegger popularized a type of military press with dumbbells that started with the palms facing the body, which in this case would be considered a supinated grip. One reason for its popularity is that this grip, for many individuals, puts less stress on the shoulders. To perform the supi-

nated military press, face the machine and grasp the handle, with your palms facing you. You should be directly underneath the machine, with your legs slightly split, which helps prevent hyperextending your lower back, or with your legs in an athletic stance. Keeping your glutes tight to stabilize the lower back, alternately press each arm overhead. You can also perform the exercise by pressing both arms at the same time.

Incline Bench Press. The position of the lever arms of the unilateral power press enables the machine to be used to perform a supine incline press. Place a portable incline bench inside the machine so that when you lie down you are facing the open area of the machine. Grasp the handles, extend your arms, and then slowly return to the start. You can also perform this exercise one arm at a time. Because performing unilateral work on this machine is more stable than when you are using dumbbells, you'll find that you can handle considerably more weight in this exercise than you can with dumbbells (thereby increasing the strength training- and muscle-building effects).

Standing French Press, Supinated Grip. The French press is one of the most popular bodybuilding exercises, placing the most emphasis on the long head of the three-headed triceps brachii muscle. This exercise targets the long head of the triceps, which appears towards the inside of the arm. The long head and the medial head (which appears towards the outside of the arm) are the primary muscles that give the triceps a horseshoe appearance. For this exercise, you face the machine and grasp the right handle with your right hand, palms facing you – this grip minimizes the stress on the wrist. Lift the elbow up and stabilize the upper arm with your other hand. Now extend

the arm overhead and slowly return to the start; perform all the reps for one arm and then perform the exercise with the other handle for the left arm.

The unilateral power press enables the user to perform several unique multi-joint exercises and several popular upper-body pressing exercises as well. It can be effectively used to perform revolutionary

training such as pre-exhaustion methods and complex training and can also be used for rehabilitation.

Muscle Building: Taking It to the Next Level

The late Arthur Jones did not invent pre-exhaustion training, but he certainly must be credited for popularizing it.

With pre-exhaustion, the basic idea is to fatigue a muscle with an isolation movement, and then immediately perform a compound movement that also involves that same muscle group. By incorporating other muscle groups, the second set of a pre-exhaustion set works the muscle even harder. Three examples of pre-exhaustion combinations are leg extensions followed

Unilateral Power Press with Hip Extension

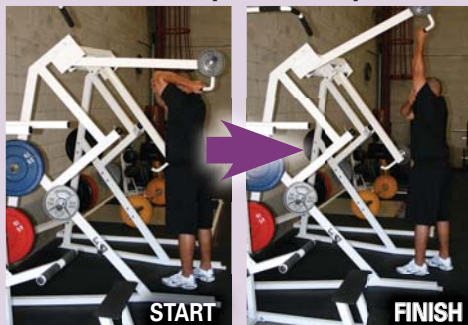


The most popular exercise on this machine is the unilateral power press, but there are several variations of this exercise, such as the unilateral power press with hip extension. With this exercise, which is popular with sprinters, you lift the knee of the opposite leg as you press. Adding ankle weights increases the difficulty of the exercise.

Unilateral Trunk Rotation



French Press, Supinated Grip



In addition to several total body exercises such as the unilateral power press, several isolation exercises can be performed with this great machine. Shown are the unilateral trunk rotation and the standing French press with a supinated grip.

Complex Training: Plyometrics with Pressing



By combining other exercises into a workout system called *complex training*, an athlete can increase power. To increase upper body power, an athlete could perform the unilateral power press followed by the plyometric push-up.



Military Press, Supinated Grip



Incline Bench Press



The unilateral power press can be useful for rehabilitation. The military press with a supinated grip places less stress on the shoulders than a standard military press with a barbell, and the incline press exercise can be performed with a limited range of motion by adjusting the position of the bench.

by squats, biceps curls followed by chin-ups, and dumbbell flies followed by bench presses.

To get the most out of a pre-exhaustion set, there must be as little rest between sets as possible. And the unilateral power press fulfills this requirement. For example, to use pre-exhaustion for the triceps you would start with the standing French press, using a weight that only allows you to perform 10 reps, then immediately perform a one-arm military press. For the shoulders, you could perform a dumbbell lateral raise followed by a standing unilateral or bilateral military press on the machine. Or you could perform a tri-set, starting with a dumbbell lateral raise, followed by a unilateral military press, and then finish with the unilateral press.

For athletes seeking to increase muscle size while also performing more functional exercises that increase stability, you would follow a sequence of moving from a speed exercise to an unstable exercise to a stable exercise. For example, perform a plyometric push-up followed by a dumbbell incline press and finally a unilateral press.

Another bodybuilding method involves the proper use of cheat reps. To effectively use cheating, the movement must be identical. For example, you could start with a strict, two-hand military press on the machine, and then use your legs to complete a few extra reps. Or you could start with a bilateral press, not using your legs, and then squeeze out a few more reps using your legs to assist you. And on your last rep, when you know you can't perform another rep, prolong the eccentric (i.e., lowering) portion of the exercise for approximately 10 seconds.

Complex Training Made Simple

Complex training involves combining several exercises to improve

power. You often see baseball players practicing a form of this when they swing several bats, or a bat with weights attached to the end, just before getting up to the plate. The idea is that strength exercise would activate a high level of fast-twitch muscle fibers and thus enable those fibers to be used in the speed exercise. Running with a parachute attached to your waist, or pulling a weighted sled and then releasing it, are other ways complex training is used.

In the weightroom, you would perform complex training by performing a strength training exercise followed immediately by a speed exercise. As opposed to developing the muscles with pre-exhaustion methods, the sequence to train for power with complex training is to go from a stable, relatively slow exercise to an unstable, fast exercise. For example, start with the unilateral press followed by plyometric push-ups off plyo boxes; or start with a standing military press followed by a medicine ball throw. Again, to get the most from such combinations, you want to move from exercise to exercise as quickly as possible.

A New Spin on Rehab


One common rehabilitation protocol is to first restore range of motion and then improve stability and strength. Another approach, which has proven very effective in treating lower back pain, is to start the rehabilitation process by improving stability and strength. Carl Miller, author of *The Miller Fitness Plan* and a respected weightlifting coach and gym owner, often uses this approach with his clients. Rather than avoiding strength training exercises with an injured client, he will find a range of motion the client can perform and gradually he will increase the range as pain allows. For example, if a biceps curl causes

pain, Carl might limit the motion to the top portion of the exercise.

To use this approach with the regular unilateral power press exercise, you simply stand farther from the machine so that you only use the end point of the motion. With the incline press, you move the bench farther back; with the military press, you sit on a 3-in-1 bench, adjusting the bench to a higher position as the injury improves.

Another approach used in rehabilitation is to focus on *eccentric training*. Whereas the *concentric* (i.e., lifting) portion of an exercise can be uncomfortable for injured athletes, the eccentric portion often causes no problems. Also, because you can lower more weight than you can lift, eccentric training may be the preferred method of training for those whose injuries have caused weakness that makes it difficult to perform the exercise concentrically. One way to use eccentric training with the unilateral power press is to use the legs to kick the weight up to extended arms, and then slowly lower the weight (such as to the count of 10) with just the upper body.

One discovery in rehabilitation that has proven to be particularly useful is that if an injury causes an arm to be immobilized (such as with a broken bone), that arm can still receive a strength training effect if the other arm is worked. Having the capability to do unilateral work on several exercises would prove valuable for many types of injuries.

Free weights are definitely the best tools for athletes, and obviously barbells and dumbbells are the exercise equipment to purchase first when equipping an athletic training facility. But when your budget allows, your exercise toolbox can become a lot more valuable with an exercise machine such as the BFS unilateral power press. 



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100 YD	15.00	14.00	13.00	12.00	11.00	10.00	9.00	8.00	7.00
200 YD	30.00	28.00	26.00	24.00	22.00	20.00	18.00	16.00	14.00
400 YD	1:00.00	0:55.00	0:50.00	0:45.00	0:40.00	0:35.00	0:30.00	0:25.00	0:20.00
800 YD	2:00.00	1:50.00	1:40.00	1:30.00	1:20.00	1:10.00	1:00.00	0:50.00	0:40.00
1600 YD	4:00.00	3:40.00	3:20.00	3:00.00	2:40.00	2:20.00	2:00.00	1:40.00	1:20.00
3200 YD	8:00.00	7:30.00	7:00.00	6:30.00	6:00.00	5:30.00	5:00.00	4:30.00	4:00.00
6400 YD	16:00.00	15:00.00	14:00.00	13:00.00	12:00.00	11:00.00	10:00.00	9:00.00	8:00.00
12800 YD	32:00.00	30:00.00	28:00.00	26:00.00	24:00.00	22:00.00	20:00.00	18:00.00	16:00.00
25600 YD	64:00.00	60:00.00	56:00.00	52:00.00	48:00.00	44:00.00	40:00.00	36:00.00	32:00.00
51200 YD	128:00.00	120:00.00	112:00.00	104:00.00	96:00.00	88:00.00	80:00.00	72:00.00	64:00.00
102400 YD	256:00.00	240:00.00	224:00.00	208:00.00	192:00.00	176:00.00	160:00.00	144:00.00	128:00.00
204800 YD	512:00.00	480:00.00	448:00.00	416:00.00	384:00.00	352:00.00	320:00.00	288:00.00	256:00.00
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3602879701896395968000 YD	900719925474098992:00.00	8295475183616000:00.00	76677523046428:00.00	703842940928000:00.00	640910651392000:00.00	577978361856000:00.00	515046072320000:00.00	452113782784000:00.00	389181493248000:00.00
7205759403792791936000 YD	1801439850948197984:00.00	16590950367232000:00.00	15335504609256:00.00	1408005881856000:00.00	1282461302784000:00.00	1156916723712000:00.00	1031372144640000:00.00	905827565568000:00.00	780282986528000:00.00
14411518807585583872000 YD	3602879701896395968:00.00	33181900734464000:00.00	30671009218512:00.00	2816011763712000:00.00	2564922605568000:00.00	2313833447424000:00.00	209439872000000:00.00	186919445696000:00.00	164399020800000:00.00
28823037615171167744000 YD	7205759403792791936:00.00	6480839987232000:00.00	59904314880056:00.00	548001838080000:00.00	496961302784000:00.00	445920595200000:00.00	394879744000000:00.00	343838891392000:00.00	292798041600000:00.00
57646075230342335488000 YD	14411518807585583872:00.00	12961679974464000:00.00	119808629520112:00.00	1096003676160000:00.00	993922628480000:00.00	891841180928000:00.00	789759480320000:00.00	687677565568000:00.00	585596083200000:00.00
115292150460684670976000 YD	28823037615171167744:00.00	25923359948928000:00.00	239617259520224:00.00	2192009190400000:00.00	1987845785600000:00.00	1783682380800000:00.00	1579518976000000:00.00	1375355571200000:00.	