



BFS Bench Press Variation: The Unilateral Power Press

A closer look at a superior upper-body pressing exercise

The bench press is a BFS core exercise and is at the top of every strength coach's list for its ability to develop overall strength in the pectorals, shoulders and triceps. Unfortunately, the bench press places a lot of stress on the joints because the shoulder blades are not allowed to move freely because they are pinned against the bench. This is why, to keep athletes healthy, we recommend that it be performed only once a week in the BFS program along with a bench variation. BFS coaches have followed this advice for 32 years, and we haven't had any complaints. But

with all the possible pressing exercises available, which ones are the best for athletes?

The most popular bench press variations are those that focus on the last two-thirds range of motion of the conventional bench press, such as the towel bench press (Figure 1). For this variation, the athlete places a thick round cushion (a BFS towel bench pad is five inches in diameter) under the shirt to prevent the barbell from touching the chest. One of the great benefits of the towel bench press is that it enables athletes to become accustomed to a heavier weight.

Normally, athletes can use weights that are 10 to 20 pounds heavier than they can lift on the regular bench press, and being successful with the heavier weight builds confidence for attaining new levels on the regular bench.

Powerlifters love towel bench presses. We say this because normally the weakest part of the bench press is the initial drive off the chest, but the bench press shirts provide the most assistance during this portion of the lift. As such, the weak link in the exercise for a powerlifter becomes the finish of the exercise, and thus to



FIGURE 1. The bench press is a great upper-body exercise, but it can be hard on the shoulders if performed too frequently. The towel bench press, which is performed just like a bench press but with a bench pad placed on top of or inside the shirt, is a recommended *bench press variation* in the BFS program. Shown bench pressing is Hannah Donnerberg, spotted by Joelle Miller, volleyball players at Lakeside High School in Plummer, Idaho. Towel bench press shown below, left.



FIGURE 2. The BFS Unilateral Power Press is a heavy-duty unit that allows athletes of all strength levels to perform numerous functional exercises. The model is Alise Larson, a volleyball player at Hunter High School in Salt Lake City, Utah.



reach the highest levels in their sport powerlifters need to focus on partial-range exercises such as the towel bench press. In fact, one of the first individuals to bench press 800 pounds said in one interview that the only time the barbell touches his chest is in competition!

While the towel bench press is a good exercise, we also highly recommend the unilateral power press as another option to use as a bench press variation in the BFS program. It is performed using the BFS Unilateral Power Press, which has become one of our best-selling exercise machines

(Figure 2). Why are we so enthusiastic about this exercise?

First, the unilateral power press fulfills the definition of a “functional exercise” for sports. It’s functional because it is a unilateral exercise, focusing on one side of the body at a time, and is performed from a standing position. With the exceptions of a few sports such as luge and kayaking, most sports are performed from a standing position. Also, because the shoulders blades are allowed to move freely, there is minimal stress on joints compared to regular bench pressing. Football coaches love it because the angle more closely appropriates the angles formed by the arms when applying force during blocking and tackling (Figure 3).

Although some coaches try to simulate this exercise with cables, it is awkward to get the cables positioned properly to perform this exercise. Further, the instability of the cables is such that you can’t use heavy weights on this exercise, thus reducing the strength training effect. With a stable unit such as the BFS Unilateral Power Press, the athlete can perform the same movement with considerably more weight. And because the weight cannot drop on the athlete as with a bench press, no spotting is required.

To perform the exercise, stand inside the machine and grasp each handle. Step forward with your right leg while at the same time extending your left arm (Figure 4). 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, there are many variations of this exercise. You can perform the exercise without using the legs – in effect performing a standing bench



Photo: Alex Goldman

FIGURE 3. From a functional standpoint, football coaches love the unilateral power press exercise, as it simulates many of the positions that occur during blocking and tackling. Shown are players from the Rosemount High School football team, which is featured on pages 22-25 of this issue.



FIGURE 4. The unilateral power press exercise involves stepping forward with one leg while pressing with the opposite arm.

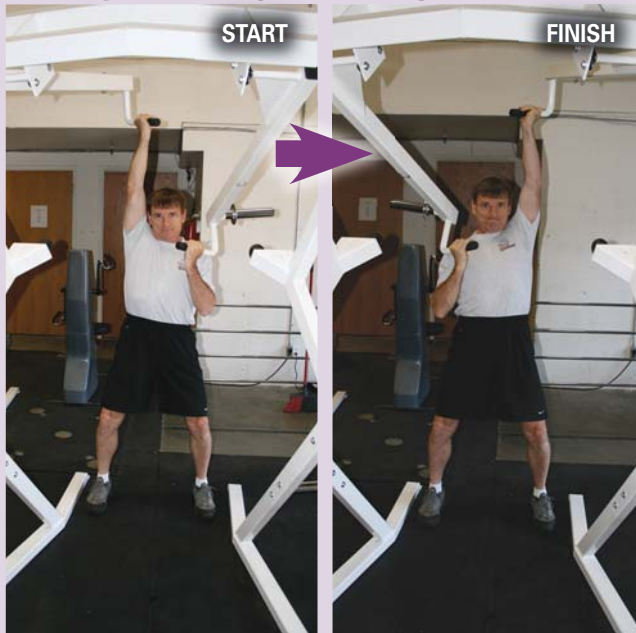
press movement. Or you can perform what is known as a *bilateral power press*. With this variation, your feet do not move and you extend your legs and arms at the same time (as if you were performing a push press with a barbell). Stand inside the machine

and grasp each handle, and then move forward so 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.

The bench press is definitely the king of upper-body exercises, and it will always be a core exercise in the BFS program. But for a great change of pace, give the unilateral power press a try. **BFS**

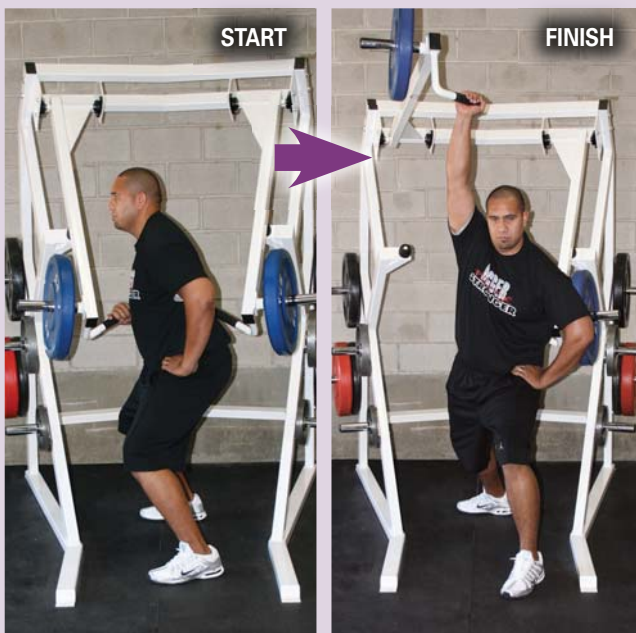
Military Press, Supinated Grip



Unilateral Power Press with Hip Extension



Unilateral Trunk Rotation



French Press, Supinated Grip

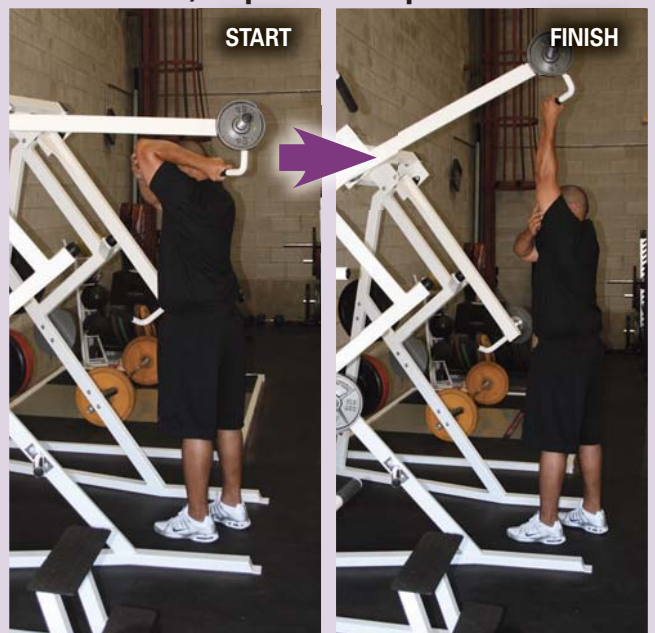


FIGURE 5. The BFS Unilateral Power Press enables you to perform many great exercises, such as the ones shown here.

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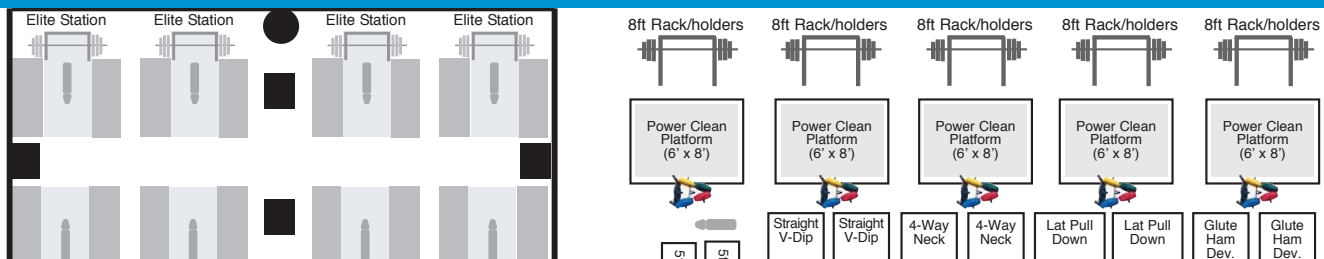
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