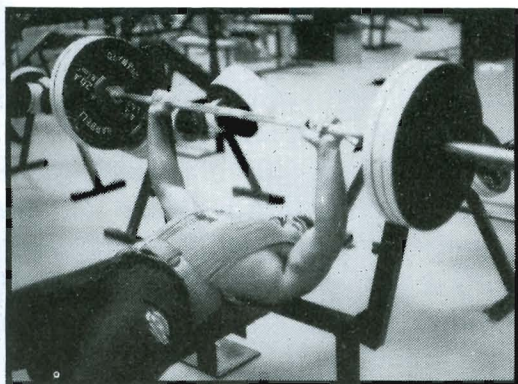


**BIGGER
FASTER
STRONGER**

BENCH PRESS

**YOUR
TOTAL
PROGRAM**

By Dr. Greg Shepard



Tony Casillas, last year's Lombardi Trophy Winner for Oklahoma, benched 485.

An athlete should only bench twice per week. Benching three times per week will lead to overtraining and tendonitis in a great many athletes. More progress can be made over a long period of time, when an athlete benches twice per week. I also believe that one of those bench press workouts should be what I call towel bench presses.

To perform a towel bench, take 3 towels and fold them in half the skinny way. Lay them on top of each other and roll them up like a sleeping bag. Lay the rolled up towels on the chest and bench with normal technique. I like to bring the bar right into the towels, not just lightly touch, before driving up.

I recommend towel benches for three reasons. First, an athlete gets used to a heavier weight. Normally, fifteen to twenty more pounds can be used on the towel bench. This builds more confidence for new levels on the regular bench. Second, it brings variety into the routine. Variety is important as this helps an athlete overcome plateaus. We guarantee that every athlete will break at least 8 personal records

per week, if our BFS Set-Rep system is used. Variety is the main reason we can make that guarantee. Third, and most important, towel benches will go a long way in preventing bench press shoulder which causes from mild to severe pain in the shoulder joint. If your athletes are benching 3 times per week, then probably 75% have some type of bench press shoulder or tendonitis in that area.

With the NBA players we train from 5 different teams, none have the slightest degree of bench press shoulder. The Utah Jazz Center, Mark Eaton, who is 7'4", 297 keeps increasing. He started with a 125 pound max at age 25 and now four years later he is benching 300 pounds. Danny Vranes, now with the Philadelphia 76ers, whom we train in the off-season, benches 325 pounds. We can't afford any problems, so we do towel benches. Can you?

Basic technique guidelines of both styles of bench pressing include: Keep a wide base with the feet, keep the feet flat and underneath, push your shoulders down towards your hips, keep your eyes open during the lift, wrap your thumb around the bar for safety, bring the bar several degrees back towards the spotter on the way up (some refer to this movement as lifting in a slight C curve), breathe deep on the way down — hold the breath momentarily — let it out when the bar passes the sticking point, try using a closer grip if you are a football player or a wrestler, squeeze the bar in a vice-like grip. Make sure the arms come up evenly, do not squirm and twist around, never sacrifice technique and form for 5 extra pounds.

Dips, tricep pushdowns, and inclines are my favorite auxiliaries for assisting a great bench press and an athlete's specific needs. The BFS Standards are as follows: Good Category — Bench your bodyweight, Varsity Level — 200, All-State Level — 300, All-American Level — 400, World Class Elite Level — 500.

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