

FULL BODY BENCH PRESS
By Mike Westerling & Al Bianchi

FOREWARD

I have known Al since he moved into my neighborhood when we were 12 years old. He was a heavy set kid that struggled with his weight and self-esteem. His home life was unstable at best and he spent half of his childhood living on the window seat in my room. I was super thin and malnourished and he was overweight and miserable. I had a small weight set in my basement and we started lifting weights together. When we were old enough, we joined Pep's Gym. A local gym than housed all of the top powerlifters and bodybuilders in the area. We worked out together every day and had some great workouts. My focus was more on bodybuilding at the time and when I was 15 I moved to Venice CA to train at Gold's Gym and observe the best bodybuilders in the world. Al stayed in Massachusetts with his parents who ended up getting divorced. Al stuck around to help his father raise his 2 younger brothers Joe and John. They all moved down to Florida and opened a gym for a while, but eventually Al ended up moving his brothers back to Massachusetts and raised them himself. Al has always been the most loyal stand-up guy I have ever known. Even as a kid he had a strong moral code that is rarely seen these days. Al truly cares about everyone he trains and will even help out complete strangers that come to him for advice. He is always more than willing to talk about lifting with anyone who seeks his knowledge. If you are looking to get stronger in the bench look no further, this book is for you. If you are truly invested in becoming the strongest lifter you can possibly be I would highly recommend hiring Al as a coach.

“Train harder AND smarter!”

-Mike Westerling

WHAT DOES BIG AL KNOW ABOUT A BIG BENCH?

Al first fell in love with the bench press back in high school and built his bench up to 400lbs by the time he was in his early 20's. Early on he knew that technique was everything and started his journey to find the best leverage for all his lifts. The bench held a special place in his heart though. Al managed a solid 390 raw bench in the 198's and a 420 raw bench in the 220 class in the AAU. Both were done in full meets where he totaled 1555 in the 198's and 1630 in the 220's which were both the highest drug free totals in the world at that time. All these lifts were done 100% raw and drug-free. Always experimenting and trying to find a better way, he started following Louis Simmons and adopting some of his techniques. Unfortunately, the volume proved to be too much and he tore his pec ending his powerlifting career.

Always the competitor, Al decided to enter the deadlift only and strict curl contests that were gaining popularity at the time. He currently holds the 100% RAW world record strict curl for the 220's in the 40-46 year old class and the deadlift record for the same class. He's won open world's 4 out of the last 10 years in the WABDL and holds the current deadlift records in the law and fire division for 40-46 year olds in both the 220 class and the 235lb classes.

“Me tearing my pec was the best thing that ever happened for the athletes I train” –Al Bianchi

Not one to cry over spilled milk, Al uses his bad experiences as well as the good to learn new and better ways to serve his athletes. He has coached many world champions in powerlifting, but since this is about the bench let me throw some numbers at you: Ricky Marrama, his star pupil, who trained with him starting at a very young age hit a massive 717 bench Drug Free in a single ply shirt in the 220 lb class and a 777 in the 235lb class and made the cover of Powerlifting USA. His brother Joe hit 510 raw and 660 in a single ply shirt back when bench shirts first came out. Kenny Matson trained with Al to hit a world record 601 in a double ply shirt in the 220's at 50 years old. Chris Melanson hit 545 in a single ply at 198 in the WABDL. Cody Gampino hit a drug free 606 in a single ply in the USAPL in a single ply at 264. Liz Cotoure hit 264 at 181 in a single ply to win WABDL worlds. Suzanne Leforge hit 174 raw at 148 to win the 54-60 year old class USAPL. All of these athletes are drug free and compete in organizations where they are tested regularly. I could go on and on about the other lifters he has trained for full powerlifting meets or that have excelled in amateur strongman, football, wrestling, baseball and a whole variety of other sports but I think you get the picture. Let's just say after a lifetime of lifting and coaching he knows his stuff. I personally have used a version of this program I created for my strongman athletes for overhead pressing and it works like a charm!

“THE BENCH”

THE NUTS AND BOLTS

Al has his athletes do a 3 day a week, low volume split, for bench. Each workout basically has the athlete work up to one hard set where they strain and move on to the next exercise. Al considers raw bench and Shirted bench as 2 different exercises.

ARCH

The secret to a big bench is a big arch. A big arch puts your pecs and shoulders in the best mechanical position, it allows the bar to stay in a straight line while going to the lower chest/ upper ab area and decreases the distance the bar has to travel. The best benchers are almost contortionists so developing an arch is paramount. Al will have his athletes use pool noodles and later pvc pipe under their backs to learn to keep the arch while pressing.

RAW GRIP

The grip for raw benching is going to be medium to even narrow. Its best if the athlete starts on the narrow side and works their way out until they find the grip they feel most powerful with. Usually it's best to go no wider than ring finger on the line unless the athlete is massive. Wider grips raw will result in more pec tears and shoulder injuries unless the lifter is particularly gifted in that department. As with anything there are always outliers that will be better super wide or super narrow but for 99% of lifters somewhere in the middle is best.

SINGLES “One and Done”

The bench is only worked for singles once the warm up is completed. The idea behind singles is that you only have to do one in a meet and the more reps you do in training the more you get fatigued in the little muscles and the worse your form gets as the set goes on. Also, doing one rep takes less out of you and allows you to hit it again in 2 days with very little residual fatigue. Remember that strength and power output is dependent on the body's ability to recruit every last muscle fiber available to do the lift. The more often you can hit 90% weights the more efficient the body gets at firing everything available to hit big weights. Unfortunately, the more you hit 90% or more, the less work you can do and still recover from. Since Al has switched his athletes to only doing singles the incidence of even slight pec tears has become almost non-existent. He believes this is because the pec is never broken down much and is healed and ready to go stronger than ever for almost every workout. Also, form stays much more consistent.

FORCED REPS

Since it is impossible to know what the body is capable of 100% of the time. Every now and then there will be a miscalculation where the lifter will miss. If it's a miss where the bar stalls that's it, it's over, take it quick. If it's a miss where the bar is moving but Al can tell it's not going to go he will give just enough help to get it go up smooth. You see, Al's hands are always on the bar so the lifter never fears failing and if he has to help a bit, he will. Al swears he almost never actually has to help but it's important for the muscles to finish their job. Al never wants his guys to know what a miss feels like! This builds unshakable confidence in his lifters. I swear Ricky Marrama would've attempted 1,000lbs if Al had put it on the bar and told him he could do it. Confidence in yourself, your abilities, your coach, and your program can not be overstated and Ricky proved it in spades!

PUTTING ON THE SHIRT

Using the shirt is a technique in and of itself. The athlete needs a coach or helper with a good amount of patience if he or she is to be successful in any kind of geared lifting; especially the bench. The shirt must be pulled down tight and adjusted every set. The best way to do this is start by squeezing into the shirt as you would put on a regular t-shirt that is way too tight. Once it's on, the lifter should sit on a bench facing the bar so the lifter can rest their forearms on the bar and the helper can get behind them and get good leverage to work the sleeves up. After the sleeves are where they need to be it's time to work the back of the shoulders as far back as possible. Now that the shoulders are in place the collar must be pulled down in the front as far as possible. The strength of the shirt is in the collar so it needs to be across the chest as low as possible to get the most out of it. The shirt should feel as if it cannot be pulled down any more than it is. Then the sides must be pulled down and the belt cinched around it to keep it in place.

THE GROOVE WITH THE SHIRT

Once the shirt is on, the athlete will switch to a wide grip. The maximum width allowed in the federation the athlete competes. This is usually index finger on the ring. While we want to use a medium grip when training raw, the shirts are designed for wide grip benches and this allows the athlete to use the shirt to its fullest advantage and makes it easier to get the bar to the chest. Don't worry about elbows tucked or flared. The goal is to find the shortest distance and straightest line possible from where the bar is locked out to the highest point of your body and back to lockout again. Remember: Straightest line, shortest distance. A lot of big lifters talk about tucking their elbows, but in most cases it is because their lats are so thick that their triceps are against them and they feel tucked. However, if you were to look from above you would see that their upper arms are at a 45 degree angle to their body because their lat is filling the space. Trying to get a smaller lifter to tuck their elbows in uncomfortably could very well end in disaster.

Day 1

Bench (Raw with a medium grip)

The plan: Singles starting light and taking small jumps to a 1RM for the day. After some real light work, the lifter will take a few bigger weight jumps to get to about 40-50% of their one rep max. Then they will go up in weight taking roughly 10% jumps to a good heavy single for the day. The idea is to practice a good set up, a good lift off, an explosive rep, and a solid lockout without doing so many heavy sets that the CNS gets overtrained or overuse injuries start to occur.

How it looks: After a real light warm up to get the blood flowing through the pecs, triceps and shoulders. The athlete starts with the empty bar for a set of 10-15, then, a little weight is added for a set of 7-10, then a little more for a set of 3-5. From there its singles taking 10% jumps. If the athletes top set has been 200lbs that means 20lbs jumps. For example 45x10-15 75x7-10 105x3-5 may be the warm up, and then 125x1 145x1 165x1 185x1 would be the work up sets. Then the final single would be somewhere between 195-205x1; depending on how 185 went. Ideally, the athlete will hit a solid rep with 205 for a 5lbs gain then it's time to put on the shirt.

Bench (Shirted with a wide grip-paused)

The Plan: Starting slightly above where the lifter left off on raw bench, the grip is widened slightly and they will do one single off 2 boards, a heavier single off 1 board, and a 1RM for the day shirted. All reps are paused on the boards. Here is where the athlete gets to practice the feel and groove of the shirt and gets to experience the heavier load that will be handled in competition. The first set is done to 2 boards as a good tight fitting shirt will not allow such a light weight to make its way down to the chest. Weight is then added and one board is taken away and the lifter benches to one board. By now they are getting the feel of the shirt and the weight is heavy enough to start making its way down closer to the chest. Finally a bit more weight is added and a final single is done to the chest. Between every set, the shirt must be re-seated and the pecs pulled up. The strength is in the collar so the lower you can get it on the chest the better

How it looks: Using our 200lb benchner as the example; the first single will be done with 205 to 2 boards where they left off on raw bench. This should feel almost ridiculous with a shirt on and the most challenging thing will be getting the weight down to the boards. The shirt would then be re-seated and the pecs pulled up. Then depending on how that felt the next jump will be around 275 and brought down to 1 board. Again, the shirt must be re-seated and the pecs pulled up. The final single will be done with 295 and brought all the way down to the chest. Bear in mind that

someone new to the shirt will take smaller jumps and a seasoned pro may take much bigger jumps. The more time that is spent understanding how to get the most out of the shirts leverages the higher the shirted bench will be above the raw bench.

Day 2

Bench (Raw with a medium grip)

The Plan: Singles starting light and taking small jumps to a 1RM for the day. The warm up and weight jumps will be the same as day one and the plan will be to work up to a 1RM to the one board. An experienced lifter will be slightly stronger off one board due to the slight mechanical advantage it affords. A lifter that hasn't spent much time developing the different firing points that boards train may actually be weaker having to overcome inertia at this point in the lift. This is because usually when the bar is at this height it is just passing through with the help on the stretch reflex it got at the bottom of the lift. That's ok though. Training off one board will build the bodies ability to add to that momentum all the way to lockout over time.

How it looks: Just like day one 45x10-15 75x7-10 105x3-5 would be the warm up, and then 125x1 145x1 165x1 185x1 would be the work up sets. Judging by the speed of 185 the next jump may be 200 followed by 215 for the top single. Now comes the fun!

Band Assisted Bench off 1 board (Shirted with a wide grip using heavy bands-paused)

The plan: Starting where you left off on raw bench, do singles taking 5 progressively heavier jumps up to a max for the day. All reps are paused on the boards. This day the weight is hung from the power rack by a pair (or pairs) of heavy thick bands. The idea is that as the bands stretch down to the bottom of the lift the weight gets lighter; and as the lifter presses the weight up the band tension releases until they are holding a huge amount of weight at lockout. This builds the ability to explode through the lift and finish with power. It also helps the lifter break the mental barrier of lifting certain weights. It also builds incredible stability throughout the core and strengthens the tendons, bones and ligaments to prepare them for the weights that will be coming in the following years.

How it looks: The bar will be hanging by enough band tension that it takes about 40% more weight to get it all the way down to the 1 board. At this point our example lifter will put on the shirt and start at 250 off one board. Then they will do roughly 5 progressively heavier singles working up to a 1RM for the day with this contraption. 250x1 275x1 300x1 325x1 350x1. Depending on a variety of factors, the lifter may have to start a bit heavier if they are having trouble getting the weight down to 1 board.

Day 3

Bench (Raw with a medium grip)

The Plan: Singles starting light and taking small jumps to a 1RM for the day. The warm up and work up on these will be identical to day one. Once the lifter hits 185x1 a judgement will be made as to if this day is another PR day or a smaller jump is taken. This is where the lifter and coach have to be honest with themselves and each other. As long as 90% or better is hit for a solid rep it is a successful day. However, far too many lifters will be so excited about making gains and feel so fresh because of the low number of work sets done on day one; and such heavy weights were moved on day 2 that they will jump too high and end up with a miss. This breeds contempt for the program and the lifter's immediate thought is "I knew this wouldn't work" when the reality is they are more fatigued than they realize because they hit over 100% of their max a few times already this week. Now the smart lifter and coach realize this and decide to only work up to 195 on this day. It's a nice, solid powerful rep that leaves them thinking they had more in them and are ready to put on the shirt. One day will not build a champion so it's important to remember the genius of this program is multiple frequent exposures to near maximal weights with perfect form over a long period of time. "Lubing the groove" as Al likes to say.

2-1-None Board Bench (Shirted with a wide grip)

The Plan: Here do the following as one big set: Do one rep off 2 boards, rack it, one rep off one board, rack it, one rep off chest. Rest, and then add enough weight so the final rep will be a max effort and repeat. The idea is to get a lot of work in at taking hand offs and get comfortable with the shirt and how it feels in different parts of the lift. It also gets in quite a bit more volume and builds some good muscle size throughout the entire shoulder girdle. It also builds a great spotter that becomes more in tune to your needs. Ask any great lifter how important this is as they approach the upper limits of human performance and the ability to stay set up as bone crushing weights are handed to them at arm's length. I bet you won't hear any 1,000lbs benchers walking up to the random gym rat with the obligatory "Hey, can ya spot me bro?" request.

How it looks: The first set of 230 is handed off to the athlete and they hit a rep off two boards and then lock it out and rack it. Then one board is taken away and the athlete is again handed the weight, they bang out a rep to one board, drive it up and rack it. The final board is taken away, and the athlete is once again handed the bar and proceeds to do a final rep to the chest. Then a big rest is taken and the lifter will repeat the process with 250. Notice as the week goes by the lifter is able to get lighter weights down to the chest. This is a combination of the lifter understanding the shirt better and some stretching of the material.

ASSISTANCE WORK

Al has his athletes do a huge variety of assistance work, and has them rotate through all the exercises. The goal is to always be trying to hit a PR of some sort on whichever exercise they are working on that particular day. This builds a well-rounded athlete with a ton of confidence. Each exercise has its own protocol as to how he has the athlete work up to their top set and the rep range he feels suits it best.

Upper Back:

- Barbell Bent Over Rows
- Pullups
- Cable Rows
- Upright Rows
- Supported Rows
- DB Rows
- Wide Pulldowns
- Assisted Pullup Machine

Shoulders:

- One Arm Seated DB Press
- 2 Arm DB Press at various seat angles (never straight up and down though)
- Trilogy Of Misery Thumbs up straight arm side laterals immediately followed by bent over laterals immediately followed by regular side laterals.
- Chest Supported Rear Laterals
- Face Pulls using bottom pulley sitting on an incline bench

Triceps:

- One arm Incline Cross body Tricep Extensions
- DB Bounce and Locks
- Incline Cable Tricep Extension
- Close Grip Pushups on the smith machine bar starting at 45 degrees and doing a set of reps at each height moving the bar closer to the ground each set then repping out on the floor with hands on dumbbells.
- Dips with the closer grip handles

Biceps:

- Drag Curls with the straight bar
- EZ bar strict curl against wall
- DB Strict Curl against wall
- DB Hammer curl against wall
- One arm spider curls

- One arm preacher curls
- Hammer curls
- Lying EZ cable curls with pulley at feet

Abs:

- Toes to bar
- Jack Knife situps
- Knee pull-ins with feet on ball and elbows on bench
- Rope Crunches
- Crunches in the middle
- V-ups
- Side Plank Crunches
- Side Bends With Db's
- High Incline situps
- Russian Twists
- Side to side Reach outs with medball on situp board

ASSISTANCE WORK SETS AND REPS On almost every exercise the goal is to do a bunch of work up sets of 3-7 reps to get the lifter proficient at the exercise, practice the technique, and get good and warm for the big set. Practice makes perfect and the multiple light work up sets give the athlete plenty of practice. Then once the athlete is prepared there is one "Big Main Set" that consists of the athlete working until they strain against a heavy weight. Depending on the exercise it could be on a max single or on rep number 35, or anywhere in between. The goal is one all out hard set then done. The caveat is that we are always looking to make a gain of some kind. Either another 5lbs or an extra rep. Depending on how the athlete is looking on a specific day the rep goal may be higher or lower, or exercises or rep ranges may be changed to one that hasn't been done in a while to allow the athlete to make a gain. This fosters a powerful belief in oneself and continues to push the body forward. For example if the lifter has been hitting sets of 5-7 reps on the bent over row for a few months and has maxed out at say 315x6 and the weights aren't exactly flying up; Al would suggest going for a rep record with 225. Since the lifter hasn't seen 225 for reps since he was weaker, it's a good bet there will be a new rep record at 225. This makes the lifter feel elated and allows them to go home feeling like a winner and excited to come back and kick butt another day!

WHY JUST ONE "BIG MAIN SET"?

Al was always looking for ways to be more efficient. When he first started training at Bay State Gym he became friends with Fred Petersen. Fred was a college professor with more degrees than I could count and a world champion lifter who's set world records and been on the cover of Powerlifting USA. Fred pulled 650 at WABDL World's at 70 years old with no drugs and no gear! He didn't even wear a belt!!!! Al took a kinesiology class under him and Fred told him that when doing multiple sets the most amount of fibers fire on the hardest one. The ones before it and after it were inferior by comparison. So Al decided why not make the ones before it easier so he could still get in the practice and drop the ones after it since they didn't matter and only cut into the recovery process. Then you could recover faster and train the muscles more often. The

more often you could hit a muscle, the more often you had a chance to make a gain. This made perfect sense in Al's mind and both he and his clients have been proving it in the gym ever since.

ENDURANCE TRAINING

Al is a big believer in super setting high rep step ups with bodyweight squats and ab work as a way to build a lifter's endurance so they can recover fast between attempts. You won't see Al's people sucking on oxygen between lifts. He believes being in shape allows for faster recovery between lifts and a healthier athlete is a better athlete.

A SAMPLE TRAINING WEEK

Al believes in a 3 day training week using full body workouts. Each workout will be centered around bench press but even though they are full body workouts, each will focus more on some areas than others. At first glance the workouts almost look haphazardly thrown together but they are structured in a way that the athlete can get the most out of each exercise, in order of importance on that particular day. The example week is centered around a 400 pound raw bencher that hits 500 in a shirt. For more detailed descriptions of the bench work see the "bench" section above.

Monday:

BENCH (MEDIUM GRIP RAW)- 45x10-15 95x8 135x7 185x3 225x1 275x1 315x1 365x1 390x1.

SHIRTED BENCH (WIDE GRIP)- 425x1 paused to 2 boards, 460x1 paused to 1 board, 495x1 paused to chest.

ASSISTED PULLUPS- The goal here is to warm up for one all out set of pullups with bodyweight. However, instead of jumping right into a big working set we will warm up everything really well and get a few sets in to "lube the groove." This will help establish and solidify our contraction pattern and add some volume to the workout without resulting in overtraining. An example of progression may be: full stack of assist x7 reps, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the stack for assist x7 reps, $\frac{1}{2}$ stack for assist x7 reps, $\frac{1}{4}$ stack for assist x7 reps, then finally they would hit the actual working set of bodyweight for 21-25 reps. If the athlete can't hit at least 21 reps with bodyweight they would stop at an amount of assist that would allow that rep goal.

INCLINE DUMBBELL PRESS- Since the upper body is good and warm now, the work up sets will be done for 5 reps each. Then the working set goal will be 12-15 reps. Again we will start light and do multiple sets to "lube the groove" and sneak up on our top set. In this case the athlete will be doing 25x5 40x5 55x5 70x5 85x5 100x12-15.

CHEST SUPPORTED REAR DELT RAISES- Al believes rear delt's are extremely important to healthy shoulders so they are hit relatively early in the workout where they can get a good amount of attention. Because they don't lend themselves to particularly heavy weights we will do

sets of 12 for our workup sets then 21-35 for our working set. For example: 5x12 10x12 15x12 20x12 25x12 30x21-35.

ONE ARM DUMBBELL PREACHER CURL- These can be done on an actual preacher bench or with the arm supported on the back of an incline bench if a preacher bench isn't available. We will do 7's for our workup sets and a top set of 21-35 reps. For example: 10x7 15x7 20x7 25x7 30x7 40x7 50x21-35.

ONE ARM INCLINE CROSS BODY TRICEP EXTENSIONS- These are done lying on a 45 degree incline or slightly higher. The dumbbell is brought across the chest to touch the opposite shoulder. Al actually encourages a slight bounce off the opposite shoulder to relieve some stress off the elbow at the bottom where the joint is most vulnerable. He believes this will add longevity to the athlete and still work the hell out of the tricep. Again we will do 7's to work up to a top set of 21-35 reps. The athlete may do 15x7 20x7 25x7 30x7 35x7 40x7 45x7 50x21-35.

FLOOR CURLS- These are done lying on your back on the floor with your feet against the bottom of a weight stack with the curl bar attachment secured to the bottom pulley. The order of the day is sets of 7 working up to a set of 12-21 reps. Here we will do 60x7 80x7 100x7 120x7 140x7 160x7 180x7 200x12-21.

DOWN THE RACK PUSHUPS- These are a favorite of Al's and although they seem quite remedial and the first sets will be almost too easy; but he believes the volume of training they add and the various angles will go a long way towards developing an athlete's work capacity and keeping the pecs healthy. These are done leaning on the bar in the smith machine starting at about nipple height. 12 reps are done then the bar is lowered to the next set of pegs, 12 reps are done again, then down to the next set of pegs, this is continued hitting 12 reps on every set until the athlete is on the floor and then one set of max reps are done. The set on the floor can be done with hands on dumbbells with palms facing each other for variety.

BOX TOUCHES- At the end of every session Al keeps his athletes mobile and stretches out their lower back and hammys by having them do a set of 25 box touches. Basically you stand in front of a 12 inch box and bend over until your hands are flat on the box, then stand up. Keep the legs straight and push off the box at the bottom a little on the first few reps until the motion feels good and loose.

Wednesday

1 BOARD BENCH (MEDIUM GRIP, RAW)-
45x10-15 95x8 135x7 185x3 225x1 275x1 315x1 365x1 390x1 410x1.

REVERSE BAND SHIRTED BENCH TO 1 BOARD (WIDE GRIP)- 450x1 480x1 510x1 540x1 580x1.

BENT OVER BARBELL ROWS- Here we are either going to stand on a 3-4" block or use all small plates to increase range of motion. We will start with the empty bar and do 7's all the way up to a working set of 21-30 reps. For example: 45x7 95x7 145x7 195x7 245x21-30

ONE ARM SEATED DUMBBELL SHOULDER PRESS- These are done on a very steep incline. NEVER straight up and down. The weight is cleaned into place with both hands, then repped out with one. Our top set will be 7-15 and we will work up with sets of 7. Small jumps and lots of "groove lubing" sets are very important here for shoulder safety. 30x7 40x7 50x7 60x7 70x7 80x7 90x7-15.

LAT PULLDOWNS- These are done with a slight lean back and pulling the bar to the chest. Keeping the chest up and pulling the shoulders down and back builds the upper back and lats into a nice big base to press heavy weights off. A nice progression on these is 50x7 70x7 90x7 110x7 130x7 150x7 170x7 190x7 210x21-25.

DUMBBELL DECLINE TRICEP EXTENSIONS- Lying on a decline bench with our feet hooked under the roller pad we will bring the dumbbells down beside our ears by bending at the elbows and drive them back straight up to arm's length. Working up with our sets of 7 as usual and hitting a solid 12-21 reps on our top set. 15x7 20x7 25x7 30x7 35x7 40x7 50x12-21.

DUMBBELL HAMMER CURLS- These are done with both arms at the same time elbows back squeezing the arms bent like trying to crush a peanut in the inside of the elbow joint. We will work up with 7's to a top set of 21-30 reps. 20x7 25x7 30x7 35x7 40x7 45x7 50x7 55x7 60x21-30.

FRONT SQUAT WITH DUMBBELL- These are done more for core stability and overall work capacity than for leg strength. Curling a single dumbbell up with one hand holding the plates on either side, (not on the handle) then plates are placed on the shoulders and the elbows held up for the entire movement. The squat is done to a 11-13" box that puts the athlete slightly below parallel and a "light touch and go" technique is employed. There will be a lot of work up sets so only 3 reps is done each time. 30x3 40x3 50x3 60x3 70x3 80x3 90x3 100x3 110x3 120x3 130x15-25 reps.

STIFF LEGGED DEADLIFT- These are done standing on a block or with small plates to increase range of motion. Al believes the legs can be either perfectly straight or slightly bent and the back can be arched, flat, or rounded. He believes the athlete must go with the position his body naturally gravitates to. The most important thing is that the athlete works up over time to heavy weights and doesn't just jump into them until their body has been conditioned sufficiently to the heavy stress associated with whichever form they choose. I remember back when Al started working stiff legged deadlifts he was already pulling 600lbs but still started them at 95lbs for 25 reps. He just went up 10lbs a workout until he was using 405 and when he got to 405 his back was like iron. It would have been easy for him to start out much higher than that, but his back wouldn't have been half as strong when he got to 405.

BOX TOUCHES- Keep that back and those hammies loose with another 25 of these!

Friday

BENCH- (MEDIUM GRIP RAW)

45x10-15 95x8 135x7 185x3 225x1 275x1 315x1 365x1 385x1 405x1.

2-1-NONE BOARD SHIRTED BENCH- (WIDE GRIP) The first set would be done with 425 to 2 boards, 1 board and to the chest (no boards). Then the second set would be done with 440 to 2 boards, 1 board, to the chest (no boards).

SQUAT- The squats can be done low bar or high bar, wide or close. The athlete is encouraged to find their most powerful and natural bar position and stance. These will be done to the same height box as the dumbbell front squats, and we will do 2's to work up to our heavy set of 1-7 reps. The first few sets may be done for higher reps. 45x10 95x8 135x5 185x2 225x2 315x2 365x2 405x2 425x1-7.

TOES TO BAR/INVERTED SITUPS- These will be done back to back but with no hurry. The athlete will do 1 toes to bar, then 1 inverted situp, 2 toes to bar, 2 inverted situps, 3 toes to bar, 3 inverted situps, etc... The athlete will continue up until they get 10 reps of each then do one max rep set of each exercise. If the athlete can only get to 7 of toes to bar then they will stop there and try and do another rep next time. Eventually the goal is to get all the way up to 10 on each, take a big break then crank out a set of at least 20 reps on each.

SIDEBENDS HOLDING A DUMBBELL IN ONE HAND- With a top set of 7-15 reps in mind the athlete will do sets of 7 reps each side as per most exercises and work up to a challenging weight for the 7-15 rep set. These can cause an incredible amount of soreness if the athlete isn't used to doing them so hold back a bit at first. A typical progression may be 20x7 30x7 40x7 50x7 60x7 70x7 80x7-15.

HYPER EXTENSIONS- Here we will do sets of 7 to warm up then do a weighted set of 21-35 reps.

STEP UPS- AL loves step ups! They develop the legs all over along with the calves and get the athlete in shape in quick order. The typical set up on these is starting with a 6" box and doing 15 reps per leg, then a 9" box for 15 per leg, then a 12" box for 15 reps per leg, then a 15" box for 15 per leg, then a 18" box for 15 per leg, then a 21" box for 15 per leg. If the legs aren't toast by then, the athlete starts adding reps to the top set. Some of Al's athletes are at the point that their top sets are so high in reps that it takes them a full half hour to just get through the step ups at the

end of the workout! You won't hear them bitching about getting tired at a contest though! They can go all day!

BOX TOUCHES- Another 25 to keep you moving healthy!

“BENCH - A WEEK IN THE LIFE”

Here is an actual week of benching that Al's start Pupil, Ricky Marrama completed right before hitting 717 and just barely missing 750 by a hair in the 220lbs class. Ricky went on to hit a 777 in the 242lbs class while weighing 235lbs. Notice the final Friday workout is ended with a max single off the chest in place of the 2-1-none board press normally done on Friday.

Monday

Bench (medium grip-raw)

45x12 95x3 135x3 185x3 225x3 315x3 (notice rather than doing a few light high rep warm ups they instead chose to do multiple sets of low reps bringing the weights up slowly to the point they start working on singles) 365x1 paused, 405x1 paused, 440x1 paused, 475x1 paused.

Shirted Bench (wide grip)

585x1 paused off 2 boards, 650x1 paused off 1 board, 685x1 paused off the chest.

Assisted Pull-up Machine Three sets of 7 reps with the full stack assist just to warm up for the main set of pull-ups.

Pull-ups 1 set of max reps. (His best was 44.)

Seated One Hand DB Shoulder Press (Seat is set back at a very slight incline) 10x5 20x5 30x5 40x5 50x5 60x5 70x5 80x5 90x5 100x21.

Dumbbell Stiff Legged Deadlift Supersettted with Barbell Shrugs DB Stiff Legged Deadlift 10x7 20x7 30x7 40x7 50x7 60x7 70x7 80x21. Shrugs 95x12 135x12 185x12 225x12 275x12 315x12 365x40.

Incline Sit-Up's 1 easy set of 5 to warm up then one all out set of 40 reps.

Wednesday

Bench (medium grip-raw)

45x12 95x3 135x3 185x3 225x3 then add a **sling shot** for 315x1 paused, 405x1 paused, 495x1 paused, 545x1 paused.

Shirted Reverse Band Bench (wide grip-green bands)

585x1 paused, 675x1 paused, 765x1 paused, 855x1 paused, 945x1 paused, then a final pause with 1,000lbs.

Bent Over Row 95x7 135x7 185x7 225x7 275x21.

Incline Dumbbell Press 10x5 20x5 30x5 40x5 50x5 60x5 70x5 80x5 90x5 100x5 110x5 120x21.

One Arm DB Preacher Curl Supersetted With One Arm Incline Cross Body Tricep Extensions 10x5 20x5 30x5 40x5 50x5 60x35 each arm.

Dumbbell Side Bends 10x7 20x7 30x7 40x7 50x7 60x7 70x7 80x7 90x7 100x25.

Ab Wheel Roll-outs 3 sets of 7 to warm up then 1 set of 25 reps with knees elevated on a 12" box.

Friday

Bench (medium grip-raw)

45x12 95x3 135x3 185x3 225x3 275x3 315x3 then 365x1 touch and go, 405x1 touch and go, 455x1 touch and go, 495x1 touch and go.

Shirted Bench

585x1 paused off 2 boards, 635x1 paused off 1 board, 675x1 paused off chest, 700x1 paused off chest.

Squats (off a 1" below parallel box-touch and go style) 95x3 135x3 185x3 225x3 275x3 315x3 365x3 405x3 455x3 495x1 535x3. These are done with a belt only.

Lat Machine Pulldowns 100x7 150x7 200x7 250x7 300x30.

Trilogy Of Shoulder Misery 3x21 5x21 8x21 10x21 12x21 15x21 20x21.

*The trilogy of misery is a tri-set performed as follows: 7 reps of thumbs up side raises with arms straight, 7 reps bent over rear belt raises and 7 traditional side raises using the same dumbbells for one giant miserable set of 63 total reps with each weight. This is the one exercise Al believes in doing a lot of volume to keep he weights down. His athletes have great healthy shoulders and he believes this is why. He also says he believes done heavy this combo would whittle the joints down to nothing but done light and just pumping the blood through like crazy will give good even development and keep them healthy and functioning strong.

Toes To Bar Supersettted with Jack Knife V-Ups The warm up would be 3 sets of 7 reps each back and forth, then 21 reps each without stopping.

Front Neck Lying on a bench, face up, with head hanging off and holding dumbbell on forehead for added resistance 10x21 20x21 30x21 40x21 50x21 60x21 70x21

Rear Neck Lying face down with head hanging off bench 1 set of 50 reps with no added resistance.

INFLUENCES

Al has spent a life time searching for the keys to getting the most out of his own training and that of his athletes. As he says “I’ve never left a room that had a great lifter in it without at least asking a couple questions”. Even though he was self-taught for the most part, there were several people that influenced his methods along the way, steering him to the program he currently uses to turn his athletes into bench machines.

Mike Westerling- I am beyond humbled that when asked he mentioned me first and credits me with giving him the ability to believe in himself and teaching him a wide variety of exercises.

Roger Paul Jr – He was the owner of Pep’s Gym and Al’s first coach. When we were younger we always thought Roger was just lazy; but he taught him the importance of not overtraining so there was something left in the tank for next time.

Fred Peterson - A deadlifting sensation who was pulling 700lbs deadlifts into his late 60’s taught Al you need to be aggressive and attack the bar!

Tiny Meeker – He convinced Al that overloading with the bands weekly was the key to getting used to huge weights and it builds incredible supporting power. After talking with Tiny he regularly had Ricky up to 1100lbs with band assisted, shirted, benching off 1 board.

Louis Simmons - Al jokingly says Louis taught Al he couldn’t follow directions. When experimenting with Westside, Al was going too heavy on his speed days and ended up tearing a pec bad enough to end his own personal love affair with the bench.

Tom Eisman – He reinforced Al’s belief that lifting is about more than muscle and strength. That making the most of your leverage through technique and intellect was just as important in building champions as brute strength.

Jason Jackson – He taught all to reach between the lifters pecs and “pull the boobs up” once the shirt was on to get the collar as low as possible. This is where the shirts power lies.

Ted Arcidi – He told Al that nose crushers ruin elbows. Al took this to heart and developed his philosophy on training the triceps in a way that tension is actually reduced at the elbows bent position to save the elbows.

Jeff Bablock – He was a member at Al’s gym in Florida that talked Al into taking his training frequency down from 5 days a week to just 2 days to give him more time to recover. After seeing an almost immediate increase in his lifts he decided to stay with 2 days a week for years. Eventually he settled on 3 days a week but limiting his efforts to a few low rep warm up sets followed by just one hard straining set per exercise.

Ray Benamerido – He further reinforced the need to be a contortionist to get the best leverage on the bench.

Ed Coan – He is a wealth of knowledge and Al’s favorite lifter of all time. Al said he couldn’t place his finger on exactly what he learned from Ed about the bench, but said he has influenced his philosophy on lifting in general in a number of ways