Equipment Utilization #2

The Bench Press

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The focal point of attention in many weight rooms is the area around the bench press stations. It happens that this is one of the most popular for athletes in many sports. However, don’t kid yourself into thinking the flat bench press station is good only for this one lift. This piece of equipment can be a very versatile item if used to its full potential.

For the strength coach who is looking to expand usage of the bench press area, here are some features that need to be considered:

- **The unit must be sturdy.** When loaded with heavy weights, the uprights must be stable. This is especially important for adjustable uprights. Be sure the adjustments can be easily made, but securely fastened.
- **The height of the bench.** Depending on the age group you work with, be sure your athletes can place their feet solidly on the floor.
- **The padding on the bench.** Too much padding makes it difficult for the lifter to get a solid base. Not enough padding will make the bench very uncomfortable, as well as bruise the lifter’s back.
- **The width of the uprights.** For safety purposes, the uprights should sit just a few inches from the inside collars on an Olympic bar. If a bench with narrow uprights is used, the bar can too easily flip off the uprights when being loaded or unloaded.
- **Back-stops on the uprights.** These extensions of the uprights assure the lifter that the bar will not go over the top of the uprights when the bar is being racked. The back-stops need to be tall enough to accommodate even your tallest athletes.
- **Safety catches.** As a safety precaution, safety catches should be located on the uprights. These give the lifter someplace to set the bar on a failed attempt. While a spotter should always be used, it never hurts to have this feature. Some benches have an adjustable extension on the front of the upright on which the bar may be set.

When your equipment is not being used for bench pressing, try some of the following exercises:

- **Close-grip bench press.** This is very similar to the regular bench press, except a much narrower grip is used. High back-stops on the uprights are extremely helpful with this exercise.
- **Military shoulder press.** With the bar in the racks, the lifter sits straddling the bench, facing the barbell. The lifter then lifts the barbell to collarbone level to begin the exercise. If behind-the-neck presses are to be done, the lifter ducks his head under the bar and lifts the bar out of the racks by placing it across his shoulders (as with a squat) and then sitting upright with it. Care must be taken when setting the bar back in the racks.

- **Flat bench exercises.** This includes anything an ordinary flat exercise bench is used for. For example, dumbbell benches, dumbbell flies, lying tricep extensions, leg raises, one-arm rows, seated arm curls (dumbbells), wrist curls, etc.

- **Bent-over rows.** Some athletes like to do this exercise while standing on the bench. This allows the bar to be lowered further than if standing on the floor. The athlete stands facing the bar, takes the barbell from

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Begin military shoulder press by lifting the barbell to collarbone level.

For behind the neck presses, the lifter lifts the bar out of the rack with his shoulders.
Standing on the bench for bent over rows allows the bar to be lowered further than if standing on the floor.

Note complete extension at bottom of motion.

Abdominal crunch can be done with the knees over the barbell.

Crunches. This abdominal exercise can be done two different ways on the flat bench press. The athlete can lie on the ground beside the bench with his legs resting across the bench. The thighs should be perpendicular to the ground. Or the athlete can lie on the bench with his legs draped over the barbell. With the hands either behind the head, or across the chest, the athlete attempts to curl into a ball. Another similar exercise is the hip flexor (also known as bent knee leg raises). This is done by simply letting your legs hang off the end of the bench while lying on it.

Pull-overs. This exercise can be done with either a barbell or a dumbbell. The athlete lies with his head at the foot of the bench and lowers the weight over the end of the bench. Another method is to lie across the bench with the upper back supporting the weight of the athlete.

Tricep dips begin in the up position.

As you lower yourself, keep shoulders below elbows.

Tricep dips. This is a good alternative to parallel bar dips. Using a slightly wider than shoulder-width grip, the athlete holds himself up along the side of the bench while resting his feet on another bench or chair. In a controlled manner, the body is lowered until the shoulders are below the level of the elbows, then returned to the starting position. Additional weight may be added by setting weights on the lifter's lap.

Inverted push-ups. These are like regular push-ups, except the feet are elevated by setting them on the bench. With a little creativity and imagination, you can probably come up with a few additional uses of your own.