Equipment Utilization #4:

Machine bench press station

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The multi-station weight machine is commonly found in many weight rooms. In many programs, it may be the only weight equipment available, such as in Junior High schools, community centers, etc. It is on such a piece of equipment that many people get their first experience in weight training. Of particular interest is the bench press station, which can be either part of a larger multiple-station unit, or an individual station.

The following are some exercises that utilize the machine bench press station:

Bench press - This of course, is the most common use for this machine. While many serious lifters may prefer to use free weights, the advantages of the machine bench press are many. It is easier to learn on, as well as being safer. It also allows you to work out at a much faster pace (eg., timed circuit weight training). As in bench pressing with free weights, it is important to be positioned correctly on the bench, that is, feet flat, buttocks in contact with the bench, etc. As with all the exercises listed, a full range of motion should be used to achieve the maximum benefits. Care must also be taken to not drop the weight stack in an uncontrolled manner. If the weights are banged excessively, cracked plates may result.

Incline bench press - A very low sitting incline bench may be used for this exercise instead of a flat bench. If the height of the handles is adjustable, this can be easily done. An alternative method is to remove the pin from the weight stack and lift the handles to the desired starting height.

The pin is then inserted into the weight stack to hold the handles at the appropriate level (see photo).

One arm bench press - This is an assistance exercise that can be used for athletes in events like shot put and discus. It should not, however, replace regular bench presses.

Shoulder press - The athlete sits on the floor in an upright position, facing away from the machine. Both shoulders must be directly under the handles. With a slightly wider than shoulder width grip, the weight is pressed upward.

Shrugs - Standing facing the machine, the athlete grabs the handles directly below his shoulders. The shoulders are then raised in an upward and backward rotation. Care must be taken to use no arm or leg action in this exercise. A very short person may need to stand on a box.

Upright rows - While this exercise is more easily done with free weights or a low pulley machine, it can also be done on the bench press machine. The lifter must take as narrow a grip as possible, and remember to keep his elbows high.

Leg press - Laying on his back with his feet toward the machine, the athlete positions the middle of his feet on the bench press handles. Using a complete range of motion, the weight is fully pressed upward with the legs. A word of caution: the bench press handles are not designed for use in this manner. Be careful that the feet do not slip off the handles during this exercise. To avoid discomfort, the lifter may place a pad under the hips.
**Toe raises** - With the balls of the feet on a three to four inch high box, the athlete faces the machine and grips it as if doing shrugs. Using only the action of the calves, the lifter raises up on his toes and then descends until full dorsiflexion is achieved. If using very heavy weights, either a hook grip or wrist straps may be desirable.

**Arm curls** - As with the upright rows, it is usually much more satisfactory to use other equipment for this exercise. Some athletes have used this method quite successfully. While facing the machine, the lifter performs a curling motion. It may be desirable to lean toward the machine slightly during this exercise.

**Bench deadlifts** - For this exercise, the athlete faces the machine while standing on a bench. Caution must be taken to be sure the bench is stable and will not move during the exercise. Using proper deadlift technique, the athlete performs the exercise using the weight stack for resistance.

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The uses of this machine are many and varied, and it can become an important component in several strength training programs.