Hyperextension Bench

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An easily overlooked part of the body in many strength and conditioning programs is the torso. This includes both the abdominal and the lower back muscle groups. While there are a great many exercises that effectively develop this area, the use of a hyperextension bench provides some excellent alternatives.

Back Hyperextensions: The athlete positions himself facing the floor with the upper thigh and hip braced against the padded bench. When doing this exercise it is important to remember to (1) Use a controlled motion, do not let the momentum of the upper body go unchecked, and (2) extend the torso to a position just past parallel with the floor, avoiding excessive extension of the back. If the body weight of the athlete does not provide enough resistance, then a small weight may be held behind the head to provide additional resistance.

Russian Twists: This is an advanced level exercise for the athlete who utilizes a twisting motion in the torso region (eg, discus, shot put, wrestling, baseball, etc). This exercise should not be attempted until considerable abdominal strength has been developed. This exercise can be performed in either a face up or face down position. For a more detailed description of this exercise, see “A Strength and Power Training Program for Football Linemen,” by Michael Yessis, NSCA Journal 5(1):30-36, 1983.

Side Raises: This is an excellent exercise for conditioning the lateral abdominal muscles. Positioning himself on one hip and placing one leg in front of the other under the padded leg board, the athlete lowers himself until a mild stretch is felt. The body is then raised as high as possible, with care being taken to maintain the sideways position.
Roman Chair Sit-ups: This can be a good exercise for both the hip flexors and anterior abdominal muscles. While doing this exercise, the athlete must take care to lower the torso no further than parallel with the floor. This exercise may not be recommended for everyone, since some people may experience lower back pain as a result of this movement. As with hyperextensions, the body must be kept under control throughout the exercise. If additional resistance is required, a small weight can be held on the chest or behind the head.

If equipment such as shown in the photos is not available at your training facility, these exercises may be performed on many roman-chair sit-up stations. It may be necessary to utilize a partner to help stabilize the feet. These exercises can also be executed on a flat bench with the legs anchored by a partner.●