



European Powerlifting Federation

COMPETITION POWERLIFTING BENCH PRESS

Starting Position

It is essential that the starting position is very stable and balanced to enable the lifter to control the descent and ascent of the bar and consequently will allow the lifter to lift maximum weights. In order to establish a good position the lifter must do the following.

1. Raise the chest as high as possible while keeping the head, shoulders and buttocks in contact with the bench. A high chest is best achieved by bring the shoulder blades together
2. With the shoulder blades in a solid position, the lifter now brings the hips back toward the shoulders. The degree of arch in the lower back will depend on the amount of flexibility that the lifter has in the lower spine. The buttocks must still remain in contact with the bench.
3. The lifter feet and knees should be positioned out and away from the bench and back toward the hips as close as flexibility will allow. The feet must be flat on the floor. The positioning of the feet will impact greatly on the lifters stability and balance on the bench. Some lifter because of poor flexibility may find this position difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, it is the coach's job to keep striving with the lifter to establish the best position possible given the lifter anatomical make-up. Flexibility will improve with practice.



Lifter in the starting position

The major muscle which is employed during this lift and especially at the start of the movement is the Pectoral Major. Since this is a fan shaped muscle many of its lower fibres pull the arm towards the side rather than lifting the upper arm in a more vertical pathway as is demanded when driving

the bar from the chest. In order to get full advantage from the action of this larger muscle the body should be arched so that the sternum can be placed in a more vertical position, in this way the lower fibres of the Pectoral Major are able to pull more vertically.

The Descent

Once the position on the bench has been taken, the lifter is now ready to receive the bar from the racks. A thumbs-around grip must be taken with a hand spacing that is as comfortable to the lifter as possible whilst conforming to the rules. However it is recommended that in order to obtain the best mechanical advantage the hands should be so spaced that when the bar is resting on the chest the forearms are vertical to the body. It is recognised however that there will be considerable variation with individual lifters and that the best results will be achieved by experimentation.

For novice lifters, it is suggested that the spotter gives a single lift off. This is done with the spotter standing directly behind the lifters head. In this position, the spotter and the lifter can best communicate for a coordinated lift off. The lifter should take a deep breath to become further stabilized and to cue the spotter that the lift off should begin. At this point the bar should be lifted off the racks and moved forward to a position just over the lifters shoulders. At this point the arms must be fully extended with the elbows locked and wait for the chief referee's signal. In the lifters own time he/she lowers the bar to the chest, this must be done under control. When the bar comes to rest on the chest it should stop dead without sinking, the lifter will receive a signal from the chief referee to press.



Bar at chest

The bar will then be driven strongly off the chest with great determination. The pressing movement must be continuous and even. During the drive the lifter should ease the bar back as if to bring it over the shoulders. Whilst the drive must be very determined, care must be taken to ensure that the elbows are not lifted upwards and forwards as this would throw too great a resistance on the Triceps too soon. It will be in the mid range of the movement that the lifter will encounter the greatest difficulties. This area is known as the “sticking point” or point of the greatest mechanical and

anatomical disadvantage, because there is a weak link between the changeovers of one muscle group to another. The initial part of the drive is developed by strong action of the Pectoral Major and anterior deltoid. At the mid section of the press the role of these muscles is diminishing in function and the triceps are beginning to take on a greater responsibility. It is here that the weakness occurs; this section of the lift is the true test of the lifter's character. As the bar passes through the mid range so it becomes increasingly easier to complete the lift the lift is completed when the arms are fully straightened. A signal from the chief referee will be given to replace the bar.



Bar at mid range

Safety Note for Coaches

The bench press is a test of arm, shoulder and chest strength. Any attempt to lift heavier weights by cheating methods, such as pushing the hips up off the bench or bouncing the weight off the chest, defeats the whole purpose of the exercise. Apart from the fact that these practices are not allowed in competition, they can be very dangerous.

Indeed, driving up of the hips while pressing can create dangerous pressure on the spinal discs and the adjoining vertebrae. And bouncing the weight off the chest can cause damage to the sternum and the rib cage.