

Masterclass Two

Welcome to the second in a series of articles specifically written for novice and developing power lifters. The aim of this series is to deliver advice and information as a starting point for new lifters, who are trying to find their feet in the sport.

It is recommended that before you make any major alterations to your technique or start lifting heavy weights competitively you should consult an experienced coach or senior power lifter for more specific advice.

Position & Signals

Many people believe they know how to bench-press and it becomes a touchy subject should you mention that they're doing it wrong. The most common mistake is raising your feet off the floor, and holding them in the air whilst lifting. This is unstable and an accident waiting to happen.

Your feet, butt, shoulders and back of your head should remain in contact with the floor and bench at all times. This builds a stable foundation to enable you to attempt the press. If you feel able then you can even arch your back, providing all the above remain in place.

This is a way of enhancing your strong position and building a bridge to take the strain. (Ask any engineer, and they will agree). This will not place your back at risk, in fact quite the opposite.

Be careful not to cheat, by raising your butt off the bench during the lift. Position yourself close enough to the racks to receive the weight comfortably, but not too close as to hit them on the way back up.

Markings are provided on the bar, you should use them as a guide and you should not bench wider than these. If in competition you will not get your press passed if your hands are wider than these marks.

The wider your grip, the easier the press should be, but it does not always work that way. You may find that by having your hands in closer, the position is stronger for you. Again you need to find your optimum position and you will only find this through experimentation.

Once the bar is at arm's length and in a settled, motionless position, the referee will give the start signal. Lowering the bar before this signal will mean that your press will not be passed.

You are required to hold the bar on your chest for a motionless pause, before the referee gives you the press signal. This could either be a verbal command, or via a clapper board.

The lifter then presses the weight in one 'even' movement, without besting the referees signal, without their backside raising off the bench and without dropping the bar below the chest onto the sternum.

Once you've returned the bar to the start position at the end of the press, you will receive the rack signal and be allowed to return the weight to the racks. You should do

all of this whilst keeping your feet flat on the floor.

Pause & Extension

A full bench press should be lowered all the way to the chest, not stopping short. You will only cheat yourself by not completing the full movement. You should not lower the bar to any area higher than the chest, like the neck as this is an accident waiting to happen.

When in competition a bench presser is required to pause on their chest for almost a full second, before pressing the weight back to the start position. The referee is unlikely to pass the lift unless there is a noticeable pause.

It's important to make sure that the weight is pressed evenly, and in a controlled manner. If the press is uneven and not controlled properly, then the weight is probably too heavy and you should reduce the poundage.

You can then build the weight back up as all the technical points fall into place. You will soon find that your strength and poundage will improve due to improved technique. One thing for sure is that you will not get a lift passed on the platform with an uneven extension.

Remember, don't try and change everything at once.

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Special thanks to BDFPA Chief Technical Officer Andy Davies and International Referee Mike Leadbetter for consulting on the Masterclass Articles. Lifters can find a list of causes for failure of lifts in the BDFPA handbook. (Pages 69 -72)