

Log Press article

The Log Press, performed overhead for a max single, is a very common strongman event. It is also instrumental in building great torso stability, as it requires the support of large loads overhead while standing. The benefit for the shoulders is great as the hand position emphasizes the same shoulder muscles needed in bench pressing. In football it emulates the hand position of an offensive lineman coming out of his stance and driving into an opponents shoulder pads. Overhead pressing is also a great addition to your repertoire because it gives your body a break from the bench press and it gives you a brutal pressing workout. The shoulders, torso, hips, triceps, biceps and traps all receive attention.

To build a great log max one need not look any further than Westside Barbell. Their techniques for developing pressing power are unparalleled. You simply use the dynamic day and the max effort day. We'll outline that more in a minute.

Just briefly we are going to talk about how strongman events add tremendous full body power, stability, torso strength, gripping power and endurance, GPP and tendon/ligament strength. It also helps to build thickness in the upper back and adds explosiveness to the posterior chain. I will use myself as an example. I am the Director of Strength and Conditioning at Total Performance Sports and have competed in the sport of powerlifting. At the time I was training using the Westside system. I was not a prolific bench presser having done 352 @ 220 in a contest with a single ply denim. For two years now I have practiced strongman events and have registered a 300 standing overhead log with a 10' aluminum log. My best contest deadlift was an Okie bar, deadlift suit 519. On our platform, this year, I pulled a 620 in cotton shorts with hiking boots and a nasty old bar. The only powerlifting training that I have done in two years was some rack pulls with bands and box squats with bands, chains and sometimes both. Those were not performed constantly but rather as a supplement to strongman training. I attribute much of this poundage increase to the torso strength built up from overhead lifts, 1-armed farmers walks, super yoke walking, tire flipping and heavy stone lifting. There will be articles on each of these in the future but for now we are going to concentrate on the log press.

Below is a sample workout intended to increase your log press max. You will notice that it mirrors the bench press protocols of Westside Barbell:

Log Max Training Schedule

Workout 1 (Speed Day)

Warm-up all related muscle groups

Band Log Presses: 10 Triples. Log weight = 50% of 1-Rep Contest Style Max.

(Band Tension: If max is over 300 then blue band in a choker/green basket. If max is 250-300 then green band in a choker/purple basket. If max is less than 250 then purple

band in a choker/black mini or mini in a basket.)

Assistance lifts to be scheduled based on weaknesses.

Standing DB presses 3x12

Plate or keg raises 3x10

Face pulls or sled pulls with long strap

Heavy triceps (8x8 DB extensions or something similar)

Workout 2 (Max effort day)

Warm-up all related muscle groups

Max effort lift to a max single or triple (see max effort list below)

Assistance lifts to be scheduled based on weaknesses.

Standing DB Presses 3x12

Plate or keg raises 3x10

Face pulls or sled pulls with long strap

Heavy Triceps (your choice)

Max Effort Lifts (some can be assistance lifts as well)

Log Max From Floor

Reverse Band Presses

Rack Lockouts

Heavy Rack Bungee Cord Presses (overweight push-press to goal, i.e. the bungee, height.

Log, standard or thick bar. Alternate weight and bungee height goals)

Max Band Presses

Incline Log Presses

Heavy Dumbbell Presses

3" Barbell Presses

2" Barbell Presses

Push Press...variety of bars

Military Presses...variety of bars

Keg Presses

Seated presses of any variety

Dumbbell Clean and Push Press

Dumbbell or Kettlebell Snatch/Swing or Clean and Press

Go back to Workout 1 72 hours after Workout 2 and go to 55% with log weight. Keep band tension the same. Wave up to 60% and then cycle back to 50% and wave back up for 6 weeks. Re-test contest max for next cycle starting at 50%. You can continue cycling, go to circa-maximal, or go on to train a different aspect of log pressing like rep endurance. It all depends on your needs and where you are in your training cycle.

Torso work is accomplished with other events on different days but some work can be included on log training day. A good example would be to lie flat on the floor as in floor presses and have two training partners hand you a log or a keg at lockout for floor crunches. This will be heavy and it also increases your adaptation to handling and balancing the log.

If building a huge log press is not on your list of priorities it can be used to increase GPP. The log press is good for the whole body as we discussed earlier. One technique that will help to build GPP is to take a log (at a weight that you could perform 12-15 push presses) from the tires, power clean it and then snap it directly into a full press. Lower it down to the floor under control and quickly repeat the rep. Strive for ten reps on this and your whole body will be spent at the end of this drill and your heart and lungs will be screaming. You can spice up your training and include some log work into the mix as a max effort for pressing either overhead, flat or on the incline/decline. The hand position is a bit different and the stroke is shorter as in a board press but the instability of an odd load will help your benching stabilizers. The grip spacing and neutral grip will allow you to keep your elbows in tight. You can include the log in floor pressing, hammer curls, skull crushers and just about any benching type movement.

For speed work you put the log in the rack and eliminate the clean. You simply drop under it and roll it into the rack position. You can do your speed presses with or without bands. Just as in speed benching, as taught by Louie Simmons and Dave Tate, you need to move the load extremely fast. Many have gotten into the rack here and tried to muscle the log up against the bands. The risk of “kissing the log” in a non-affectionate way is high doing this. The three presses need to be accomplished in a time that does not exceed what you press for a one-rep max. The head must be snapped through so that the ears are between the elbows so that you do not develop any bad habits. The band assists the negative portion of the lifts and, although difficult, the log should be caught in the rack position, dipped and then immediately driven back up. This uses the stretch reflex and helps to build feel and stability. You can use chains but you will need a very long lead chain to get the proper chain travel. The terminology we use with the bands is taken from the rigging and hoisting industry as it pertains to lifting straps. The bottom band is set in a “choker” to the handle of a single dumbbell or to your custom rack attachment. You loop it through itself and slide the loop down until you choke the dumbbell handle. This is a long attachment. The second band is applied in a “basket”, which basically means that you take the band long ways fully through the bottom band. Holding an end in each hand you just bring them together and loop both ends around the end of the log, outside of the rack. You will want to be careful not to crush the band. This band rig should give most people perfect tension from just above the head to lockout. You will have to adjust this if you height is extreme in either direction. You can use other band configurations at different times in your training as well. This falls under the speed strength/strength speed concept.

The log press also applies to sports in several ways. First, the posterior chain receives plenty of work trying to get the log into the rack position. It is an explosive short range hip-drive lift where the force is translated to a load starting at the ground and finishing at arms length. This kind of strength is useful for many athletes including football players, hockey players and combat athletes. Also good for these types of athletes is the fact that, like Olympic lifting, the log gives you plenty of practice giving and receiving force. This is especially true in speed or rep work when you are rebounding with the stretch reflex and pressing in a rhythmic fashion. Balancing a heavy awkward load overhead builds tremendous torso stability. The log press is definitely a good addition to the combat athlete's arsenal.

This system is configured to help you increase your log max. You should always strive to increase your max but you should do so in combination with working on increasing your repping ability if you are a strongman competitor. There are many techniques used to acquire heavy rep ability that are beyond the scope of this article. Raising your absolute strength level is a good place to start though. Time the system around your next contest, depending on the events at that contest. There is a time and place for all types of training and you would be remiss to include some Olympic type assistance lifts into the mix to help with the elements of a big log press. As in all training you must address your weaknesses. You just have to use your head. The above training scheme is simply a model. The log press is a very explosive movement and those experienced in the Olympic lifts do very well, as they are accustomed to driving large weights overhead with great speed. Speed, above all else, is king. Get fast and slam a big log up overhead. As an added bonus your bench will go up too.

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