

Bench pressing safely with the proper grip

Recently I heard of another unfortunate case of a lifting injury which took place while a young athlete was performing the bench press. The injury took place when the barbell dropped out of the lifter's hands causing a neck injury that will keep the athlete out of football for the rest of the season. This young man is very lucky to be alive when you consider the amount of pressure a one inch diameter steel shaft with over one hundred pounds loaded on each end could place on a structure as delicate as the human neck.

What always infuriates me whenever I hear of these types of accidents is that they are so preventable when correct lifting procedures and techniques are followed.

As an international level powerlifting referee with over twenty years of experience I have seen thousands of lifts up close performed by some of the best bench pressers in the world.

Here is one of the most common causes of barbell drops while bench pressing.

Using a false (or thumb-less) grip is often the reason for dropping the bar during the bench press. With the thumb-less grip the bar is held with the fingers and thumb on the same side of the bar. This grip is also called the suicide grip, and for good reason one slip and the bar plummets to the chest or neck. If you're lucky the bar may hit your chest first and then bounce onto your neck or head with a little less impact and a better chance for your survival. If you are really lucky maybe your spotter is really on his toes and catches the bar after the first bounce so maybe you only will have a broken rib or two. Remember there are only two types of lifters that bench with the false grip, those who HAVE dropped the bar and those who are GOING to drop the bar! With the false grip it is only a matter of time I personally know a lifter who bench pressed with the false grip for fifty years before he dropped a bar on his chest but the point is, eventually, it happened!

Several years ago the International Powerlifting Federation (IPF) decided that the false grip was so dangerous that it was made illegal for lifters to use it during IPF competition. The rule made NO difference in size of weights lifted or the number, frequency, or severity of shoulder injuries but it did almost eliminate the problem of dropped bars during the bench press.

If you bench press with the false grip change to a grip with the thumbs all the way around the bar. If you have children who are weight training go and see for yourself that they ARE using the thumbs around grip when bench pressing it is the proper and safest technique.

Steve Howard is the owner operator of Steve Howard Fitness at 601 12th street suite 3 in Rapid City, SD. Specializing in private and small group training by appointment.

He can be reached at www.stevehowardfitness.com