

So, You Wanna Press The Beast?

September 2005 RKC I went out to be an assistant instructor and gave the first ever beast challenge a whirl. Only completed the pull-up, but knew the press and pistol were very close. I didn't think much about the challenge after that and started training for my first ever full raw PL meet to take place at the end of January 2006. After that meet I started training with a Westside template for the AAU raw worlds in June. At some point in March one of my clients asked me if I could press the beast yet; I told him I wasn't sure. So out of curiosity, I mentally committed myself to the task, picked it up for the first time since September (other than to do swings) and boom nailed the press smoothly. So what made the difference? The difference is without question more lat strength and lots more tricep strength derived from all the PL training. That was the difference for me, but this article will focus first on a few mental and physical techniques followed by several exercises within a simple program that will help you press that heavier kettlebell. It's important to distinguish that this article is focusing on a single kettlebell military press and not a double military press. The difference between the two is significant in terms of the technique – especially when the weight is heavy.

Getting started: First you need to know the heaviest bell you can press over head. Do not substitute a dumbbell for the sake of “accuracy.” In other words, if you can strict press the 70 easy but not the 88, do not press a 75 or 80 pound dumbbell and assume that is your max KB press (reasons explained later). Instead, If 70 is the most – see how many strict presses you can do in a row with 70 and work from there. Same thing with any other weight (e.g. you can press the 88 but not the 106, so see how many you can do in a row with the 88). Do this on a day when you are relatively fresh. You do not have to “taper” to test your max KB press, instead work it into one of your workouts and make sure you are adequately warmed up!

Check your general form: There is a big difference between a heavy double military press and a heavy single bell press because in a single press there is heavy weight on only one side of your body. This requires off-setting your body weight to accommodate for a smooth press. The best way to do this is to put the arm that is not pressing out to the side (parallel to the ground) and make a tight fist, make the wrist and arm as rigid as possible. This will create a nice counter balance. You are also going to shift your weight slightly away from the bell once it is cleaned and you should look up on about a 45 degree angle once you start the press. It is imperative that you begin the press as soon as you clean the weight . . . there should be no delay. The longer you let that monster sit in the rack the less likely it is to go up. The bell will also start to play mind games with you. Commit to the clean and the press in one aggressive smooth transition. If you clean and then decide to psyche up before you press you will already be defeated once you feel that bad boy in the rack. PSYCHE – CLEAN – PRESS !!! By the way this is the difference between the dumbbell and kettlebell press and the reason you shouldn't substitute. The dumbbell doesn't lie in the rack the same way a kettlebell does. Don't believe me? Try it! The kettlebell wants to crush you. The dumbbell waits more patiently for you to press it.

More form issues: Remember that this is all going to happen very quickly or it isn't likely to happen at all. So the following checklist is easy to read but not so easy to implement, especially when the weight is heavy. I say that because when things get heavy there is a fear factor that makes many people lose tension; however, others who are strong in the fight or flight response will actually increase tension. No scientific references to this – just what I have observed after a dozen years of training hundreds of clients and competing in various strength events. It is true. When the weight is heavy some will cringe and collapse and others will let the angry man come out and fight until their eyeballs pop out of their head. If you want to be a good presser, deadlifter,

whatever, you had better get to know the angry man. Having said that – here is a list of things to look for when you go for that heavy press.

- 1.) When you clean – clean aggressively. A good clean often determines if the weight goes up or not. Think of the clean as the confidence builder.
- 2.) As soon as that weight hits you counter balance yourself as described above and press immediately! Squeeze the handle look up or at the bell and keep your shoulder DOWN!
- 3.) Keeping the shoulder down is critical because you need to recruit as much lat strength as possible at the bottom. Think of pushing off the lat from the start and this is likely to get your fist to about forehead level.
- 4.) Squeeze your glutes as hard as possible and push your feet through the floor as you press.
- 5.) If someone punched you in the stomach while you were pressing they should hurt their hand. You must engage the mid-section as much as possible and push the diaphragm down.
- 6.) Learn how to power breathe TSSSSSS
- 7.) Tell your body (not your shoulder) to lift the weight.
- 8.) Don't "see if you can lift it" or "try to lift it" instead tell your body what your about to do and do it. I know this is cliché, but often the case. What people say out loud or to themselves before a max lift often predicts the outcome. What I want you to do is not just say it but mean it.

The program: This is a very simple program to follow. Just remember 6,5,4,3,2,1. There is not a lot of volume, but the weights will be heavy and you will be training upper body 4 days a week with very little legs. The volume will increase slightly every other week. You should leave each workout feeling like you have more in the tank – if not you need to take longer breaks between sets and exercises and/or decrease the weight slightly. Make sure you know your 1 rep max before you start as described above. It is possible that your max is 3 reps with the 70 lb. bell because you can't press the 88 lber. That is okay . . . only retest at the end of the 6 week cycle!!! Give yourself a 3-4 day rest at the end of the cycle before you retest. After that I suggest you take off another 2 days and then do a program that includes some serious leg training.

6 week program

5 exercises per workout

4 times a week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday)

3 reps of each exercise on each arm (unless otherwise noted)

2 sets of each exercise on each arm

1 exercise from each of the following 5 groups

All exercises are to be done with 1 kettlebell (unless otherwise noted) using 80-90% of 1 rep max for that exercise (don't make the mistake of going too light). Weeks 2, 4, and 6 you are allowed to try an extra rep or set, but not both within each group – from that point decide if you need more weight for the following week. It is understandable that the first week will be more experimentation to establish 80-90%; but use your judgment

in terms of weight and refine the next week. Take 90 seconds rest between each set and 120 seconds between each group. Record your workouts!

Before each workout it is required to do at least 10 minutes of upper body joint mobility and spend your time in between sets staying loose shaking out the muscles. If not you will likely get hurt.

Group 1 (Designed to improve pressing strength)

- Kettlebell Side presses (Monday)
- Kettlebell Floor presses (Tuesday)
- Kettlebell Push presses (Thursday)
- Kettlebell Double military presses (Friday)

Group 2 (Designed to improve tricep strength)

- 4 board bench press (Monday)
- Choose a tricep exercise e.g. band push downs, tricep extensions, etc. and do 5 sets of 12 – 15. This is the only time you will deviate from the 2 sets 3 rep pattern (Tuesday)
- 6 inch bench press rack lockout (Thursday)
- Choose a tricep exercise e.g. band push downs, tricep extensions, etc. and do 5 sets of 12 – 15. This is the only time you will deviate from the 2 sets 3 rep pattern (Friday)

Group 3 (Supplementary lifts to improve shoulder stability, core strength, and clean explosiveness)

- Kettlebell Windmills (Monday) – for safety purposes okay to go lighter.
- Kettlebell Dead hang cleans (single arm) (Tuesday)
- Kettlebell Turkish get-ups (Thursday) – for safety purposes okay to go lighter.
- Kettlebell High pulls (Friday)

Group 4 (Designed to improve lat strength for pressing out of the rack position)

- Kettlebell single arm rows (Monday)
- Kettlebell bent-over rows with 2 bells – or use barbell (Tuesday)
- Kettlebell renegade rows (Thursday)
- Weighted pull-ups (if necessary) on rings palms facing each other (Friday)

Group 5 (designed to improve the core)

- Hold the plank position with a training partner sitting on your back (15 – 20 seconds) Do 2 sets only, but do it at the end of each workout.

If your goal is to press a heavier bell, then your program must reflect that goal. This is a simple 6 week program that if followed correctly will increase your pressing power . . . guaranteed! Make sure you eat and sleep well. Also, make sure you keep me posted on progress. If you have any questions please feel free to e-mail me at this address: fitforlife4@verizon.net

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