

Negatives: If you want big numbers on the bench

ASK ROCCO
WITH
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When I was a kid (I say “kid” because I’m old enough to have kids in their 20s), I used to bench press an insane amount of weight. Everyone asked, “How the f**k can you do that?” The first thought was always, “he’s juicing, he’s gotta be booting that shit in his ass.”

Obviously they were accusing me of doing steroids. Now, before I get into my personal life, which is way longer than this column could hold for the next two years, steroids could never be part of my life, never.

When I was growing up I had this insane rage problem – it was literally insane. Think of me stressed out and then the hulk appearing out of nowhere, without the whole green thing.

I suffered from a few brain disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety and the grand daddy of them all, Intermittent Explosive Disorder, which happens to be pretty f**king rare. I didn’t know what the f**k it was back then but I knew that whatever it was that made me rage, I didn’t want to encourage it. At all.

I was hearing every week that someone else at the gym or a friend of a friend went to jail for killing their girlfriend, that someone was in a bar fight or some other violent act. I already had enough problems with keeping my shit contained – I was not about to open up a can of worms that could have me killing someone. Long story short, no steroids for me.

So how the hell was I able to bang up 455 pounds for reps (about 10 on a good day), freshly out of jail weighing 205 pounds? You guessed it ... jail food.

No, F**k Nuts ... it wasn’t the jail food.

It was a trick that I learned from an article I read from one of my idols at the time... Bill Pearl (Who later I became friends with), and Frank Zane (at his bodybuilding bootcamp).

It’s called “negative” training. It was funny, when I came back from Frank Zane’s camp and started training this way, everyone thought I was an idiot. My cousin who owned the gym, thought I’d

lost my f**king mind. He literally laughed at me and told me to shut the f**k up. At the time, he was Mr. New Jersey, and huge. I didn’t waver. I wanted to prove to everyone that they were the idiots, and eventually, they all were.

Back then, there was a severe bodybuilding mentality at North Jersey Health Club. It was a bodybuilding gym. It was built in the 1970s, the height of “Pumping Iron” and all the shit that went with that.

I had spent 12 years there and learned more than anyone could ever know. I went to jail for beating the shit out of some people I thought needed it. In 1983, I came out smarter and stronger than anyone could have ever thought. I remembered everything that Frank Zane taught me, and put it into practice. Even though I think the 1980s was the most idiotic decade of the 20th Century, I still practice the same old-school technique to pack pounds on the bench, leg press and pull up: negatives.

Now, before all you hypervigilant freaks start going crazy with “negative” training, you need to realize how f**king hard this is. Before I went to jail, I was benching 315 pounds. That’s a 45 pound bar and three 45 pound plates on each side for the mathematical adverse.

When I got out of jail, I was benching 375 pounds. Not bad for a kid who weighed 205 pounds, soaking wet.

So how the f**k did I get to benching 455 pounds for reps? Hold it, grasshopper ... I’m the one telling the story ... OK? Relax.

Everyone was trying to add weight to every set when they were bench pressing and failed miserably. Your body and muscles are made to react to stress. Reacting to stress is what our bodies do very well, especially our muscular system. If you stress your muscular system it will always overcome and adapt. So I listened to Frank Zane and Bill Pearl, reversing the bodybuilding mentality on every other chest day and only doing negatives.

The way I did it was to add 15

percent to my 12 rep max. What does that mean? I knew how much I could bench for 12 reps – Let’s say 375 pounds – which was true. I would take 431.25 pounds, put it on the bar and make sure my training partner could handle pulling that weight. He could. I would take it off the rack and lower it to my chest in 10 seconds. My training partner would count it out. He would help me lift it up, I would lower it again for 10 seconds, and again, until I was exhausted. And then I would have to just one f**king more.

It was usually 12-15 reps.

All of this was training in an eccentric way – no, you are not eccentric if you train this way. You are training your muscles using eccentric contractions. If you haven’t noticed, your muscles can handle much more weight when lowering than raising.

But the secret is getting your muscles to adapt to handling the weight. Once they do, it will be familiar and you will be able to add insane weight to your bench press.

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