

# Candito Advanced Bench Program

by Jonnie Candito

## Goal And Context Of Program

This program is built primarily for an advanced lifter looking to set aside a period of time to focus on overloading the bench press with high frequency, volume, and specificity. Also this is executed while varying the approach from normal training outside of this specialized program as well as within the cycle (dramatic difference between first 3 weeks vs the rest). This is intentional because after a certain point, even with smart training, you tend to run into a wall especially as a natural lifter. This is the place I was at when I went a full year only increasing my bench press literally by about 0 pounds along with having minor recurring shoulder pain. I say about because technically it increased by 5.5 pounds, but if you look up "2013 National Powerlifting Meet" on my channel and compare it to "IPF Raw World Championship Meet" from 2014 you will see that realistically my max was likely unchanged if attempt selection was the same.

Direct links to referenced videos here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oH5Q6JxoADU> vs <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaZPkHlsbig>

After being honest with myself that I have slammed into a wall, despite initially making consistent progress on my bench for years, I started to piece together what would eventually become this program. I scrapped the whole "bench press more to bench press more" oversimplified approach that I used to avoid taking accessories seriously. Also the standard 2-3x a week frequency year round approach was not doing me any wonders as the same basic input was causing the same output. Thirdly, I noticed I was consistently peaking too soon on the bench press. Volume would gradually drop, intensity would rise, but supercompensation just wasn't evident on meet day.

So all of this brings me to what I am presenting in the following pages and ultimately in the Excel document. I have managed to turn around my bench press progress significantly now to say the least. I hit a 350 pound bench press in the gym followed by a 347 pound bench press in competition which ended up being the lift I improved on the most out of all 3 during 2015, judging strictly by meet PRs. I gained about 30 pounds on my bench press without gaining a single pound of bodyweight. Then afterwards when I ran the program a 2nd time while dropping a weight class, I was able to bench press 2 times my bodyweight which is an accomplishment I honestly did not know if I'd ever be able to do.

My bench press is still my worst lift out of the big 3, I am certainly not the most genetically gifted in this aspect of powerlifting. Also not many realize that I have actually been bench pressing much longer than any other lift, so progress in it naturally should be the most difficult. However with this program I have finally figured out both how to increase my bench

beyond what was seeming to be a limit for me along with setting it up to be adaptable in a long term approach.

## Phases

**First 3 weeks** - Maximum Fatigue Phase. 5x a week, goal is fatigue + accumulating high weekly volume with emphasis on accessories. Skill in bench press developed very well too but bar speed kept fast as effort on competition lift is low. Goal is simply working so hard that your body has no choice but to react to the collective stimulus. On week 3 a range is given it is intentional to allow for autoregulation based on the day. I recommend hitting the max end of that range at least once during the week. Also, the reason behind building up to 90% by week 3 is to essentially have a mini-peak within the cycle when fatigued. It will help you get a good judgement on how realistic your goal max is which is useful since most of the cycle is so deep into being sub-maximal.

**Weeks 4** - High Volume W/ Specificity And Full Recovery Phase. 2x a week, goal is as much volume per session on the bench itself while being able to keep intensity gradually climbing. Expect great deal of soreness but near full recovery in between sessions.

**Week 5** - High Intensity Peak Set Phase. Goal is to hit some rep PRs but intentionally keeping it to a conservative 3 rep peak set followed by the next workout being a true 5 rep max at the end with backoff sets to keep volume up. The philosophy on this program is valuing volume with an extremely short and minor taper off on the bench press compared to what I recommend on the squat/deadlift.

**Week 6** - Max Out Phase.

## Progression Of Primary Accessories

**Loading** - As mentioned in the "General Guidelines To Program" sheet on the excel document, the loading is intentionally unlisted on the 2 main accessories. If you are using the RPE scale, I'd say these sets should be around an RPE 9. Another suggestion is to use weights you don't normally gravitate towards so that you can both make small steps of progress and avoid getting lost in constantly trying to prove something to yourself on an accessory. I cannot emphasize enough that obsession with loading on accessories is unnecessary. Make it heavy enough to get a noticeable stimulus, light enough that you aren't getting so amped up for a set of incline press that you're looking like Pete Rubish going for an 800 pound deadlift in front of his washing machine.

**Rep Schemes** - The rep ranges were determined based on 2 things:

1. Carryover
2. Variation

1. By carryover I am referring to being able to lift heavy enough to substantially impact your bench press. A big lesson I have learned lately is that only relying on accessories for isolation work in the 8-12 rep range can only go so far. Don't get me wrong that is the best way to go until you have a need for more variation. The simplest route should take precedence. But when just bench pressing more no longer makes you actually bench press more, then that's when the heavy accessories become more important. That's why you see most the sets in this program on the primary accessories initially are in the 3-6 rep range. I personally find that if I just progress on the bench press from very light to heavy then I run into the same walls and reset points. But if I try to keep it heavy throughout the training cycle then my shoulders have issues. So by starting with heavy accessories it is simply another tool of progression to work with while keeping the actual bench press sets highly specific in terms of rep range and low effort. Keep in mind triples on close grip bench are actually more specific to a 1 rep max than going super light high volume sets with just the competition bench press.

2. The lifts listed are only barbell lifts due to this point of variation. Dumbbells and machine work can be superior for activation in many cases, but simply having the versatility of being able to train heavy triples all the way up to a 20 rep max in week 4 on the same lift gives the barbell a big advantage here. The rep ranges on the primary accessories also complement the isolation work. You get strictly low reps in the competition movement, mid range on the 2 accessories, then very high reps on the isolations. Simple, but it can make a huge difference if you're used to only pairing the competition lift with isolations in the traditional 8-12 rep range, as I said I was when I was spinning my wheels. Another point to variation is that the 2 slots are intentionally pairing one horizontal press with one vertical press (counting incline as vertical). I have found this is an easy way to reduce the shoulder issues I've had with pressing in the exact same plane of motion.

You may notice that you are never using the same exact rep scheme twice on the same primary accessory in this program. That is actually something I found out myself when going through test cycles of it. Since the goal of the first 3 weeks is to go so hard in terms of overall fatigue but aren't truly specializing in the accessory lifts, you may not actually progress if you compare one week to the next on that particular movement. That's fine. I found the best way to solve this is to just avoid repeating the same schemes to allow yourself to focus on the real purpose of using these movements as tools. That's why I don't really have an answer for people when they ask if my overhead press has increased after I chose it as an accessory after failing to press 185 pounds right before the cycle. The truth is I still haven't hit 185 pounds nor do I care. All that mattered was attacking the weakness itself with the overhead press and letting the positive effects show itself later on down the road when it counts, when maxing on the bench press.

**Shift To Pin Pressing** - This is both to keep up avoidance of doing the same rep scheme on the same exercise twice and to create the mini-peak briefly alluded to in the abridged phases summary. I considered cycling through a wider rep range while sticking strictly with the two accessories to avoid using the same rep range twice, but carryover would be lacking.

Remember we want to keep the rep range low to mid-range for the most part. So the pin press not only allows for that but also of course increases specificity when it comes to transference to the bench press. This also cushions the transition from mostly very light bench press sets to then the 3 single then at the start of week 3. After that first week 3 workout, the rep range goes back up as the 2 primary accessories return in order to simply back off a bit from the heavy lifting since the working sets on the bench press start to be somewhat of a notable challenge beyond just sport practice. The second reason is to bridge the gap before the 15-20 rep peak sets on week 4.

### Isolation Accessory Setup

This is far simpler than the primary accessories section. Loading is largely irrelevant. Variety is even more important as I recommend choosing different exercises as often as you can to target the lagging muscle group(s) in your bench press. If you do have an issue of getting too sore in your triceps for example from the bench press + primary accessories then you should never force the issue. That means you can train so light it is basically active recovery, or if needed just move down the list of muscle groups less directly involved but still somehow relevant to pressing. For example you could focus on lateral delts, rear delts or upper back work.

### Why Use a Goal Max?

All of my advanced programs will have a goal max integrated as well as using an initial training max. The main reason is that increased precision is needed the advanced a lifter becomes. Back in the good ole days of being an intermediate, I remember squatting 455 pounds for 3 sets of 6 reps on the squat, then going into a meet and hitting a lifetime PR of around 535 pounds. No peaking whatsoever since it was a local meet. Nowadays as an advanced lifter these moments just don't happen. You no longer can run a cycle of 5/3/1 using a super low training max and expect on meet day to perform with world level IPF lifters.

Also at the more advanced level bodyweight starts to become more of a strategic tool. No longer is the best advice to "eat big to lift big" with no further questions asked. Now the best course of action, if you are a competitive lifter, is to find the weight class you place the highest in. This isn't only applicable when dropping a weight class like I did my most recent cycle on the program, but even when staying in the same division some weight fluctuation should occur (at the very least a minor water cut is an advantage you can't ignore).

With this being said, I don't expect most to run this program going into a meet. I will go more in depth on that point in the section regarding why this program is 6 weeks long specifically. But regardless even if bodyweight is held constant, the goal max is more useful for advanced lifters because expected progress starts to vary more significantly, proportionally speaking, within this group.

Let's say you have two advanced lifters, Lifter A and Lifter B. Lifter A gains 5 pounds on their bench press in 6 months, Lifter B gains 15 pounds on their press in 8 months. Clearly neither are intermediate lifters as their progress couldn't even be properly measured monthly since it is less than 5 pounds, and of course we all know it wouldn't be linear each month anyways. So to most on the outside looking in these guys are in the same situation of slow progress. However Lifter B is progressing at a 300% faster rate than Lifter A! That is massive. When it comes to novice/intermediate lifters, we generally program assuming a similar rate of progress across all lifters fitting that classification and just try to keep it going as long as we can. With advanced programming we are dealing with a far more varied group which requires more input. This is also why there are more ranges for loading given throughout and an open ended 5 rep max with no loading suggested at the end.

Simply put this style of programming is a way to compromise between training max only percentage based programming and autoregulated programs. I find at the advanced stage the former does become too inaccurate later in the training cycle, but the latter gives me too much room to overthink the process.

### What Is An "Advanced Lifter"?

This question is similar to what constitutes an elite powerlifter in that there is no universally agreed upon answer, but it sounds official so we all just roll with it. So the real question is what is my personal definition of an advanced lifter? That entirely based on one aspect and one aspect alone. Rate of progress.

It is entirely irrelevant if you bench press 225 pounds or 500 pounds for a 1 rep max. If you are unable to make consistent, testable (ie not under the minimum increments in your gym) progress each month then you are advanced by my definition. Percentages already handle accommodating different strength levels easily. Deciding duration of the training cycle and approach to projected strength increase is the tricky part requiring more division based on advancement. There are other perfectly valid definitions that shorten the time table to weekly progress for an intermediate and trackable progress straight from the previous workout to the next for novice. But since the gap between novice vs intermediate is already so short in comparison to intermediate vs advanced with my approach, I don't like to use a version which splits hairs even more between those groups while expanding the already ambiguous advanced group.

To summarize:

Novice = Progress weekly.

Intermediate = Progress monthly.

Advanced = Everything else.

### Why Is The Program 6 Weeks?

I promise that I'm not just making another 6 week program because that is some appealing number to market. For my advanced programs the programs will be the following length:

Bench Program = 6 Weeks

Deadlift Program = 8 Weeks

Squat Program = 8 Weeks

All 3 Lift Program = 10 Weeks

For my advanced programs, I am focusing on one lift in a given training cycle. Therefore the length is determined by significance. The bench press makes up the smallest percentage of a lifter's powerlifting total and the time justified focusing specifically on it should reflect this fact. Of course this is only relevant if you are going with my style of specializing one lift at a time followed by then all 3 at once for a peak before competition. By the time all 3 programs are done I will have a separate yearly planning and beyond type of PDF to put all of my programs into one frame of reference. Outside of that I will have intentionally low frequency offseason programs with the minimal volume possible to just aim to maintain on the other 2 lifts until going back to focusing on each.

I will add that this is a general idea and not to be strictly enforced. For example if I'm running the 8 week squat specialized program, I will likely start it being on the offseason programs for both bench and deadlift. But after about 4 weeks or so I may start a bench cycle as the squat program shifts to lower frequency. So you can apply the same logic to the bench program by going 3 weeks just focusing on the bench press itself but then perhaps starting a new training cycle for the other 2 lifts as you begin pressing just 2 times a week.

Another reason for the bench cycle being the shortest is that I find the bench press requires the least amount of time to peak in a traditional sense. I mentioned at the start of this PDF that one of my biggest issues was becoming undertraining by the time I'd max out. So what I found works by far the best for myself is just cutting out nearly all of that low volume, high intensity, full rest phase and jumping straight from high volume, work up to 5 rep max, straight into maxing out the following week. I have not found this to be the case with the squat or the deadlift. It makes perfect sense too, beyond experience, since the squat requires more skill due to more technical factors (bar path, nuances of knee/hip positioning, etc.) and the deadlift makes volume less tolerable without burning out due to nervous system dealing with a far greater load. So squat needs more specificity with fully rested low rep work while the deadlift you just need more of a break before maxing while the bench press doesn't need to be trained the same way.

### Can I Use This With The Candito 6 Week Strength Program?

I am sure this will be a common question since the "Candito 6 Week Strength Program" is by far my most popular program. It is of course made for intermediate lifters. Also we

established earlier that this bench program is made with the idea that the lifter will allow himself to focus on each lift at a time, at least during the high frequency stage. As long as you understand those two points, you can try out whatever you want. If it works well for you then by all means go for it.

### How Often Can This Program Be Repeated?

I strongly recommend that you always avoid running this program twice in a row. A solid general rule is a minimum of a 4 week break in between. I included a sample 1x a week offseason workout that I use for this time as a separate sheet in the excel document. Also I strongly recommend choosing at least 1 different primary accessory exercise when restarting a new cycle. Overuse injuries tend to occur when we get greedy. Beyond that I am also a big believer in intentionally reducing volume for periods of time to allow for the stimulus to have a greater effect when a new cycle begins.

### Final Words

This type of program relies on consistency and staying patient. Also likely will result in being sore and not feeling too great for the first 3 weeks. So make sure to both be motivated while ensuring you are taking every step you need in order to stay healthy. If you don't know the difference between soreness and injury then this program isn't made for you.

If you do approach this program with an open mind then I am confident great progress can be made even if you've been stuck at a certain plateau for far too long like I was. You don't need to be a super elite level lifter to run this as the term "advanced" isn't nearly as prestigious as many perceive, when looking strictly at rate of progress. Those who have been through the poverty bench struggle know how gratifying it is to finally break through it.

Last thing I want to say is as with all of my programs, this will remain entirely free. I do put a lot of thought and effort into each one and have bills like anyone else. So if you do have success on this bench program and have the money to pitch in then I'd appreciate any donation on the download page of my site - <http://www.canditotraininghq.com/free-strength-programs/>. If not, it's all good as each person's support of my channel in addition to simply making a tangible impact are both immeasurably valuable to me. Good luck!