

Is this the best “raw” double bodyweight bench press ever?

The title of this article probably has many readers thinking they are going to see some massive powerlifter or rugby league player smashing up a huge weight. You know the types of videos, regularly posted on YouTube. I love watching them and post some myself. But this is way more inspirational. This is the greatest lift I have seen by a non-competitive lifter. Please read the story before hitting the link to the video.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8W_G0vFkBs

So who is the lifter and what makes it so special. The lifter is Dean Clifford, a friend of mine and a sufferer of Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB). What the hell is EB? EB is an inherited connective tissue disease caused by a mutation in the keratin or collagen gene. In people born with EB, the two skin layers lack the protein anchors that hold them together, and any action that creates friction between the layers (like rubbing or pressure) will create blisters and painful sores. As a result, the skin is extremely fragile and minor friction, such as clothing or bumping things, can separate the layers of the skin and form blister and sores. Children born with EB have traditionally been called "Cotton Wool Babies" because they have to be wrapped in layers of cotton to prevent friction sores.

This is an excerpt from Deans website (<http://www.deanclifford.com.au>) that explains a little more ~

*“In 1979 I was born in the small country town of Kingaroy in South East Queensland. After almost 18 months I was finally diagnosed as having the very rare genetic skin condition called Epidermolysis Bullosa (more commonly referred to as E.B or Cotton Wool Kids) and given a life expectancy of just 2 and a half to 5 years. The medical experts said I would never be well enough to attend school or simply have any kind of quality of life at all. However what the medical experts did not count on was even at a young age my determination and desire to live my life according to my life long motto to **“Never Admit Defeat”**. I lived my entire childhood in and out of hospital undergoing countless operations, nearly all of which were very experimental due to the simple fact that up until that point almost everyone with a severe form of E.B unfortunately had passed away. There were only a handful of us worldwide that had managed to survive with E.B as severe as what I had as a child. I was one of the first in the world to trial skin grafts on my face and some of the worst affected areas of my body. The hardest part was not so much the operations and all the anaesthetics and everything, it was the mental struggle. I was wrapped and bandaged like a living Mummy. From head to waist completely covered*

in bandages for 4 to 6 weeks at a time.”



Figures 1 & 2. Dean Clifford and Dan Baker celebrate after the Brisbane Broncos 2006 Grand Final victory. This is before Dean started to lift weights. When you view the 2011 bench press video note the massive difference in his upper body size.

So Dean has struggled through adversity his whole life and always come out on top. A few years ago, Dean started to lift weights, mainly the bench press, to improve his health and quality of life and I am sure, it was also another challenge. You have to remember that Dean is great friends with former Brisbane Bronco and now All Black Brad Thorn (he is the spotter in the video), so between Thorny's and my influence, Dean was always going to smash up big weights. Just how big, we didn't know. I think he probably also wanted to outlift Thorny and me on a bodyweight ratio, for bragging rights etc. Another challenge for Dean.

You have to consider that Dean is very limited in his training choices. He cannot perform many upper back, pulling exercises because gripping the bar, dumbbell or handles would cause much of his skin on his fingers to blister or flake off. He can barely grip, so those important exercises for building upper back strength – the true basis for a big bench press – cannot be performed. I gave him some #2 bands as he could anchor one end behind his flexed wrist and perform some pulling/rowing exercises. But basically it is bench press 3/wk (heavy/light/medium, a tried and true formula from the 1970's and 80's). And he trains at home, so getting a competent spotter when you are lifting heavy, is another challenge (you can't get your mum to spot 120 kg!)

So now Dean has finally achieved the dream of most male strength trainers – a double bodyweight bench press of 135 kg at less than 67 kg bodyweight. That is a massive lift. Ray Hope, one of my former charges, who is the current Australian

Powerlifting 67.5 kg champion, would struggle to bench press 135 kg raw (raw means without a special bench press shirt that helps a powerlifter to bench press more weight). So it is a big lift. Do you know anyone who can bench press 200% bodyweight, raw and drug-free? Do they also have to wrap the skin on their hands to stop the bar blistering them or wrap a crepe bandage around their elbows so that when the triceps and lats temporarily brace against each other during the lift, they don't flake layers of skin off from each other?

So if you need inspiration or if someone you train with or coach is complaining that something hurts, or they don't have the best equipment or they proffer some other minor excuse going on in their life, please do two things ~ show them Deans bench press video and then tell them to **“HARDEN THE FUCK UP”**.



Figure 3. Dean with former Brisbane Bronco rugby league and current New Zealand rugby union All Black, Brad Thorn, who is Deans favoured spotter.