

Advanced Upper Body Training: Stage 4

by Ian King | Fri, Aug 03, 2001

King, I., 2001, Advanced upper body training: Stage 4, t-mag.com, Fri 3 Aug 2001

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Bring on the Pain Advanced Upper Body Training, Stage 4 by Ian King It's crunch time as we enter the fourth and final stage of Ian's second generation upper body program. If you're new to this program, you'll need to head back to issue #155 and read the introduction article . If you've been following along from the beginning, then it's time to hunker down and bring the pain! It's now time f...

Bring on the Pain Advanced Upper Body Training, Stage 4 by Ian King

It's crunch time as we enter the fourth and final stage of Ian's second generation upper body program. If you're new to this program, you'll need to head back to issue #155 and read the **introduction article**. If you've been following along from the beginning, then it's time to hunker down and bring the pain!

It's now time for the final stage! If you've skipped ahead and peaked at the workouts, then you may be thinking that something's been accidentally left out. Surely there's been a mistake, you think, because there's no way he'd have us do only one exercise per workout! No, there's no mistake. In stage four you'll only do one exercise a day! Just think, you can put all your effort into just one exercise!

Ever wanted to get good at doing the basic movements? Well, now's your chance because with my relatively low volume approach, using only one exercise allows a fairly high number of sets. That means you get the chance to rehearse the skill component of the lift. If you're following my guidelines, you'll appreciate the need and benefit of developing the skill in the early stages and getting strong within that skill or movement pattern as the program progresses.

Ever wonder how powerlifters get that "thick" look? Two things contribute to this: 1) regular exposure to high load and 2) using a high volume of sets on less exercises. This program allows you to do both. You say you don't want to be a powerlifter? Irrespective of your end goals, your physique will benefit from training like one from time to time!

What about muscle balance? Well, provided we addressed this earlier in the program, we can throw caution to the wind and focus on a more narrow approach for this stage. Of course, when you start your next program, you'll go back and address the potential imbalances that this stage may have produced by again prioritizing the weaker, neglected muscle groups.

There's a skill and strategy to succeeding with low rep/high load sets. In brief, if you enter the set with a low level of arousal, you'll lift little and get little benefit. In low rep/high load sets, the window of opportunity is very brief and you need to take a whole new perspective into the workout to optimize the outcome. You'll benefit from using focus and arousal methods to optimize your load capacity. These include:

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- 1) Visualization
- 2) Imagery
- 3) Body temperature
- 4) Rest period length and content
- 5) Refocusing after the rest period

If you're unfamiliar with these keys to success in neural training, read my article [here](#) for details.

Because I focus more than some on skill execution, a common knee-jerk reaction (either by the poorly motivated or the misinformed) is that you can only use light weights with my methods. Let me make it very clear—having a focus on technique does not equate to lifting light all the time. Provided the skill is mastered, load potential is unlimited. But I sense that this is only appreciated by those who've actually competed in strength events.

The reality is, as one gets closer to one's maximum at any given stage of the training career, some technical breakdown may occur. You don't drop the weights in horror. You finish the set, decide whether the technical deviation wasn't so bad that further reps or sets can't be done, and commit that in the next general preparatory phase and subsequent buildups you take your technical limits of work capacity even higher. Again, this may be something only those with greater discipline and appreciation of the long term, bigger picture can relate to.

Now a little bit more about stage four. Again, this upper body program is a two-day a week workout as part of a combined upper/lower body four day a week standard split routine. The upper body dominates over the lower body in stage three and four if you use linear periodization, and in stage two and four if you use an alternating approach. In stage four in the upper body, pushing (horizontal and vertical) dominates over pulling. This is because the first exercise on the first workout of the week is bench press, as it was in stage three.

If you're following the linear periodization plan, you'll be going lower in reps and doing less exercises in this stage compared to stage three. If you're going to work the alternating plan, you'll be using this program after stage two.

I also want to make sure you understand the loading protocol that dominates this phase. You'll be using a form of step or wave loading, depending on the level of advancement at which you're working. Step loading involves increased load in subsequent work sets, whereas wave loading sees the load alternate up and down as the sets progress. All are then followed by what I call a "back off" set.

The critical key to load selection in wave loading is to avoid total fatigue from any of the early sets. If you don't respect this you may negate the potential neural "disinhibition" that step and wave loading offer! To assist you, I've provided some sample loading patterns for each of the three protocols later in this article.

Note that the days below are called "A" and "C" days. They are simply the first and second upper body workouts of the week in this stage. "B" and "D" days are intended for the lower body, subject to your individual modification.

Enough talk! Let's do it!

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UPPER BODY

Stage 4 — Weeks 10-12 (longer if you choose)

A Day (first upper body day of the week)

Warm up: 10 minutes of light aerobics, compulsory 20 to 30 minutes of stretching.

Choose one of the following three options for A day. (I'll explain the exercises in detail below.)

A - Hypertrophy/Lower Training Age Option

Bench Press (MG/LB/FD/Arch)

Warm-up: 10/8/6

Sets: 4 x 4, 1 x 8-10, 1 x 15-20 (step load on work sets)

Speed: 211

Rest: 4 minutes

A - Hypertrophy-neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

Bench Press (MG/LB/FD/Arch)

Warm-up: 10/8/5, 1 x 3 optional

Sets: 4 x 3, 1 x 8-10, 1 x 10-15 (wave load on work sets)

Speed: 211

Rest: 4-5 minutes

A - Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Bench Press (MG/LB/FD/Arch)

Warm-up: 10/6/4, 1 x 2 optional

Sets: 5 x 2, 1 x 5-8, 1 x 8-12 (wave load on work sets)

Speed: 211

Rest: 5-6 minutes

Here's a description of the exercises involved in A day:

Bench press: (medium grip, low bar, feet down, medium arch) Take a medium grip on the bar. For most, this will be with the little fingers inside the lines on an Olympic bar. You'll lower the bar down to the lower portion of the chest. This is a strong position, allowing a greater arc in the bar movement and greater lat involvement. Your feet are to be on the ground.

I want you to arch as much as you can. If you want to express your fears about the "danger of arching" I can only imagine you believe full range bench pressing is also evil and that you're at the wrong website! Now for those who simply want to do it, there are many ways to get into an arch, but the outcome is the same. The hips and head are in contact with the bench,

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but as close to each other as you can contort them to be. Your feet are flat on the ground, slightly turned out, and your knees are at an acute degree of flexion.

Take some tension and load through your legs and buttocks. Remember, the greater the arch, potentially the heavier the loads you can lift, so get it organized! You may want to do some passive hyperextensions prone on the ground prior to the bench to warm up this position. And after each set I like to do some cradle positions on the bench before getting up to reverse the hyper-extended position.

If you want a visual display and discussion on arching in the bench, or benching in general, you can find it in my *How To Teach Strength Training Exercises* (for professionals) or *Get Buffed!* video series or find an experienced powerlifter to give you some tips. I also encourage you to familiarize yourself with the benching tips I shared with you in **part three** of this program series.

C Day (second upper-body day of the week)

Warm up: 10 minutes of light aerobics, compulsory 20 to 30 minutes of stretching.

Choose one of the following three options for C day. (I'll explain the exercises in detail below.)

C - Hypertrophy/Lower Training Age Option

Chin Up (neutral/medium grip)

Warm-up: 10/8/6

Sets: 4 x 4, 1 x 8-10, 1 x 15-20 (step load on work sets)

Speed: 211

Rest: 4 minutes

C - Hypertrophy-neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

Chin Up (neutral/medium grip)

Warm-up: 10/8/5, 1 x 3 optional

Sets: 4 x 3, 1 x 8-10, 1 x 10-15 (wave load on work sets)

Speed: 211

Rest: 4-5 minutes

C - Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Chin Up (neutral/medium grip)

Warm-up: 10/6/4, 1 x 2 optional

Sets: 5 x 2, 1 x 5-8, 1 x 8-12 (wave load on work sets)

Speed: 211

Rest: 4-5 minutes

Here's a description of the exercises involved in C day:

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Chin up: (neutral/medium grip i.e. palms facing towards each other, shoulder width grip)
Take a shoulder width grip with palms facing towards each other. If your gym doesn't have this option, don't panic. Just use whatever you find to be your strongest grip position.

Allow the feet to come off the ground slowly, without inducing any body sway. Cross the feet at the ankles and tuck them up behind you. Pull straight up and finish the pull with the chin over the handgrip level. Don't do another rep if this pulling range isn't met!

Avoid swaying in the chin-up using the techniques I recommended in **stage three**. This sway can be made worse by the external load or the way you're attaching it to your body, and there will be *a lot* of external load sets in this program! I like the old "rope and belt" method to increase loading, and I clamp the load (usually a weight plate) between my upper thighs. This keeps the load still and central. A dipping belt will work too.

As I noted in stage three, if you can't get the reps in the final back-off set (or both of the back-off sets) at bodyweight, use the lat pulldown instead. Or you can use the lat pulldown in a superset to compliment the reps if you don't hit the target on the chin bar.

General Notes:

- This program is based on standard setting (as opposed to the alternate setting we used in stage three). Do a set, take the long rest period indicated, and then do the next set. (Note: take shorter rest periods on the warm-up sets.) Other than doing the exercises required, there isn't much else to do other than check out the scenery. Just make sure you don't lose too much blood from the working muscles! Or should I say, remember which muscle you came to the gym to work!
- One thing that usually happens when you take up an exercise station for 40 minutes or so (five sets of five minute rests plus work set time) is that you'll get people either wanting to take over that piece of equipment or people asking, "Have you finished yet?" You could respond, "No, I just loaded the bar up to 300 kgs as an exercise in art, you fuckwit!" but some might think you rude.

The problem is, I don't recommend you sit on or sit too close to the work stations, which makes it harder for the conscious and subconscious mind to increase arousal levels when you come into the vicinity of the bench or bar for the set. So, how do you guard and keep your work station? Simple. Place a towel or similar on the bench, kind of a gym culture sign equivalent to a dog pissing on the ground to mark his territory! Even if you do this you'll want to sit a few meters from the work station where you can see it so you can discourage others from stripping the bar and generally pissing you off.

Off course, you should be happy to work in with someone, provided they have the bar loaded back up to where you had it, honor your rest periods, don't alter the height of the bench, leave the bar asymmetrically on the racks, don't leave their germ infested towel on the bench, or ask you to spot them. Sure, we learned to share when we were kids....

- Spotters? Definitely! A trained, competent spotter is required. If you have any doubts about them, have them work with you in your last warm-up set as a dress rehearsal. Remember, my definition of a spotter is someone to be there so you don't have to lose focus wondering what

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might happen *if* you can't finish the rep. Don't pick weights *knowing* you have a spotter. In other words, don't select and use loads with the intent of giving your spotter an upright row workout!

And make sure they understand what speed to lift the bar should you fail in the concentric phase. My preference is for the bar to be lifted at the same speed as the average concentric speed for that set. Any slower and you'll be inducing too much fatigue.

- Load guidelines — See below for generalized guidelines on what type of jumps may be involved in the step and wave loading:

Hypertrophy/Lower Training Age Option

Sample loading pattern in week one for the 4 x 4 step-load method:

Warm-up sets

1 x 20 kgs @ 10 reps (about 45 pounds)
1 x 40 kgs @ 8 reps (about 90 pounds)
1 x 60 kgs @ 6 reps (about 130 pounds)

Work sets

1 x 80 kgs @ 4 reps (about 175 pounds)
1 x 82.5 kgs @ 4 reps (about 180 pounds)
1 x 85 kgs @ 4 reps (about 187 pounds)
1 x 87.5 kgs @ 4 reps (about 193 pounds)
1 x 60 kgs @ 8-10 reps (about 130 pounds)
1 x 40 kgs @ 15-20 reps (about 90 pounds)

As for weekly progressions, you may find they go something like this in the ideal world.

Week 1

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)
Warm-up x 8 @ 40 kgs (about 90 pounds)
Warm-up x 6 @ 60 kgs (about 130 pounds)
Work set x 4 @ 80 kgs (about 175 pounds)
Work set x 4 @ 82.5 kgs (about 180 pounds)
Work set x 4 @ 85 kgs (about 187 pounds)
Work set x 4 @ 87.5 kgs (about 192 pounds)
Work set x 8-10 @ 60 kgs (about 130 pounds)
Work set x 15-20 @ 40 kgs (about 90 pounds)

Week 2

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)
Warm-up x 8 @ 42.5 kgs (about 95 pounds)
Warm-up x 6 @ 62.5 kgs (about 140 pounds)
Work set x 4 @ 82.5 kgs (about 180 pounds)
Work set x 4 @ 85 kgs (about 187 pounds)
Work set x 4 @ 87.5 kgs (about 192 pounds)
Work set x 4 @ 90 kgs (about 200 pounds)

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Work set x 8-10 @ 60 or 62.5 kgs (about 130 or 140 pounds)

Work set x 15-20 @ 40 or 42.5 kgs (about 90 or 95 pounds)

Week 3

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)

Warm-up x 8 @ 45 kgs (about 100 pounds)

Warm-up x 6 @ 65 (about 145 pounds)

Work set x 4 @ 85 (about 187 pounds)

Work set x 4 @ 87.5 (about 192 pounds)

Work set x 4 @ 90 (about 200 pounds)

Work set x 4 @ 92.5 (about 205 pounds)

Work set x 8-10 @ 60 or 62.5 or 45 kgs (about 130, 140, 100 pounds respectively)

Work set x 15-20 @ 40 or 42.5 or 45 kgs (about 90, 95, 100 pounds respectively)

A - Hypertrophy-neural/Intermediate Training Age Option

Sample loading pattern in week one for the 4 x 3 wave load method:

Warm-up sets

1 x 20 kgs @ 10 reps (about 45 pounds)

1 x 40 kgs @ 8 reps (about 90 pounds)

1 x 60 kgs @ 5 reps (about 130 pounds)

1 x 80 kgs @ 3 reps (optional) (about 175 pounds)

Work sets

1 x 100 kgs @ 3 reps (about 220 pounds)

1 x 105.0 kgs @ 3 reps (about 230 pounds)

1 x 102.5 kgs @ 3 reps (about 225 pounds)

1 x 107.5 kgs @ 3 reps (about 235 pounds)

1 x 80 kgs @ 8-10 reps (about 175 pounds)

1 x 60 kgs @ 10-15 reps (about 130 pounds)

As for weekly progressions, you may find they go something like this:

Week 1

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)

Warm-up x 8 @ 40 kgs (about 90 pounds)

Warm-up x 5 @ 60 kgs (about 130 pounds)

Warm-up x 3 @ 80 kgs (about 175 pounds)

Work set x 3 @ 100 kgs (about 220 pounds)

Work set x 3 @ 105 kgs (about 230 pounds)

Work set x 3 @ 102.5 kgs (about 225 pounds)

Work set x 3 @ 107.6 kgs (about 235 pounds)

Work set x 8-10 @ 80 kgs (about 175 pounds)

Work set x 10-15 @ 60 kgs (about 130 pounds)

Week 2

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)

Warm-up x 8 @ 42.5 kgs (about 95 pounds)

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Warm-up x 5 @ 62.5 kgs (about 140 pounds)
Warm-up x 3 @ 82.5 kgs (about 180 pounds)
Work set x 3 @ 102.5 kgs (about 225 pounds)
Work set x 3 @ 107.5 kgs (about 235 pounds)
Work set x 3 @ 102.5 kgs (about 225 pounds)
Work set x 3 @ 110 kgs (about 240 pounds)
Work set x 8-10 @ 80 or 82.5 kgs (about 175 or 180 pounds)
Work set x 10-15 @ 60 or 62.5 kgs (about 130 or 135 pounds)

Week 3

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)
Warm-up x 8 @ 45 kgs (about 100 pounds)
Warm-up x 5 @ 65 kgs (about 145 pounds)
Warm-up x 3 @ 85 kgs (about 187 pounds)
Work set x 3 @ 105 kgs (about 230 pounds)
Work set x 3 @ 110 kgs (about 240 pounds)
Work set x 3 @ 107.5 kgs (about 235 pounds)
Work set x 3 @ 112.5 kgs (about 248 pounds)
Work set x 8-10 @ 80 or 82.5 or 85 kgs (about 175, 180, 190 pounds respectively)
Work set x 10-15 @ 60 or 62.5 or 65 kgs (about 130, 140, 145 pounds respectively)

A - Neural/Advanced Training Age Option

Sample loading pattern in week one for the 5 x 2 wave load method:

Warm-up sets

1 x 20 kgs @ 10 reps (about 45 pounds)
1 x 50 kgs @ 6 reps (about 110 pounds)
1 x 80 kgs @ 4 reps (about 175 pounds)
1 x 100 kgs @ 2 reps (optional) (about 220 pounds)

Work sets

1 x 120 kgs @ 2 reps (about 265 pounds)
1 x 130 kgs @ 2 reps (about 285 pounds)
1 x 125 kgs @ 2 reps (about 275 pounds)
1 x 135 kgs @ 2 reps (about 300 pounds)
1 x 130 kgs @ 2 reps (optional set) (about 285 pounds)
1 x 100 kgs @ 5-8 reps (about 220 pounds)
1 x 80 kgs @ 8-12 reps (about 175 pounds)

As for weekly progressions, you may find they go something like this.

Week 1

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)
Warm-up x 6 @ 50 kgs (about 110 pounds)
Warm-up x 4 @ 80 kgs (about 175 pounds)
Warm-up x 2 @ 100 kgs (about 220 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 120 kgs (about 265 pounds)

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Work set x 2 @ 130 kgs (about 285 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 125 kgs (about 275 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 135 kgs (about 300 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 130 kgs (about 285 pounds)
Work set x 5-8 @ 100 kgs (about 220 pounds)
Work set x 8-12 @ 80 kgs (about 175 pounds)

Week 2

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)
Warm-up x 6 @ 55 kgs (about 120 pounds)
Warm-up x 4 @ 85 kgs (about 187 pounds)
Warm-up x 2 @ 105 kgs (about 230 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 125 kgs (about 275 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 135 kgs (about 300 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 130 kgs (about 285 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 140 kgs (about 310 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 135 kgs (about 300 pounds)
Work set x 5-8 @ 100 or 105 kgs (about 220 or 230 pounds)
Work set x 8-12 @ 80 or 85 kgs (about 175 or 187 pounds)

Week 3

Warm-up x 10 @ 20 kgs (about 45 pounds)
Warm-up x 6 @ 60 kgs (about 130 pounds)
Warm-up x 4 @ 90 kgs (about 200 pounds)
Warm-up x 2 @ 110 kgs (about 240 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 130 kgs (about 285 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 140 kgs (about 310 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 135 kgs (about 300 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 145 kgs (about 320 pounds)
Work set x 2 @ 140 kgs (about 310 pounds)
Work set x 5-8 @ 100 or 105 or 110 kgs (about 220, 230, 240 pounds)
Work set x 8-12 @ 80 or 85 or 90 kgs (about 175, 187, 200 pounds)

Conclusion

So here's your opportunity to develop that big bench and big chin-up! Be smart about it and avoid overtraining and injury. Learn to master focus, imagery, and arousal during this time to exploit the window of opportunity. Note whatever technical breakdown may have occurred and address it in later phases. And in your next program after this one, counter the imbalances that may have arisen during this stage of narrow focus in regards to exercise selection.

If you've had the discipline and belief to stick with my recommendations for the full four stages, I trust it has been a rewarding and educational experience! Thanks for participating!

Now go and bring on the pain!

Note: You can get further technical guidelines on video at KingSports.net.

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