

PUSH PRESS

"A line-out-related exercise. Initiate the movement in your legs, your glutes and finish off with the upper body. You start with the legs at about a quarter squat, with a straight back; at the top of the movement when you feel the bar starting to rise off your chest, you just continue that movement using your shoulders and arms. Do sets of three to six, and for muscle endurance you'd be doing more."



CALL ME AL

He's been called "Quiet Al"; the All Blacks call him "Angry Al".

"There has to be more than one, doesn't there? The one on the field has a totally different persona than the one off it. I become a competitor on the field, while off the field, I'm different things: an architect, a father, all that kind of stuff. If you're the same on and off, you've got some serious issues. I'm in a physical competition and act like it. I do what I have to do."

He says he has calmed down, however. "It's just from having a number of years playing at the top level. It is a technical sport, but you also need experience. We're lucky in the front row where you can keep getting better the older you get. Sometimes my focus has been lacking because it's very easy to get carried away with the emotion of the game, especially at Test level where you're playing in front of enormous crowds and playing the anthem at the start. It's very easy to lose focus and not do the right thing at the right time. Over the years I've learned to stop getting carried away so much and just make sure I'm switched on at the right times."



HANG CLEAN

"It's a power exercise, and uses similar muscles to the squat, but has an explosive element to it. This is a trained exercise, very much one you need to learn from someone who knows what they're doing. It's a good idea to start with light weights on the bar and get used to the technique: chest out, scapulas on and when you get going use your glutes and not your back. Push your hips forward at the same time as doing a basic shrug. For strength, do a couple of reps at 90 per cent of maximum weight. You can also do a repeated speed effort for fitness: sets of eight to 12."



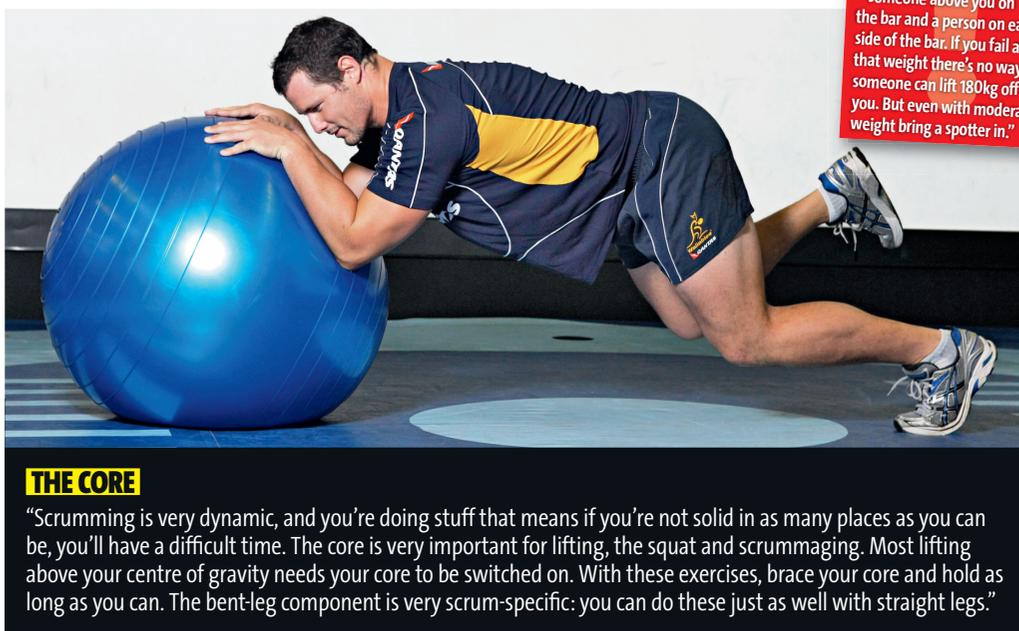
HEAVY WEIGHT WARNING!

"Anyone who uses very big weights, especially on things like bench press, will usually have three spotters – someone above you on the bar and a person on each side of the bar. If you fail at that weight there's no way someone can lift 180kg off you. But even with moderate weight bring a spotter in."



SINGLE-ARM RAISE

"This balances the bench press, so you've got a strong front and back. You need balance in everything, otherwise there will be injuries. Switch your core and scaps on, so you're not stressing the back. You should just use your arm and the shoulder muscles behind your scapula. You don't want to be arched out or rolled over, or have your head right up or down – have a neutral position. Start with light weight, see how you go, then move up. If you're using muscles other than the ones you're aiming to use, it's either poor technique or you're putting too much weight on. For strength work, do low reps – two or three. Normal muscle gain, six to 12 reps, endurance 12-plus."



THE CORE

"Scrumming is very dynamic, and you're doing stuff that means if you're not solid in as many places as you can be, you'll have a difficult time. The core is very important for lifting, the squat and scrummaging. Most lifting above your centre of gravity needs your core to be switched on. With these exercises, brace your core and hold as long as you can. The bent-leg component is very scrum-specific: you can do these just as well with straight legs."

DIET AND NUTRITION

"When we started, the instructions for the front row were 'eat as much as you can'. They didn't care what – their motto was 'all weight is good weight'. As long as you were doing your weights and running around the field, they didn't care. Now it's very much more scientific, down to what you eat at what times: carbohydrates and protein before a weights session, for example, and after a session you've got to have different protein on board. It's all very much eating the right things at the right times."

"We used to eat massive amounts of carbohydrates, which we still do around very heavy training days, but it used to be all week long. But now when you have a day off you don't need to burn through all that energy, so we eat more vegetables and fruit, salads and protein, plus a few carbs. There's so much more understanding and variation in the diet. Now protein is important around weights and muscle regeneration, for example. Sometimes the protein powders are the best thing because when you do heavy pre-season training, you simply can't eat that many steaks."