

Training Equipment: Never Looking Back

By: Louie Simmons

I made the Top 10 in the United States in 1972 in Powerlifting News. At that time, they kept track only of the Top 10 and this was with no equipment. In 1973 I made a 1655 total at 181, again with no gear: a 605 squat, a 380 bench, and a 670 deadlift. At the time, 1605 was Elite, but it was later adjusted to 1643. In 1980 at the YMCA Nationals, I made the Top 10 in the bench press with a 480. This was done with no bench shirt. Then with the introduction of power gear, from 4 inch belts to squat and deadlift suits, and of course the bench shirt, through the years, I totaled Elite in five weight classes, from the 181's to the 275's. In the 2002 rankings my bench press was sixth at 575 in the 220 weight class.

However, I experienced many setbacks before 2002. I broke my fifth lumbar vertebra in 1973 and again in 1983. I tore my right bicep in the USPF Senior Nationals in 1979. Six months later, I was lucky and won the YMCA Nationals and pulled a 705 deadlift, 33 pounds more than the weight with which I tore my bicep. But, as luck would have it, I tore two small holes in my lower abs and sustained a partial tear of a pelvic tendon (this still bothers me today). I finally made my first 2000 total in 1987 at the YMCA Nationals in Columbus.

My left knee had been bothering me for about a year. I had a heavy workload for the next five years. While training for the APF Seniors in Pittsburg, I suffered a complete patella tendon rupture of the left knee. I went in for a second minor surgery 14 weeks later and nearly died from a reaction to the anesthesia. A tracheotomy was performed and chest tubes were inserted after I stopped breathing for 4 minutes. The chest tubes severed nerves in my ribcage, to this day causing severe shoulder pain.

I was seriously thinking about giving up lifting. But I trained hard and made a 680 below-parallel box squat (there were no Monolifts at the time) with no knee wraps and without the straps up on the suit. Before this, my best squat was 821 at 242.

Meanwhile, Kenny Patterson benched 728 at 22 years old in 1995 at 275 and was ranked the best pound-for-pound bencher. But in 1997 he still had not broken that record. We were doing a bench workout and I said, "Damn, Kenny, I'll squat 700 again before you break that bench record." And he said "Old man, you will never have 700 on you back again." Well, I can thank Kenny Patterson because he brought me out of retirement at that moment.

I competed seven times in the next 11 in full meets and some push/pull meets. My best bench was 530 at 242 in 1992. I broke my bench record several times, ending up with 600 pounds (a dream come true for me). I also squatted over 800

in 1997. This was important for me because no one 50 years or older had made a 600 bench. I also squatted 900 and 920 at 52 years and had a 2100 total.

I was not pleased because, as usual, I could not put my best lifts together, which were at 235 a 920 squat, a 580 bench, and a 710 deadlift. After squatting 810, I recall telling Jesse Kellum that I could do 900. And he said, "Buddy, why don't you?" So I did. He was a big help, just being himself.

Chuck Vogelpohl also helped me greatly, always pushing me to the limit, along with all my Westside training partners, in addition to ambition, determination, and my powerlifting friends from around the world. But not of this could have happened if powerlifting gear had not evolved to the point where it is today.

I went from no knee wraps to Ace bandages, then to horse wraps, then the Canadian wraps such as the TP5000 wraps, to today's best: Frantz, Inzer, Titan, and Crain. They also have their brand of suits and bench shirts. You can choose from polyester, denim, or canvas. Each Federation has their own rules, so take your pick. This is the U. S. of A., and you have the right to lift in any Federation you choose, whether it is drug-tested or non-tested. At Westside we lift primarily in the APF, IPA, and WPO.

It's not the equipment that makes a champion, but rather your mind. There is really no reason for the controversy over power gear. When Fred Boldt came to Westside, he used a poly shirt. It took 3 months for him to master a double denim. In his first meet, he did 450, but within a year he made 540 in the same shirt. Where did the 90 pounds come from? Training. People come to Westside all the time to train and learn, and most walk out the door with an all-time PR.

Don't lie, dudes. You all would love to lift more. The simple fact is a lot of lifters can't master the gear. For bench shirts, Bill Crawford has the golden hand. For canvas squat suits, Ernie Frantz is the man.

At Westside we have the greatest collection of benchers. Four men have held the all-time biggest bench in six weight classes, and I believe another will be added soon. Our lifters have evolved right along with the sport. Chuck's squat of 1025 was done in a two-ply squat suit, in keeping with WPO rules. The bench records were done in two-ply shirts.

Nothing has changed since powerlifting began. Everyone looks for an edge. That's simply sport. I remember 20 years ago some knee wraps had a rubber lining. Bill Kazmaier had a pair of shoes that were supposed to be worth \$1000. In 1979 at the North American Championships in Canada, Fred Hatfield (Dr. Squat) showed up at the equipment check with a pair of knee wraps made of jock strap waist bands. The IPF ref looked at them and said he couldn't wear them. They were twice as thick as normal wraps. But Fred won the argument and proceeded to break Ron Collins world record squat. He also had the squat rack

pulled out of his way instead of walking the weight out. Was he cheating or innovative? Being a lifter, I thought he was innovative. Every lifter should take advantage of people like Dr. Squat who paved the way to bigger numbers.

Is the use of squat and deadlift bars cheating? No. That's progress. When people see a boxing match, they want their man to knock out the opponent. Someone told me, you have to have the right size fish. I think equipment is the same.

Dave "Zippy" Tate said he felt that the only regulation on power gear should be for novices, for example, up to a Master total. Then somewhat stronger suits could be used by those between Master and Elite. Only the strongest and the bravest would use unlimited gear. That's right, I said the bravest. I have seen a lot of lifters stop progressing because they were scared. That's right, they're scared and they won't admit to it, and they hate those who dare to break today's records.

Look at what's happening today. It's embarrassing what raw lifters are lifting compared to the lifts in the early 1970's. Remember my 181 total - 1655. Jack Barnes held the top spot at 1745. At this time, Larry Pacifico was doing 1900 at 198. I saw Larry do a 530 bench at 198 in Cincinnati, and 8 weeks later in Dayton he benched 590 at 228. These lifts were done in full meets with a 1 ½ hour weigh-in. But don't think for one minute that today's raw lifter would bench over 600 or squat in the 800s just by putting on gear.

Powerlifting is years behind other sports as far as equipment is concerned, including swimming, track, football, and even bowling. The gear is getting better in every powerlifting federation including the IPF. As race cars go faster, the rules call for more safety equipment to keep the drivers safe. The racing association made recommendations for a better safety belt harness after Dale Earnhardt's death. But in powerlifting when new innovations come about we're cheating? This doesn't make sense. I don't know a single strong man who complains about better gear.

It's not easy to learn how to use bench shirts and squat suits. Matt, a 275 from Ball State University, had just made a 479 bench P.R., but could not master his new bench shirt. During a visit to Westside, in 45 minutes he made a 530 bench with plenty to spare. His shirt is 100% legal; he just needed to learn how to use it.

I notice that the people that bad-mouth the top powerlifters are invisible at power meets. I have to attend the APF Nationals, IPF Nationals and the World Cup, and the WPO semifinals and finals at the Arnold Classic, not to mention the WPO Bash for Cash, and I never see these guys. But I know for a fact that the great lifters at these meets would never give them a second look. After all, what have they done?

Until the end of time people will seek out a way to win. That's human nature. Why not use what's available. Most use computers today, not an ink quill.

I read a lot and suggest to you a book: 2001, a Sport's Odyssey by Dr. Judd Biasiotto. It has been advertised in Powerlifting USA. As you know, Dr. Judd is opposed to modern lifting gear, and his opinion on drug use is the same. His goal was to total 1400 at 132. You can read how he used hypnosis, biofeedback, mind control, and just about everything a cybernetics lab can offer. He was a man of positive thinking. See how long his power career lasted. And, oh yes, how that quest for a 1400 total turned out. He eventually squatted 603 at an AD-FPA meet in 1989. If hypnosis works that well, give me two bottles of it. I invite Dr. Judd to Westside to see what modern lifting is like.