



# TRAINING FOR LIFE

BY ZACH EVEN-ESH

**POWER:** You're a single dad and a business owner, and you've conquered many obstacles thrown your way. Thanks for sharing your insights with Power readers. How old are you, where are you from, and when and why you did you start lifting weights?

**JESSE BURDICK:** I'm 34. I'm from Erie, Pa., and I live and work in Dublin, Calif. I started working out at about 15 years old at a local physical therapy clinic because, I as a freshman in a very competitive high school athletic program, I needed and wanted to be a bigger and better baseball player.

**POWER:** How the heck did you find your way to a hospital PT clinic? Most people end up at the local Y or a local gym.

**BURDICK:** I never really knew or asked, to be honest. I used to go to a doctor there; looking back at it now, it could have been covered by insurance. It didn't last for long, maybe a year or two.

After that, between water polo, fall ball, swimming and the season approaching, I didn't have time for anything else but schoolwork. Soon after I was pulled up to varsity baseball, I became a one-sport athlete. While that was amazing, working out took a backseat to going to every camp and playing in every league I heard about. I remember being told I needed to be a bigger kid, but was never told how or even given the time to get there.

There was a time, as a freshman, I was in a small group in the cage with a junior and two seniors, all who ended up being either D1 or minor league players. I saw them really turning their hips into the ball and I understood what it meant to "drive" the ball. I tried over and over to do it and just never got it. I was frustrated and sat down. Soon an assistant coach sat down. I told him I didn't know why I couldn't sit back and drive into the ball like those guys. He was very matter-of-fact. "They have a waist and hips and an ass," he said. "You don't have any of those right now. You are a gap hitter and they are power hitters."

**POWER:** Most people who fall in love with the iron somehow have the fortune of a mentor helping them in the gym. Those mentors usually find the lifters. Who mentored you, if anyone at all?

Burdick: You are 100-percent right, I was found by my college strength and conditioning coach, world-record powerlifter Paul Childress. He saw me rocking a muscle mag workout and thinking that growing an inch on my biceps would make me a better baseball player. Paul was very kind and told me that what I was attempting to do probably wasn't the best idea.

Knowing everything — because I read it from a bodybuilding magazine — I told him I had it handled and not to worry about it. He laughed and let me continue. My baseball didn't get better, but I did look better and managed to do enough cardio to put myself in the hospital three times and give myself mono, which resulted in me having to redshirt my sophomore year. Soon after, I started to listen. Paul educated me on how to train and pointed me in the direction of powerlifting, everything conjugate and Russian.

**POWER:** Did he guide you in training with written workouts or did he tell you to check out certain books or websites? What resources motivated you the most?

**BURDICK:** I found Bill Star, Charles Poliquin and the like on my own, and it took a





few years for me to run the course and need more information. That's when I turned back to Paul. He turned me onto Westside Barbell methods, all the Russians manuals and everyone over at elitefts.com. Paul's name opened a lot of doors for me. I would call Louie Simmons or Dave Tate or Jim Wendler and be able to actually talk them or visit them. The help they gave me was unbelievable. I have been trying to pay it forward for more than 10 years.

Through these connections I hooked

up with a powerlifting gym in northern California and encouraged to head out there. I hopped on a train for an hour, waited for one of the owners to pick me up, and was sold once I walked through the door. While I had read everything I could possibly read to that point and talked to the greatest thinkers out there, it wasn't until I got to an actual gym and applied what I read did my real education begin. I commuted for more than two hours on public transportation four times a week

in order to train there.

**POWER:** Most people can't get their ass to the gym three times a week, even if the gym is only a few minutes away. What made this gym so special?

**BURDICK:** The gym was called Diablo Barbell, and it was the only powerlifting gym in the Bay Area that I got positive feedback from. Also, Dave Tate said he'd dealt with the owners and they were cool. I had tried doing a lot of the conjugate system on my own at a commercial facility and it just wasn't going as I had hoped. When I called up the owner, he invited me to come check it out and be taken through a workout. One problem was that I didn't have a car at that time, and the 45-minute train ride only got me within about 5 miles. The owner told me that if I was willing to travel that far, he would pick me up from the station.

When I finally got to the gym, it was instantly perfect. It had a Monolift, bars that I had only read about, chains everywhere, bands, sleds and many

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other powerlifting tools. More importantly, it had a small crew of dedicated lifters who would always show up, work hard, push each other and never back down. It was exactly what I needed; a locker room mentality, a team, a sport and a coach.

**POWER:** About three years ago you and Power's Mark Bell held your first seminar for "the masses," so to speak.

**BURDICK:** We couldn't give the damn seminar away. I emailed every CrossFit in New Jersey and those close in Delaware, Philly and NYC. I was pissed that two elite powerlifters were willing to unleash their knowledge, and even the powerlifters at my gym next door didn't sign up.

**POWER:** Yet you guys said that even if only one person signs up, you'll fly cross-country to make someone strong. On top of it all, you lost your brother literally a day or two before the seminar, and you still showed up. Where does your commitment to life, not just lifting, come from?

**BURDICK:** Something like the death of a sibling is about as bad as things can get. Luckily I had my long-lost brother Mark with me, helping me every step of the way. If it wasn't for him, there is no way I would have gotten out of bed, let alone get on a plane. We talked about what we were doing, why it was important to us and to everyone involved. In the end, it was something we had to do in order to keep our vision alive and give me something to grip and stay in reality.

I blame all my hard headedness, tenacity and commitment on my parents. My dad worked swing shifts loading and unloading trucks in a paper mill to come home and coach my brother, sister and me in whatever sport season it was. He worked a massive number of hours, drank massive amounts of coffee, seemingly never slept and was always around for us. I remember one summer he and his union were on strike, and he had to go out and do handyman work and paint houses to keep us fed. He left before sunrise and came home after dark, sunburnt. This

was all while my mom raised three kids separated by four years, and the two boys were absolute maniacs. She made every meal, made sure we had everything we ever needed, kept us as clean as she could and was the happiest, most positive person I have ever met. My parents taught me that there is nothing I can't handle, learn or do. It all comes down to hard work. If I ever had a question about things, there was always an answer in a book.

**POWER:** You're the father of two twin girls. How do you get your training done as a father and business owner? What tips do you give the other parents out there for training and life?

**BURDICK:** I consider my girls, Kaycie and Sophia, the best things that have ever happened to me on every level possible. They give me drive, focus and motivation. I have never been more sleep deprived, stressed and an emotional wreck while getting my best work done and lifting my best, all because of them.

I think that everyone's situation is

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different, but there are lessons that are universal. The trickiest and most misunderstood concept is that in order to be the best parent you can be, you need to be the best “you” that you can be. What this really means is that it’s easy for parents, especially new parents, to become consumed by their new situation and lose touch with who they really are. It will sound selfish, but some of the best advice I ever got was to set aside time to get to the gym and work my ass off. I fought this and thought I was being a bad dad. But there is nothing else in my life like the gym. I have been an athlete my whole life, and to not have that physical competitive aspect made me someone who I wasn’t — and that dude wasn’t good at anything.

Setting goals has also been huge for me and the parents I’ve worked with. The key is to take a realistic look at life and then make decisions. If you have four hours a week to lift and want to bench 500 lbs. or lose 100 lbs., that’s an awesome goal — but it may have to be a long term goal. It’s just as effective to start off with the goal of getting to the gym everyday, and then move to benching 300 and losing weight. The positive personal feedback from friends and family will make the next, smaller goal doable, reachable and desirable. I have goals that I still haven’t checked off my list, but there was a time when I had to put those goals aside and reach for something I could touch. It was a temporary ego hit, but I quickly got over it when my hard work and progress started to pay off and get attention.

**POWER:** Talk to us about your

**daily schedule and how you find energy and motivation to train with the hours you put into the gym. Also, do you train alone or with partners? Give the guys and girls out there who lift alone your most critical tips.**

**BURDICK:** My life and schedule revolve completely around my girls. As they have gone from daycare to kindergarten and now into first grade, my daily routine was in a constant flux. Now that their hours have pretty much become “normal,” I wake them up at about 7:30 a.m. and have them ready and fed by 8:15. After that we are out the door. I get them to school, grab more coffee and I’m off to the gym. I train clients from 9 to noon, then the powerlifting team comes in and I usually work out with them. I run back to get the girls at 2:15. After school we usually have a snack, then homework and some free time.

Three days a week I go back to the gym for evening sessions for groups and the late powerlifters. I am very lucky that everyone at CSA gym is so kid-friendly and cool with the girls. The girls love it at the gym and usually come with me most days to play and hang out. The girls have two CrossFit kids sessions, Krav Maga and swim lessons throughout the week, so between running back and forth from those and the gym, once we get home it’s dinner, showers and bed. I am very lucky that my girls are so great and love everything they do. I am also blessed that in the past year I met the love of my life, she has been a huge help. The girls adore her and her family. So while my schedule looks

and sounds nuts, having Katie around has made our lives more peaceful and amazing.

I am in a very fortunate position right now where I only have to work out alone a few times a week. I usually do my main lifts with the team and coach at the same time; this doesn’t leave me much time for all the accessory lifts and the extra stuff, like stretching, mobilization, tanning and the like. I will end up catching that later in the day whenever I can fit it in. Thanks to a great crew of lifters, I am very rarely doing a main heavy lift on my own. The best advice I can give people who work out alone is to have a very clearly laid out plan. I have found that if there isn’t a plan in place, there is far too much wiggle room to procrastinate and ends with not getting things done. Also, just because you work out alone doesn’t mean you can’t train heavy or hard. Be detailed in your goals and very honest in programming what you are capable of, and pay close attention to how you feel each day. This should help you dictate the road to your goals.

**POWER:** If you could only give one piece of advice for training and one piece of advice for life, what would be your top tips for each?

**BURDICK:** I think in both instances you need to find something to live for and something to train for. You need to be motivated and have goals for both. In so many ways training is my life, but I don’t live for it. I train for me, to be a better me every day — because I live for my girls and they will never get anything but the best me I can be. **PM**