

CANADIAN POWERLIFTER SHANE CHURCH

BY KEN WHETHAM

There must be something in the water near the Ottawa area that makes guys want to lift heavy weight and compete in strength sports. This is the third time I've traveled to our capital to interview a powerlifter and, although I tried to drink the Ottawa water in the hopes of boosting my strength, to my disappointment my bench didn't go up much. I guess I'll just have to keep training to get stronger.

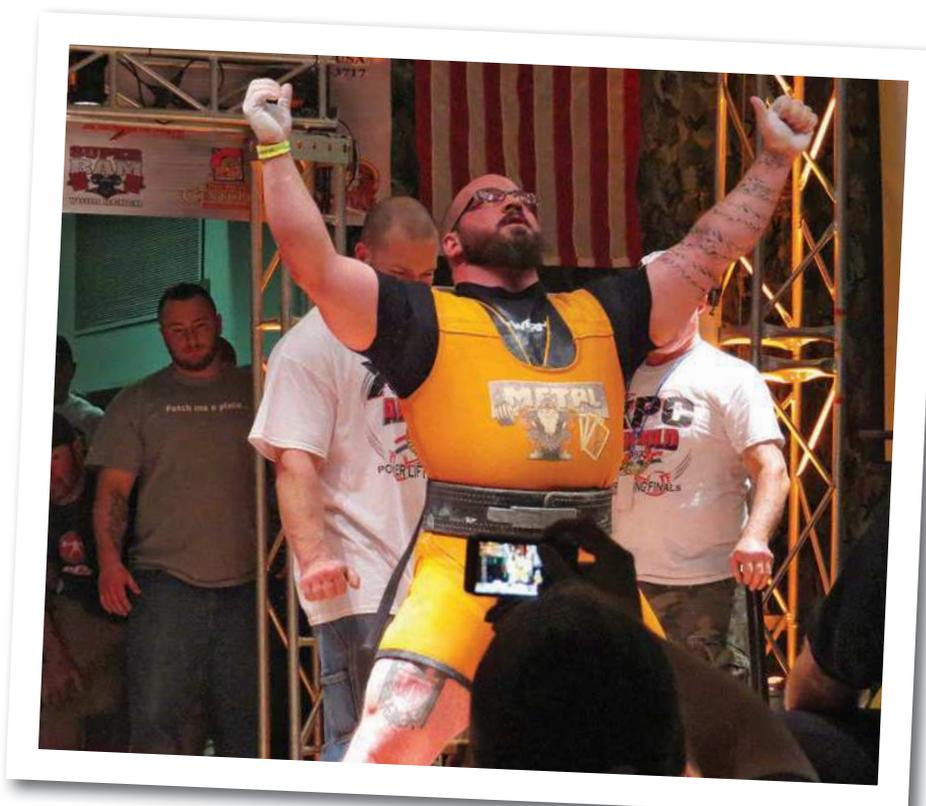
I met Shane Church a few years ago. He was the first person I witnessed squat more than 1,000 lbs. Not unlike most powerlifters, Church is one of the nicest people to talk to, a person who puts family first and who is more than willing to help anyone get stronger and achieve their goals. I had the opportunity to talk to him at his in-laws' house, where we were spoiled with great company and an awesome roast beef dinner.

POWER: First, introduce yourself. Where are you located in Canada, how old are you and what do you do for a living?

CHURCH: My name is Shane Church. I am 30 years old and live in our Nations Capital, Ottawa Ontario, with my better half, Shannon, and the new addition to our family, my son Odin. I'm currently employed as an Information Center Specialist at a secure document storage warehouse.

What are your current rankings and records?

CHURCH: Currently I'm 13th all



time overall in the squat with a 1,036, and my total is 25th all time overall with 2,402 in the 242s.

POWER: How long have you been powerlifting?

CHURCH: I started lifting in 2006 with Paul Vaillancourt. He is one of Canada's best Strongmen and owns two gyms in the Ottawa area. I was working at a plant as an industrial firefighter and one of our work benefits was to have a gym membership to ensure we kept in decent physical condition. I went to Paul's gym, Ulti-

mate Fitness, where I met him, and he immediately invited me to start training with him. Paul convinced me to enter into a Strongman competition. In the winter of that year, Paul, his wife, Sarah Leighton, and I entered a powerlifting competition and I was hooked on the sport. My first meet was in single-ply gear and I squatted 565, benched 385 and deadlifted 550. I competed for about a year in single-ply and actually competed in a multi-ply event in single-ply gear before I started getting into multi-ply.

POWER: What got you interested in the sport?

CHURCH: Paul Vaillancourt. Besides Paul, the thrill of competing is as addicting as crystal meth, or so I'm told. I played pretty much every sport you can think of growing up: hockey, baseball, basketball, wrestling, rugby, soccer and track and field. I love competing and making new friends from all over North America and Europe.

POWER: Have you always competed in gear, and have you ever considered lifting raw?

CHURCH: I've done one meet raw because I ruined my bench shirt right before a planned meet, and I had already paid my registration. It was fun to try, but I consider myself a gear whore and I plan on continuing to lift in the gear.

POWER: What is your most memorable competition and why?

CHURCH: The first one would be competing at the Arnold in 2013 because of the incredible location and the caliber of lifters I got to compete with. Lifting with legends like Brian Carroll, Al Mehan, Evengy Yarmbash and Henry Thomason. I placed second in the 242s with a 2,360. The second most memorable competition was this past November when I competed at a meet in Long Island, N.Y., with my wife, who competed in her second powerlifting meet.

POWER: Do you think large quantities of Canadian bacon, beer and maple syrup consumption are some of the best kept post workout training secrets that Canadian lifters don't want anyone to find out about?

CHURCH: Maple syrup is the key to everything in life. It's definitely necessary to eat lots of bacon post-workout, pre-workout and intra-workout. It's just sometimes a little tough to get the bacon to mix properly in the shaker bottle. Maybe we need to invent a "bacon maple syrup" sports recovery drink.



POWER: Have you ever suffered any significant injuries during your powerlifting career?

CHURCH: I've had two significant injuries that hampered my training for a while. I tore my hamstring and tore my bicep tendon. It took a while to repair my hamstring. I just had to take it easy training for a while. When I ruptured my bicep tendon (a 100-percent rupture of the distal tendon) I had to get surgery to repair it. My first cast was put on so tight I cut it off the same night. They put on a second cast but it only lasted two weeks before I cut it off. Four months post surgery I benched 600 lbs. I suffered a bulging disc in late 2013 and had to take intense A.R.T. and acupuncture for four weeks before I could start lifting again. I had arthroscopic surgery on my left knee last summer, as well. I'm 100 percent healthy now and plan to stay that way (fingers crossed and knock on wood).

POWER: Where do you train, and do you have a coach or training partners?

CHURCH: I train during the week at a commercial gym in Ottawa with

my wife, who is a personal trainer. On the weekends I train at Dynamo Barbell with some of the best Canadian raw lifters ever, Jay Nera, Kade Weber, Paul Oneid, Chadwick Haines and of course my beautiful wife.

POWER: Do you have a particular training protocol that you follow, like Westside, Cube or 5-3-1?

CHURCH: I started with Wendler's 5-3-1, which got me established to a good level of strength. But once I started lifting in gear I changed my training to follow the Westside training protocol. I was fortunate to have had an opportunity to move to Columbus, Ohio, and train with Louie Simmons and the Westside Crew for nine months. I moved in with AJ Roberts and Jake Anderson. There was more than a few tons of food consumed at our place! It was one of the most amazing and humbling experiences of my life. The week I moved I had finished third at the CPF Nationals in Canada, and when I got to Westside, I was the weakest guy in the gym. Very humbling. I learned so much about life, humility and being

a better person, and I also learned a ton about powerlifting. The biggest improvements I made at Westside were to my deadlift, from low 600s to more than 700 just with simple technique adjustments.

I still follow a similar method, but I don't have access to all the different bars so it's a little more simplified. I usually try to work up to a heavy single, double or triple with all my lifts and then back down to 80 percent and do a 5X5. I'm also working on a lot of things that I suck at, like raw squats, incline bench, ab work and anything else that makes me feel weak.

My typical week looks like this:

Day 1: Squat variation: raw squat, box squat, squats with wraps, full geared squats and bottom position squats. I work up to a heavy triple, double or single. I change it up every week, which follows the conjugate method. I then drop down to do 80, 70 or 60 percent of the number hit that day for a set of 5x5. After that I train quads and abs.

Day 2: Incline bench: same theory as the squat; work up to a max set of reps and then back down and do a 5X5 set. Accessories work follows for the chest and arms. Chest work includes ultra-wide grip bench, dumbbell work (flat and inclined) as well as close grip bench, tricep press downs, skull crushers etc.

Day 3: Deadlift variation: I train both with a conventional and sumo stance from the floor, block pulls and deficit pulls to work a variety range of motion. The same theory applies, work up to a heavy set and then back off to finish with a set of 5X5. Accessories work may include stiff legged deadlifts, glute ham raises or reverse hypers, and I'll finish with some mobility work.

Day 4: Bench variation: I train flat and inclined barbell bench as well as dumbbell flat, inclined and declined bench. My accessory work is pri-



marily for shoulders and back. I'll do a variety of military presses, pull ups, barbell rows, dumbbell rows and try to hit my shoulders, lats and triceps to help increase my bench.

POWER: Are you a sponsored athlete?

CHURCH: I am extremely fortunate to have two amazing sponsors. SD Pharmaceuticals is a Canadian supplement company that has top-of-the-market quality products, my favorite being the Dendrobium. I am also sponsored by EliteFTS. Being a member of Team EliteFTS was a career goal of mine back around 2008 when I first started reading about the exploits of their team members. The training logs on EliteFTS were like our gospel for training and getting strong. I remember running in the gym and yelling "did you see what Wendler did? Did you see Vinny Dizenzo bench a million pounds? Look how sexy Joey Smith is! Do you think Matt Kroc is real?" It is an honor for me to represent EliteFTS and Dave Tate.

The most bad-ass part is being in the same circles as lifters like Brian Carroll, Steve Goggins, Matt Kroczaleski, Joey Smith and, of course, Dave Tate.

POWER: Do you think a "Beaver" as the National Canadian symbol is kind of lame?

CHURCH: No, it's fantastic. Have you ever seen the complexity that beavers use to build a damn or their beaver house? It's equivalent to using duck tape and mud to build a condominium complex. Beavers are awesome!

POWER: What is the best thing about being a Canadian?

CHURCH: Free health care! There's a lot more but that's the best part.

POWER: Do you utilize any accommodating resistance, like bands or chains in your training?

CHURCH: I use a lot of EliteFTS bands in my training. I train with bands for both my squats and deadlifts to add a dynamic element to my lifting. Deadlifting with bands definitely helps me work on my lockouts, and squatting

with bands is beneficial for creating more explosive squat power. I also use bands for mobility work for upper body and lower body as well as utilizing them to help with stretching and flexibility.

POWER: Do you follow any specific nutrition plan to keep strong for powerlifting?

CHURCH: Nope. Shannon wishes that I would work with Shelby Starnes again. When we first met, I was working with Starnes and I was lean and jacked. Now I look like a stereotypical powerlifter, a little heavy but damn handsome! You can't have your cake and eat it too, unless you're a strength athlete.

POWER: How do you prepare mentally for an attempt?

CHURCH: Relax. Focus with a smile on my face. I have tried the angry lifter smashing the bar and it doesn't work for me. I'm a gear whore, so my technique needs to be bang on. Freaking out at the bar for no reason usually ended up in me missing weights horribly.

POWER: What are your best competition numbers?

CHURCH: Squat: 1,036; bench: 644; and deadlift: 749. Total: 2,402

POWER: Best gym numbers?

CHURCH: My gym numbers are actually a lot less than my meet numbers. I train a lot by myself, in a commercial gym. So, I have to eat a little humble pie when I'm walking out weights and wrapping my own knees.

POWER: What are some of the changes you've made to your lifting over the years?

CHURCH: I have changed a ton. I am always learning to get better. There are many ways to skin a cat. Because I'm doing something a certain way, that doesn't make it right. There are always different approaches or changes you can make that will help you progress. Getting strong doesn't happen overnight, it's a long process with many

hills and valleys.

Who are some of the lifters you grew up admiring?

CHURCH: The legend Ed Coan is my favorite. Scott Cartwright is bad-ass! I learned most of what I know from the Westside DVDs. Guys like Dave Tate, JL Holdsworth, the Chuck Voghapol and of course Louie Simmons. I also admired a lot of the great Strongmen too. Hugo Girard from Canada, my homeboy Paul V and Svend Karlson are probably my favorite Strongmen.

Do you have any advice for someone entering the powerlifting game?

CHURCH: Be prepared to learn from anyone and everyone. Every person has done something that you want to do. Learn from their mistakes and their successes and apply it to your own strategy.

Do you still get excited and amped up when you go to compete at a meet?

CHURCH: I can't sleep. Meet day is the best thing ever. I love seeing people break PRs and light bulbs go off when someone yelling a random cue "clicks" with someone.

POWER: What is your favorite lift and why?

CHURCH: The squat. It's the biggest number and it's my best lift.

POWER: What do you do in your spare time?

CHURCH: I am lucky to have the coolest kid in the world, Odin Benjamin Church. Odin is almost one year old and takes up most of my time, and I love it! I do get a chance to help people with programming their training as well, but it's more of a hobby.

POWER: What's next? What are your goals for the immediate and distant future?

I have the goal that I feel every lifter should have: to stay healthy. After that I want to become the best squatter in the 242s ever.

POWER: Do you think it should be mandatory for all geared lifters

to shave their head and sport some type beard?

CHURCH: Only the men.

POWER: What drives you?

Two things drive me. First is pressure. I have made big claims in the past I want this or I'm going to do that. I have to put my squat where my mouth is. The second is my son, Odin. I hope when he grows up I can be a hero in his eyes.

POWER: If you had the choice of being any superhero, who would it be?

CHURCH: He-Man. The dude is jacked, wields a giant sword and rides around a huge green cat. And the place that he protects is Castle Greyskull. Enough said.

POWER: Now that you're at your current level of strength, do you get impatient trying to make specific gains?

CHURCH: Of course! I want a 2,800-lb. total and I want it yesterday. But, I also realize that every time I get a PR, no matter how big or small it is, it gets me one step closer to reaching my goals.

POWER: Is there anyone you would like to thank?

CHURCH: Millions. The most important first is my parents. They have been amazing my entire life. Thank you. My wife, Shannon, for putting up with all my training, weight cuts and powerlifting meets. I'm also excited now that Shannon is getting addicted to competing in this sport. Matt and Julia Ladewski for being role models for Shannon and me in lifting and in parenting. They are two amazing people! My sponsors of course: SD Pharmaceuticals and EliteFITS, companies that have helped me get this far and hopefully further. All my training partners: Paul, Sarah, Jay, Kade, Willie, Paul and Martin. I'd also like to thank Mark and Andee Bell of Power for putting out a great magazine and giving me the opportunity for an interview. **PM**