

# CLINT HARWOOD

## CANADIAN BENCH PRESS SPECIALIST

BY KEN WHETHAM

**E**very morning, Clark Kent...er... Clint Harwood, begins each day by donning an inconspicuous freshly pressed suit, a tie and by placing glasses on his nose. This ensures that he blends into his surrounding environment without any suspicion or indication of his true identity. He blends into the crowd and rides the subway to work in an office surrounded by normal humanoids that are ignorant of his real identity as one of the strongest benchers in Canada. When the time comes to reveal himself, a quick SHW [Super Heavyweight] conversion occurs in a

stuffy phone booth and he emerges as the completely unrecognizable Clint Harwood: Bench Specialist. Trading in the Superman cape for an Inzer SDP [Super Duper Phenom], a singlet and a pair of well-worn Chuck Taylors completely transforms the office dwelling Clark...er...Clint into one of Canada's biggest and strongest benchers!

**Tell us a little about yourself; your age, where you live and what you do for a living**

I am a 41-year-old Information Technology Services nerd, living in Toronto,

Canada.

**I understand that you have a degree in Astrophysics?**

Well, yes I have a B.Sc. in Astrophysics. I looked at the university degrees that would get me a "job" and thought, "No, I don't want any of those advantages! That's cheating!" So, I took a degree that didn't lead to any particular career.

Of course, it does allow me to say, "This isn't rocket science and I should know!"

On the plus side, I had the most positive university experience of anyone that I know. I left university feeling educated



and equipped to wade into almost any arena. One of my professors used to say that when we left his class, we'd be able to apply numbers to any sort of problem. He was right, and it has helped me a lot in powerlifting.

**How long have you been involved in powerlifting?**

I've been competing for about 15 years. In 1999 or so, I stumbled into Bruce Greig's Back Alley Gym in Okotoks, Alberta and I benched a raw 415 with truly embarrassingly horrible form.

Bruce, the Godfather of Canadian Powerlifting, who was clearly struggling to keep from laughing said, "Well kid, benching is 90% technique; a 90% which you lack. If you can put up 415 like that and we can give you some technique, you could be a great bencher."

I've spent a lot of years trying to live up to the prediction.

**Have you always been a bench only lifter or have you competed as a full powerlifter?**

I have competed occasionally as a 3-lifter but an old knee injury and to

be honest, a near-psychotic loathing of the deadlift, keep me in the bench-only for the most part. My best squat is an equipped 705 and my best deadlift is a raw 518.

**What got you interested in powerlifting?**

I got into powerlifting after an ill-fated attempt to become skinny. For 6 months, I starved myself and jogged. I got to the point where I could run a solid 30-minute 5k without an out-of-body experience but I didn't get any skinnier. While I did not develop a six-pack, I did develop the temperament of a teased rattlesnake. Deciding that life is too short, I opted to try something different.

I had always been pretty strong, so lifting weights was an obvious course. My father had done some Police and Fire meets when I was young and I had seen a few of them, very much enjoying the experience.

One day, my training partner started hitting me with a printout of the provincial IPF [International Powerlifting Federation] records, as I had just done the SHW bench record for a triple, and

he commanded me to find a meet and take it. Always do what your training partner says.

I looked up Greig's Back Alley and have been hooked ever since.

**Tell us about your rankings, records and accomplishments.**

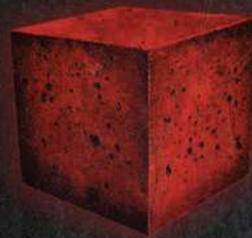
I have been one of the top benchers in Canada for several years now and have a sock full of heavily-qualified world and national records, but the ones I am most proud of are:

- Heaviest Bench in the AWPC [Amateur World Powerlifting Congress] for the second time.
- First Canadian to bench 800 in a competition
- Michael Soong's Top 20 in two weight classes - 308 and SHW. I've only gotten up to #19 but I have made it on the list three separate times over 4 years.

**What is your most memorable competition and why?**

There are so many! It is hard to choose. I lifted at the 2007 WPO [World Powerlifting Organization] Arnold on the main stage and came dead last in the

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Heavyweights with a 770. The first Canadian 800 was a serious milestone, and something I worked several years at.

As to the most memorable, I have to give the nod to my first WPC meet. It was an APF [American Powerlifting Federation] Bench Wars [meet] in Lake George put on by Bill Crawford. The story goes like this:

Bruce McIntyre had encouraged me to try an APF meet and I was struggling to learn a denim shirt for it. So, I dropped a line to Shawn Lattimer, who had recently benched an 859 at the WPO Arnold. I thought that if I was going to get advice, I might as well start at the top.

He replied that if I was going to be at Bench Wars, he had another lifter who was going to be there and would be willing to coach/handle me too. I was more than a little gobsmacked.

Let me put this in Canadian terms: It was as if I, a total nobody, sent an email to Wayne Gretzky asking about equipment, and he dropped by my little-league hockey practice to give us some tips.

And Lattimer followed through. He set my shirt, did my handoffs - I learned a lot that day and I benched my first 600. Most importantly, I learned something about powerlifting - one of the best in the world took time out of a meet day to help out an aspiring lifter.

I've always remembered that and

have done my best to pass it along.

#### **What are your best lifts?**

My best lifts are:

AWPC 390kg/859 lbs (shirted bench)

Raw 235kg/518lbs (bench)

Squat 320kg /705 lbs

Dead 235 kg / 518 lbs

I did an IPF 292.5kg/644 a few years back, and keep thinking that I should try one of the modern single-ply shirts.

#### **Have you ever competed raw?**

Only as a lark, I have never seriously trained for it. There were some good 100% RAW meets near my house, so I hit a few lifts there in the mid-400s.

One time, I spent a month focusing on raw and hit a decent 235kg/518lbs at SHW - that was the second best tested raw in Canada, after John Giffen's 240kg.

While I agree that equipped lifting is probably on the way out, I enjoy the geeky-tweaky nature of it, and will likely continue to lift in both.

#### **You recently set the AWPC biggest bench press at the Global Bench Wars in Michigan... tell us about the meet.**

My training going into this meet went a bit sideways in the last month. I had intended on opening at 375kg, but complications in life messed up my training and I missed 375 in the gym a couple of times leading into it.

So I opted to find a lighter opener and the lightest I could reliably touch was

345kg.

It is always annoying to drop an opener but I'd rather get a lighter lift in than bomb out, as I had at Global Bench Wars the year before.

Joe Smolinski always puts on a good meet and the judging and equipment were top-notch. I weighed in at a lame 145kg (read: uncommitted SHW) but that was where the shirt had been working. I attended the rules meeting then went back to my room and napped as best I could.

The warm-up room was crazy with big benchers like Jimmy Kolb, Richard Singh, Didier Michelon and Roger Ryan.

I got a few raised eyebrows when I went straight into my shirt. I'm weird in that I don't lift raw before I shirt up. My warm-ups at 400, 500, and 650 went smooth as silk and I started to get a little nervous. Was I going to tank again like last year?

Matt Brass, who was doing my handoffs, caught me starting to fret. "Talk yourself into it," he reminded me and I set about getting my head under control.

My name came up and 345kg went about as perfectly as I have ever done a lift for a new AWPC M1 WR [World Record].

I was stoked. Warm-ups were now over and it was time to start putting a meet together!

I went to my planned opener of 375kg. Not quite a PR [Personal Record], but it was the weight I had been training for. The nervousness was now gone and I was staying in the moment. Matt, Chris and Denis gave me another perfect handoff and the weight flew up better than it ever had in the gym.

Now the dilemma: 380kg was my PR - the reasonable thing to do would have been to put a solid 385kg in the books.

However, I am a bench-only! Moreover, I was a bench-only with six white lights! That is not a reasonable creature.

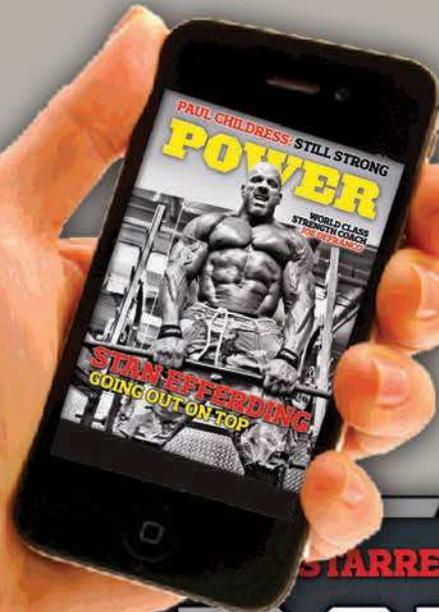
I wanted 390kg. The All-Time Canadian Bench Record was Mike Guay's 387.5kg, which happened to coincide with the Heaviest bench in the AWPC; Robert Vick's 387.5kg. I had never done it in the gym, but I had to take a swing at it.

I kept repeating to myself: "Feels Heavy, Moves Easy." When I took the weight, it did indeed feel heavy, but I put the feeling in a box and I let the lift hap-

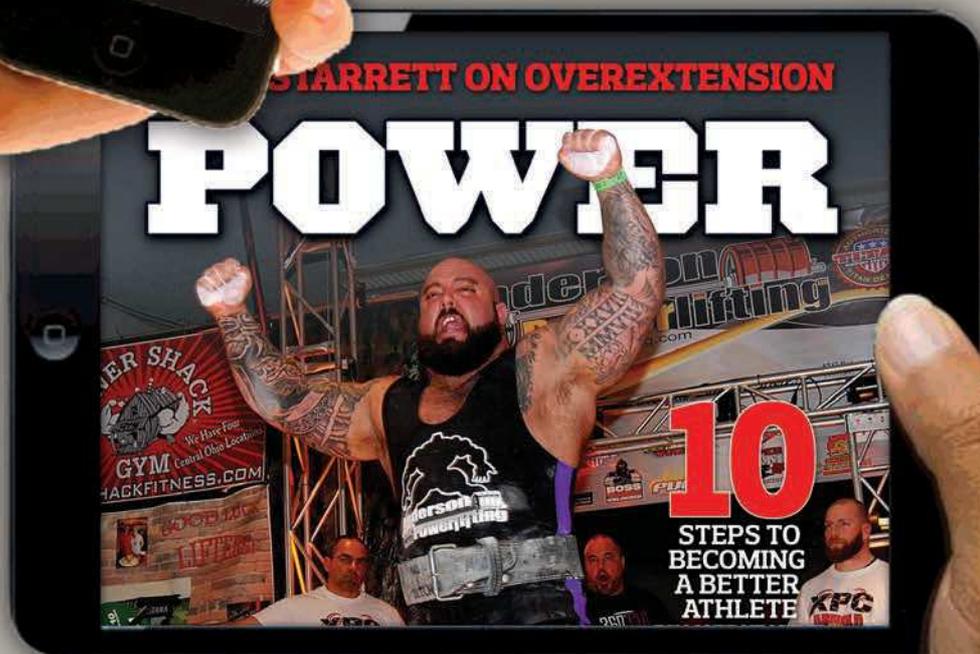
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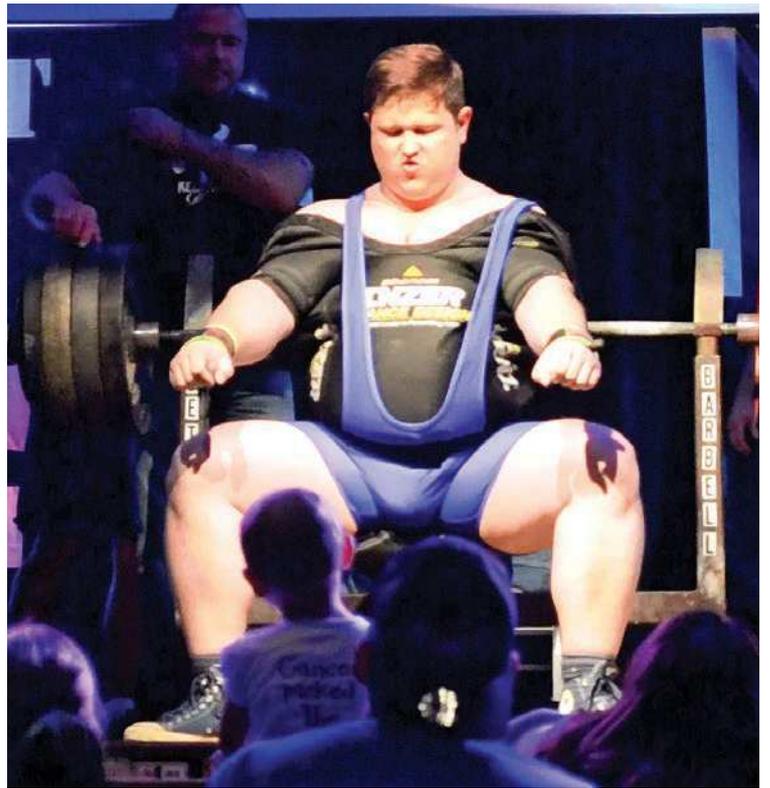
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pen. The weight ate through the SDP's tension and touched shockingly easily. If I had thought about it, it would have scared me, so I didn't think about it.

I got the press call, cranked my heels down and pushed...and pushed... and felt it move, and I pushed some more. It felt like a slow-motion-disco-breakdown. The lift is 11 seconds long according to the video. Those were 11 long seconds.

I ended the day with 9 white lights, all-time Canadian best bench and heaviest lift in the AWPC.

**Do you have a particular training protocol you follow?**

I have about three principles:

1. You have to do the lift the way you do it in competition. On the platform, you will perform the way you train, only worse.
2. It has to be fun. It takes years to get good at this sport, so if you hate the workouts, you will get bored and leave before reaching your potential.
3. Group Dynamics -you need to have people in the room who know what you should be doing and will call you out if you are not doing it.

**What does a typical training week look like for Clint Harwood?**

I've tried most schedules at some point (Westside, Sheiko, Linear etc.) and

have settled on a general program that sees me lifting heavy, full range reps once a week - one day on lockouts and one day on assistance. I'm currently doing squats on Mondays, heavy bench on Thursdays and lockouts on Saturdays.

My workouts are typically 1-2 movements and relatively low reps. My heavy bench workout is down to 4-5 warm-up reps and 3-4 working reps total - the next morning, I am wrecked.

I used to have a lot more volume in my training but as I struggled more and more with recovery, I pared the volume down further and further. I don't know anyone else who trains like this.

It's funny; when I read articles like Sebastian Burns "Hard Work", I feel like a lazy schmuck but I can't argue with the results. Higher intensity and lower volume work for me and they allow me to balance lifting with a career.

**You've been called one of the best technical lifters regarding the bench press. What are your thoughts about being referred to as "The Technician"?**

It is the best compliment I could ever receive. I have consciously and deliberately tried to become the most technical lifter I could be. It has quite simply allowed me to out-lift numerous competitors who are much stronger than I am.

It is part of why I like equipped lifting. I am a nerd with a healthy dose of OCD, and it [the equipment] allows me to express that in lifting. Being able to tweak my technique has allowed me to develop a very consistent career (well... consistent for a bench only!) with very large amounts of carryover.

It has some drawbacks though. I struggle more with different benches than some other competitors - low bench pads and non-adjustable uprights are a lot harder to deal with, as I don't have the brute force to just bull through problems.

**What is the best thing about being Canadian?**

In powerlifting, it was listening to Bill Crawford psyching up one of his lifters by shouting, as only Bill can, "You aren't going to let a Canadian win are you? A CANADIAN?! He'll <censored> apologize for winning!!" I did win and I apologized to Bill.

But the best thing about being Canadian is: William Shatner.

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

Only one actually and it wasn't that bad. I tore, but didn't separate, a tricep some years back doing skull crushers. I was having a seriously "off day", and

everything felt completely wrong. I actually considered leaving the gym, but decided to tough it through because I am both a powerlifter and an idiot.

It took me 6 months to properly rehab it, which was longer than was probably needed, but I am very glad that I spent the time [taking time off]. I have no issues with it anymore and have upped my PR over 300 pounds since the injury.

The funny part of the story is that I was working on a contract in Washington, DC in August at the time. I didn't have a long-sleeve shirt with me, so I wore my raincoat to the office and kept it on inside.

My manager came up to me with his best, "I'm about to deal with a socially deficient tech-nerd" face on and asked why I was wearing a raincoat indoors on a hot summer day.

I explained that my right arm had the most horrid bruise on it that he had ever seen, from tricep to fingertip.

He paused, barked a laugh and explained that he had been a Colonel in the Marines. He had a plan and was going to sell tickets to people to look at it.

We raised about \$100 for the United Way to have people peeking at "The Nightmare Arm."

#### **What are your short term and long-term goals moving forward?**

Short-term goal: Bench an AWPC 900.

Long Term Goal: Be an old man in the sport. When I see a lifter like George Flikas in his 70s crushing 400-pound raw benches, I know that when I grow up I want to be like George.

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

All of them! I started off, like everyone else, doing a routine out of Arnold's encyclopedia of Bodybuilding that had 3x10 of 5-6 movements per day, and training 4-5 days a week with no periodization.

There was a time when I had to have a plan and had to have every number in a spreadsheet but I found that if I just went to the gym and committed to lifting something heavy, I pretty much saw the same gains.

What I have found is that commitment to the workout is more important than the details of the volume, intensity and schedule. If you are showing up every day and hitting it hard with heavy

weights, then the rest is just details.

#### **Do you have any advice for someone entering the Powerlifting game?**

Lots, but the most important thing you can do is to find a solid group of lifters and lift with them regularly. A journeyman in the room beats a master over email every time.

The next most important piece is to avoid injury. It takes a long time to get good at this sport and injuries set you back further than you think. One stupid injury set me back six months. Nothing I could have done in the gym that day would have benefitted me an equal amount to what that injury cost me.

#### **Do you still get excited and amped up when you get ready to compete at a meet?**

Excited? Hell yes! I freak out. A lot of my mental prep is built around giving myself the physical advantages of the "psyche-up" with the focused clarity of a calm lift.

When I did the Arnold in 2007 on the main stage, it was surreal. A degree in Astrophysics does not prepare you to be in spandex in front of that many people.

Earlier in the day I had introduced myself to Ryan Kennelly (who went on to win), and he asked if it was my first time on this stage. I said it was and he replied, "If the crowd gets to you, close your eyes and focus on the stage. Spotters, judges, that's all familiar, it'll calm you down." Great advice.

#### **How do you prepare mentally for a lift?**

I think the psychological aspect of the training is vastly underrated. It really is 90% mental and the rest is in your head. As an Albertan redneck, I resisted it for a long while and now I realize that I did myself a disservice in that delay.

So what I do is sit on the end of the bench and visualize the movement in every detail from start to finish. Then I do a whole psych up, getting as wound up as I can, culminating in a barbaric yawp. The "Yawp" is the trigger for me to stop amping up and get calm. I then get as focused as I can and do the lift, just as I visualized.

This way I can have most of the physiologic advantages of a psyched up lift, without the sloppy technique that often goes with it. It takes some mental discipline and practice but it seems to work well for me.

At that point it is a matter of "letting it happen" rather than trying to "make it happen." This is an important distinction. If you are consciously trying to move yourself through steps while on the platform, you can easily get distracted or lag behind the lift mentally. If you have done the training right, your body will go through all of the steps in the manner that you have trained for.

#### **What assistance exercises helped your bench the most?**

I don't do a lot of other assistance exercises. I do some light work with kettlebells for rotators and shoulders, squats and a lot of lockout work.

The lockout works tends to be raw boards, pin-presses and pin presses from chains. I do all of this work with competition grip. I tried varied grips but didn't get any real benefit out of them, so I dropped them.

I have used grippers and nail bending - all kinds of triceps exercises; whatever seems like fun.

#### **What do you do in your spare time when you're not competing or training?**

A long night of shooting the Desert Eagle just before heavy bench night is not recommended. It's fun, but not recommended.

I am also one of those wacky coffee people. I have an industrial roaster in the basement and a ludicrous espresso machine. The perfect cup eludes me, but I continue to search.

Last year my wife and I took up ballroom dancing. One of the greatest secrets to happiness is being willing to walk into a room and be utterly terrible at the activity at hand. Learning how to get better is one of life's great joys.

#### **Is there anyone you'd like to thank?**

My wife, Pamela, for not only putting up with me but for also actively encouraging my insanity.

The Anvil crew! None of this would have been possible without all of you.

Bruce McIntyre for so many things that I can't list them all.

My family. Thanks for the great genetics and for the encouragement to do something so different and so awesome!

Thanks to Mark and Andee Bell for publishing Power Magazine and giving me the opportunity for an interview. **PM**