

## ALLEN BARIA

as told to *Powerlifting USA* by Curt Dennis Jr. of *Critical Bench*

**Hey, Allen. Thanks for doing this interview. Please introduce yourself.**  
My name is Allen Baria. I am 39 years old, have a beautiful wife Cindy, a nine year old son Evan and five year old twin sons Andrew and Alex. I am from Charleston, West Virginia and I am employed as an operations manager for ThyssenKrupp Elevator.

**What are your current PRs?**

My best raw, paused bench lately has been 655, but I feel I can exceed that by several pounds soon enough.

**How long have you been powerlifting?**

I have competed on and off locally since my teen years. I took most of my twenties and my early thirties off due to the children.

**Tell us about your childhood and how you got into powerlifting.**

I grew up in a rural area, always splitting fire wood and working with my dad (I think my dad may have invented work). Dad is extremely old school, but he and Mom bought my first set of weights and a squat rack when I was in junior high school to help me strengthen for football and wrestling. Of course I had to lift by myself because none of my friends wanted to come to my house because Dad would invent work for them too!

**Who did you look up to when you were coming up as a powerlifter?**

A gentleman I still admire to this day and who lives in our area is Mr. Don Hundley. He has helped me for years with honest words and solid advice.

**What is the craziest thing you have ever seen at a powerlifting meet?**

I saw Brian Siders bench 799 pounds like there was no weight on the bar!

**What is your advice for a novice lifter or to a lifter who is just starting out in powerlifting?**

Work with all of the training methods out there and then determine what works best for you. I have learned so much in the past couple of years from guys much younger than me.

**Which is your favorite lift?**

The bench is my best lift, but I like the squat the most.

**What are your current goals and when is your next meet?**

I am going to bench at the Olympia Bench Press Invitational on September 25th in Las Vegas. I hope to bench in the low to mid sevens.

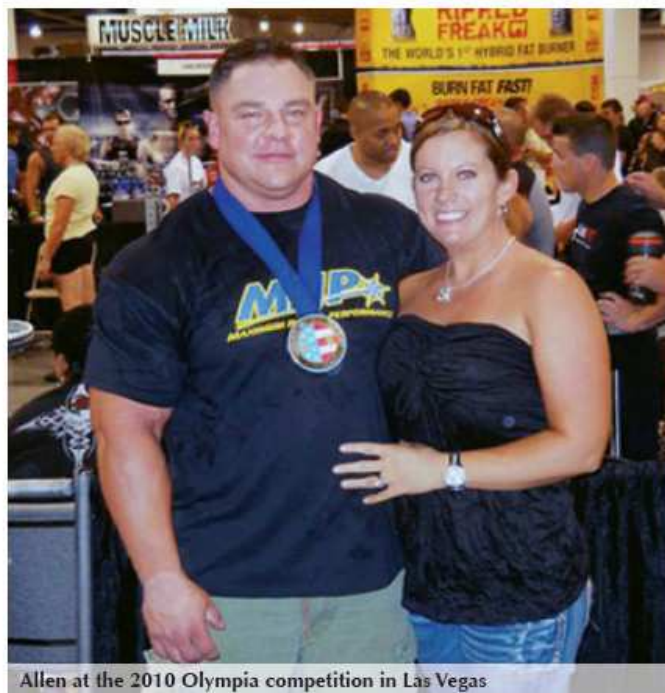
**What are some of the challenges you face training as a powerlifter?**

Finding spotters, keeping training partners, interference with other scholastic sports, lack of a good hardcore powerlifting gym in the area... and my dad thinking up new work to be done instead of lifting weights.

**Tell everyone here the difference between someone who wants to look "pretty" and someone who does what we do? Like, what's the difference between a workout and a training session?**

The difference between a workout and a training session? I can't really tell the difference because I have always been sort of a hybrid. I have always trained like a bodybuilder, but used the weight of a powerlifter. For example, I've benched 500 pounds for 15 reps on a down set and behind the neck pressed 405 for reps. However, as soon as my bench or squat went down five pounds, any sort of diet aimed at looking good was out the window. I'd rather be a little fat and strong than ripped and wondering if my legs can carry me up a flight of stairs!

**What would you tell a powerlifter if they are trying to get to the next level in the sport? Do you believe that powerlifters are required to have a lifestyle of their own?**



Allen at the 2010 Olympia competition in Las Vegas

I would recommend sitting in on a few hardcore training sessions at a reputable powerlifting gym like Westside or Super Training. The methodology and experience of the guys and gals training in those environments is extremely valuable to a young powerlifter. It has been my experience that most powerlifters are very approachable and seem to be genuinely nice folks. Also, the Internet is a great resource. I can find an answer for any question I might have, no matter how stupid.

**How driven would people say you are about being a powerlifter? How does it affect you outside of the gym?**

I am driven about everything I do. I just have to spread my time so thin that some things take precedence over others. My wife gets really aggravated at my competitive nature and the fact that I am never satisfied with myself. If I miss a training session, then you know there was something more important going on. I just don't blow off training because I didn't feel like it. Outside the gym I manage crews of union elevator mechanics, installing new and modernizing old elevators. It is very hectic work and training is the absolute best stress reliever I have found.

**How has powerlifting made you a stronger person?**

It has given me a great deal of confidence in my ability to accomplish daily and long term goals.

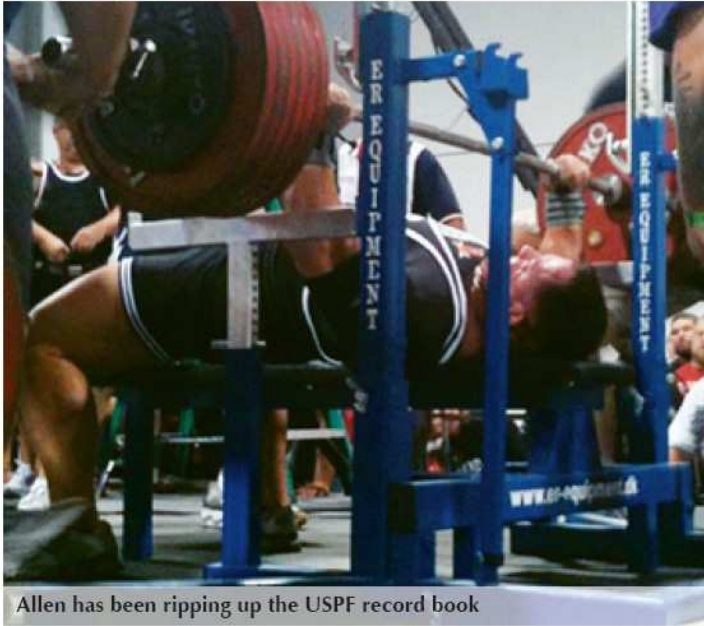
**Do you have training partners? How have they helped? Tell us about them and who they are.**

I lift with two great guys: Scott Criser and Richard Fisher. Scott is a 40 year old Nurse Practitioner and powerlifter who has been at it for years. He's had several serious injuries over the years (such as ripping his left triceps completely off the bone), but remains incredibly strong. It has been his powerlifting knowledge and neurotic punctuality (that's an inside joke, I am always late for our workouts) that has benefitted me the most over the past two years. Richard began training with us several months ago and has brought both comedy and power to our sessions. He is as strong

photos courtesy Allen Baria and Critical Bench

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Allen has been ripping up the USPF record book

as he wants to be on any given day. I have yet to see a weight challenge him, which leads me to believe that he's a professional sandbagger! Just kidding—I owe these guys a tremendous amount of respect and gratitude for tolerating me!

**What are your workouts like? How are they set up? What training meth-**

It's not cheating if everyone is on the same playing field. I do believe that raw benching should determine who's the strongest overall. As far as I am concerned, Mendy's raw record is the only mark I'm concerned with. I believe this because there will certainly be a more powerful single-ply shirt out tomorrow. Soon they'll add three hundred pounds to your max if you can touch and then there will be a better one next year, and so on and so forth. Perhaps we can construct a single-ply shirt of aramid fiber since it just surpassed the spider web for tensile strength per diameter. I think you get my sarcasm!

**What is your view on training in equipment and learning to use it?**

I am not very good in the gear, but since that is what we use to compete I do my best to facilitate. However, it also seems that what I am just learning, everyone else has known for years!

**What do you think is the reason for all the big numbers as of late, like Kennelly's 1075 and Frank's freakish total or Hoornstra's raw strength? Has strength training evolved that much?**

I believe strength training has evolved considerably since I have been lifting. Ideas about how to train, when to train, what to eat, when to eat, and how much rest to get all play a huge role in our evolution as athletes. The gear also plays a huge role as well. Of course, Ryan, Shawn, and Jeremy are all superhuman! Compound this with evolved training, good nutrition

**odology do you follow?**

Until recently, I trained like a bodybuilder. I would go by feel and work what wasn't sore that day. I would always use heavy weight, but would only work one body part a day. I still hang on to that a little, but have since incorporated exercises that work for me into a variation of the basic Westside template.

**What do you think attributes to a big bench these days?**

Gear. There are guys out there that are getting ridiculous poundages out of a single-ply shirt.

**What are the benefits you see as a powerlifter from implementing ideas from bodybuilding?**

The systematic strengthening of auxiliary and stabilizer muscles gained from bodybuilding is critical to heavy multi-joint lifting, in my opinion.

**What recommendations would you make for someone wanting to get stronger in all 3 lifts?**

Constant strengthening of the weakest muscles involved in each lift. Variations of reps and weights, bands, chains, isometrics, time under tension—try it all and decide what works best for you.

**What drives you as a lifter? What is your mindset like during training?**

Competition drives us all. As men, we compete for everything every day. I can't stand for someone to tell me that I can't do something, so my mindset during training is always pretty much "in your face!"

**Was your training any different prior to your last meet?**

Yes, I am finally actually training like a powerlifter!

**Do you think using bench shirts/gear is cheating?**

and gear, their genetic ability and a drive to be the best has set them apart from us mere mortals!

**Do you think the standards have gone up in the sport?**

If you are talking about the gear, absolutely. If you are talking about the judging, then absolutely not. I have seen some very questionable benches get three whites in some feds, especially the belly benches. I personally would like to see the sternum marked on all competitors. The bench is supposed to land at the lower pec not the middle ab!

**What is your nutrition like now?**

Despicable. I am a human garbage disposal. I do, however, get my daily allotment of protein in all of my gluttony. That's usually 300–400 grams per day.

**What changes do you see you can make in order to get to the next level?**

Eat better, train harder, smarter, and safer.

**Is there anyone you would like to thank right now?**

I would like to thank God for blessing me with my family and health, my wife for her continual support of my childish needs to compete, my parents for the genetics to do what we do, and Critical Bench for taking the time to listen to all my nonsense! ☺