



BIG CHILL

BY JESSE BURDICK

I first met Paul Childress 15 years ago in my college gym. I was a pale 180-lb. kid in a tank top in the dead of winter in Buffalo, N.Y., doing a workout right out of the pages of a bodybuilding magazine. Needless to say, I was pretty awesome. When Paul came over to correct me on a form issue and dared to question the magazine's workout routine, I wasn't very receptive. It wasn't until after a few years, a few hospital visits, a move across the country — and realizing that not only was bodybuilding not helping my baseball career, but I wasn't a bodybuilder — that I sought out Paul again.

He was very receptive, welcoming and helpful. This was unexpected, considering the last words I had spoken to him were, "You don't know what you're talking about." Since then he has been a great influence. He is a wealth of training knowledge and strength, and it's my hope that this article will even out my punk-ass, 19-year-old, know-it-all rudeness.

POWER: Give us some history. How and what got you started?

PAUL CHILDRESS: I watched the World's Strongest Man program featuring Don Reinhardt, who at that time was one of the strongest men on the planet and happened to be from my home town of Buffalo, N.Y. I thought it was incredible. Shortly afterward, I received my first weight set at age 8, which was nothing more than a hollow bar and plastic, concrete filled plates. I benched, squatted and pulled just like the guys on TV, even coming up with exercises I thought would help. Contrary to popular belief, I pioneered the conjugate method before my mentor, Louie Simmons! (Emphasis on the sarcasm.)

POWER: What are your best lifts and what's your competition history?

CHILDRESS: Squat: 1,147 (308), bench: 800 (SHW), deadlift: 821 (308), total: 2,700 (SHW). I started competing at local power meets in high school, with a squat of 505, 315 bench and 505 deadlift in the 198 weight class — raw. Belt only. From then on I was hooked. After my college football career ended at Buffalo State College, I went on to compete in the





local state meets and eventually moved to AAU Nationals in 1996, taking fourth place.

These experiences led me to having the privilege of meeting Louie Simmons and making multiple trips to Columbus, Ohio, to train at Westside Barbell. I started competing in IPA contests, where I placed ninth out of 10 competitors at my first World competition. I learned that it was about being strong as much as it was about being smart.

Louie suggested reading materials and different training philosophies, guiding me to a more promising future. Years later in 2001, at the WPO (RIP) in Orlando, Fla., I took second place at 308, losing on account of body weight. I had squatted 947, benched 600 and pulled 771, all big PRs, which put me on the international scene for the first time. That meet gave me the opportunity to compete at The Arnold Classic, never finishing out of the top three. Most notably in 2003 at the GNC Show of Strength, I won the heavyweight division, having a 10-for-10 day, breaking multiple world records. I totaled 2,500-plus and became the first 308 to break that barrier. In 2005 at the WPO in Chicago, I totaled 2,663 at 308, going eight-for-nine with a world-record squat

of 1,146, 694 bench and 821 deadlift. Work responsibilities took me out of the top for a time, but I have managed to find a great fit and recently totaled 2,700 at SHW.

POWER: What are you doing now?

CHILDRESS: In 2005 I accepted a position as an assistant director of sports performance at the University at Buffalo, where I played a crucial role in the Bulls' 2008 Mid-American Conference Championship in football and first Bowl appearance in 50 years. In addition, I had responsibilities to track and field, baseball and softball. This experience saw multiple All Americans and All Conference athletes, as well as helping three athletes to the NFL – James Starks of the Green Bay Packers who is a Super Bowl Champion, Jamey Richard of the Indianapolis Colts who also appeared in a Super Bowl, and Trevor Scott of the New England Patriots.

In 2011 I moved on to establishing my own business, Absolute Performance, where I continue to train NFL clientele and collegiate athletes, as well as high school and youth athletes. We also provide personal training services, nutritional consultation and rehabilitation services. This gives me the opportunity to help others achieve their fitness and

athletic goals as well as provide me the stability to chase the 3,000 barrier.

POWER: How do you train?

Childress: I follow the true Westside Barbell split, utilizing two max effort days and two dynamic effort days. My training days are as follows – Sunday: max effort upper, Monday: max effort lower, Wednesday: dynamic effort upper, Friday: dynamic effort lower. I took my first trip to Westside Barbell in 1997 and have followed Louie Simmons' philosophy on conjugated periodization ever since.

POWER: Do you have a training crew?

CHILDRESS: Yes. It begins with Joe Dougherty. He has been my main training partner for the last 15 years and also happens to be one of the best 181ers of all time. From there we have a fairly large group of individuals who enter in and out of the group from all walks of life. Bench-only guys, shot-putters, up and coming youth and professional athletes, as well – some among the likes of Tom Schmitt (735 BP), Kris Herbert (750 BP), Gary Larson (745 BP), Sheldon Battle US #4 Shot Put 2005, as well as Trevor Scott and Jamey Richard of the New England Patriots.

POWER: How do you deal with

beginning powerlifters? Advice, guidance?

CHILDRESS: We pretty much throw the young guys in with my group and modify their training to fit what they need to do. We strive to perfect movements (squat, bench and deadlift) before any accommodating residence is added. We train simple and master movements first.

POWER: How do you train athletes from pro to amateur level?

CHILDRESS: We treat pro athletes very similar to high-level lifters. We make things more complicated for them to deal more with performance. The younger guys will have muscular imbalance addressed first and try to fix overall muscular weakness. With the amateur athletes, we look to simply develop a well-rounded athlete.

POWER: Due to your devastatingly good looks, most people don't know that you are a highly regarded mind in strength and conditioning. Can you take us through your education, under the bar education? What has shaped you to be a coach and lifter?

CHILDRESS: I assume you are speaking of my dashing sophisticated appearance. I hold a bachelor's degree in health science and nutrition as well as a master's in exercise science and physical education.

More importantly, I have competed in the powerlifting world for 20 years, my under-the-bar experience has taught me much more than I could ever learn in a classroom. I truly believe that to be a well-rounded strength coach, you need to be educated, but you really need time spent under the bar. Too many young strength coaches rely on book knowledge believing that it is enough to be a strength coach. To be an effective coach, people should train for strength themselves to know what works and what doesn't. In my years of training, through college football to being an elite level lifter, I have been through many different programs — including progressive overload, to HIIT training, to Westside Conjugate Method. The first two worked for a period of time, but the only program that has withstood the test of time is the Westside Conjugate Method.

POWER: You have managed to stay relatively injury free. What has kept you healthy in the gym and on the

platform?

CHILDRESS: When it comes to training, I believe in in-season and off-season training. I don't have to be at 100 percent strength level year-round. My off-season training is spent conditioning and increasing overall general physical preparedness. In-season training is dedicated to developing absolute strength and power. The whole preparatory focus is on meet day and peaking for that day. Only doing two meets a year allows me to maintain that philosophy and stay healthy.

POWER: You mentioned you follow straight-up Westside. Can you tell us

what a typical speed session and cycle would look like for the squat?

CHILDRESS: I'll take you through what I would do for typical meet preparation. We start with a strength/speed face using bands. Two strong (blue), one medium (green) and one light (purple) band. Week one we work up to a squat that is moderately hard — four plates. Week two we work up to a one-rep max. Deload for week three. Second phase has changed over the years but, most recently, we work up to five sets of chains and a set of light bands pulling the bar forward from the bottom of the monolift. This helps us stick with normal percent-

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ages in the 45 to 50 percent range. We deload one more time, then the last phase is circa max. I'll use two blue bands for two weeks, week one working up to something moderately hard, then the last week will be a full one rep max. Throughout the meet cycle I wear squat briefs and a belt. Throughout the year I will wear full gear once in a while but only on maximum effort day.

POWER: Do you use these speed sessions with your newer athletes, raw lifters and athletes who are weak?

CHILDRESS: We certainly do. I believe most athletes have a hard time learning to accelerate and move fast, so we find that speed work is very important for teaching aspects of force development. Part of speed training also includes various forms of jumping using kneeling, box jumping, horizontal jumping and weighted jumps.

POWER: In general, do you use a lot of powerlifting/Westside with many of your athletes and even regular clients?

CHILDRESS: Of course. It's the best way to train.

POWER: You have a nice fat dead-



lift. What do you do for it?

CHILDRESS: For a long time I struggled with the deadlift. When I started powerlifting, deadlifting was not a main focus to the Westside system. We did a lot of box squatting and good mornings. I had to rethink my approach deadlift, training heavy once per month, as well

as speed pulling weekly.

I currently rotate deadlifting variations using deficit, accommodating resistance, rack pulls and the lightened method, more ME days. As for DE day, we pull multiple sets of doubles, varying from straight weight to mini-bands doubled to light bands stretched over the bar. On occasion we add chains but it's more of a hassle, as I typically whack myself in the groin. As for my technique, I am a sumo puller but will pull conventional 25 percent of the time to ensure that there are no weak links in the pull.

POWER: What is the worst and best advice you've ever received?

CHILDRESS: I have been very fortunate to have many great mentors, including Louie Simmons, Buddy Morris, Tom Myslinski and Dave Tate. I can honestly say I haven't received any bad advice.

If I can recall the most memorable piece of advice that still sticks with me today, it's what Louie said to me some time ago: "Get the most out of training, don't let training get the most out of you." **PM**

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