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TAKING THE LONG ROAD

BY JEFF "ROBOT" IRION

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Carl Yngvar Christensen has been putting up some massive lifts for a few years, which says a lot because he's only 21. He hit a huge 2,502-lb. total in the IPF and it looks like he could dominate the SHW division for years to come. Power caught up with this kid to talk to him about his controversial training techniques, what it's like to be a powerlifter in Norway and what's in store for him.

POWER: Do you speak English?

CHRISTENSEN: Yes. We have schools here in Norway. I've had English in school for seven years or so.

POWER: Meanwhile, I'm stumbling my way through poorly translated versions of Norwegian web pages trying to get some background information about you. Anyway, what is your height, weight and age?

CHRISTENSEN: 188 cm (6'2"), 357 lbs., 21 years old.

POWER: When did you start competing in powerlifting?

CHRISTENSEN: I started lifting when I was 13 or 14 in the basement on my father's old Weider bench. I remember I bench pressed exactly the same weight (three sets of 10 with 59 lbs.) three times a week for at least a year. I spent a couple of years in the basement doing only light bench presses and other upper body exercises before I entered the local gym. There I started training squats and deadlifts as well. In autumn of 2007 I entered the powerlifting club. I entered my first competition in December 2007. It was a small local competition in the club and I lifted without gear, just knee wraps. I did 573 - 363 - 606 for a 1,543-lb. total.

POWER: What are your current best lifts and what world records do you hold?

CHRISTENSEN: My best squat is 981-lbs. I benched 727-lbs. at the Norwegian Powerlifting Nationals on June 3, 2012. And at the GNC deadlift competition at the Arnold Classic I pulled 832-lbs. My best total is 2,502-lbs. (981 - 710 - 810) from the European Open on May 12, 2012. I don't care much about records. For me it's the competition that counts. So I'm not even really sure about what which world records I hold, but I think my squat and total are IPF world records for both Jr. and Open in the SHW class.

POWER: Let's talk about the IPF SHW squat record. The heaviest "official" squat that has ever been done in IPF competition is Shane Hamman's 1,008-lbs. Brian Siders and Dmitry Ivanov have both successfully squatted 1,014, but the IPF doesn't count their lifts because they bombed on the bench. Furthermore, in 2011 the IPF decided to restructure its weight classes, changing the SHW class from +125 kg to +120 kg. The bottom line is that you now hold the IPF SHW squat record with your 981-lbs. I won't name names, but Mark Bell says your squat record isn't legitimate and he wants to know when you're going to squat more than 1,014-lbs.

CHRISTENSEN: Well, I don't like to talk about numbers that I may or may not lift in the future. Either you lift it or you don't. I have little respect for people standing on the sidelines saying that they could do this or that,

blah blah blah. Do it! But since you are asking, I can't say when I'm going to squat more than 1,014-lbs., but I can say that I will squat a lot more than that in the future.

POWER: What do you do for a living?

CHRISTENSEN: I'm a student. I study constructional engineering at a university. I just finished my second year and I have one year left for a bachelor's degree.

POWER: In the U.S., powerlifting is very much a fringe sport. What is powerlifting like in Norway?

CHRISTENSEN: Powerlifting is also a fringe sport in Norway, although it varies a little from town to town. For example, in my town the people now know a little about it since they have seen me in the local newspapers. In general I would say that if you randomly



asked people on the street in the capital (Oslo), only one or two out of 10 would know what it is. Most people mistake it for weightlifting since they have seen it on TV from the Olympics. That's very typical in the news, they often say "weightlifting" when they are showing "powerlifting". Powerlifting is on the rise now in Norway for sure, and weightlifting is getting smaller and smaller.

POWER: I saw some training videos of you online and they were shocking, to say the least. Squatting 694-lbs. in your underwear? Crushing a full soda can? Are these the kinds of training methods that got you to where you're at now?

CHRISTENSEN: They are not training methods. The squat in the underwear was a project with Lars Samnøy, the national junior team coach, and the Norwegian Powerlifting Federation. They were making a 3D model of the lift or something. I didn't mind, so I did it to help my friend Lars, since it was for his master's degree. The soda can is just a cool trick.

POWER: What does your training look like? Do you have a coach?

CHRISTENSEN: We have an established and well-coached national team in Norway. My trainer is Dietmar Wolf. He is the national open team coach. He is very well known in the IPF, but probably not so much in the U.S. because you have so many feds other than IPF/USAPL. He has done a great job in Norway of educating regional- and club-level trainers.

Every lift I do in training is planned to the detail by Dietmar, every set and every rep. He coaches everyone on the national team, and I only do as he says. I don't know anything about percentages and that stuff, but I'll explain it the best I can. I train Monday through Friday, and I do a variation of squat, bench press and deadlift on each day. Supplemental exercises involve lots of rowing for the upper back and traps, and they're spread throughout the week.

I can give an example on deadlift, it can be like this:

Monday: Deadlift from 5 cm. below knee and stiff-legged deadlift.

Tuesday: Deadlift with wide grip.

Wednesday: Reverse band deadlift.

Thursday: Sumo deadlift.

Friday: Normal deadlift.

Friday's workout might break down like this: Warm-up, bicycle, stretch. Usually I'm already warmed up since we always squat before deadlifts, so all I do is stretch my hamstrings a little before deadlifting. Then I do warm up sets with 135, 225, 315 and working sets could be like: 6x405, 5x440, 4x4x495.

As for set, reps and weight, Dietmar sets it all up in Excel on his computer. I don't know exactly how he measures it out, but he tweaks the amount of weights and reps up and down from week to week depending on where we are on the calendar.

POWER: Where do you train?

CHRISTENSEN: Most of the time I train at the local gym in my town with a few friends. It's an okay gym but I train as much as possible in my powerlifting club, Brumunddal AK. It's a very good club, mostly because of the trainers. Dietmar lives and trains there and Roger Eriksen, Norway's first junior world champion in powerlifting, is now the club trainer. Before him we had the great Jørgen Haug as club trainer. Also, many other good lifters train there but it is a 40-minute drive from my town and a 30-minute drive from the town where I study, so it's not so often that I go there. I know you are all thinking, "A 30-40 minute drive is nothing," but you Americans have another mentality when it comes to driving. I've heard about Americans driving 5-6 hours one way just to go to a restaurant.

POWER: I've never heard of anyone driving that far to go to a restaurant, but this is your interview so you can say whatever you want! Your meet squats are always deep and fast. Does Dietmar call your attempts? Why don't you put some weight on the bar?

CHRISTENSEN: Yes, Dietmar calls my attempts for the most part. I'm glad I don't have to think about it. In the IPF you only have 1 minute after the lift to call the next attempt, and then you have to follow up on the scoreboard to see what your competitors have called. I don't have time to do all of that! Plus, I'm usually the heaviest lifter, so we have to be a little smart with the calls because the other lifters can call their attempts to try and win by body weight.

Dietmar likes to be a little conservative with the weights that he calls because he is all about long careers. Theoretically it takes about 10 to 15 years, maybe longer, for a drug-free athlete to reach his or her potential in powerlifting. We have seen so many good junior lifters burn out after a few years of international competition.

My squats might look fast, but between the heavy weights and the gear, the lift almost always feels heavy, no matter how easy it is. So the feeling can be very different from how it looks!

POWER: In one of your YouTube videos you say that it was

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only your "second time (squatting) over 100 kg since Sept. 4, 2010." Were you injured or something?

CHRISTENSEN: Yes, I was injured, and I still am. It's my knees. There is always something wrong with them. Nothing super serious, but always some irritation — like Osgood-Schlatter syndrome, jumper's knee, Sinding-Larsen-Johansson syndrome and others. It has always been a problem, no matter what I do. Soccer, snowboarding, skateboarding and other things that I did when I was younger gave me trouble with my knees, as well. My father is the same way.

Right now, after this spring's competitions, it is really bad. So sometimes I have to really ease down on the squat training. This is something that really holds me back.

POWER: From watching your YouTube videos, there were two bench movements you seem to like that really stood out: benching with your feet in the air and incline benching with bands. Can you explain to us the reasoning behind both of these movements?

CHRISTENSEN: Well, I don't like or dislike anything; it's Dietmar that has the control. Of course, we have a dialog on what works and what doesn't, but he is the boss! Benching with feet up is like a lazy man's floor press, although the floor press has never been an exercise we have used. It's a good bench variation because you don't get the same tightness as if you had your feet on the ground and full leg drive. So it's a little more taxing on the upper body than normal bench press.

Incline with bands is because incline bench can be a little tough for big guys' shoulders at the bottom, so it's a way to train incline bench with light enough weight at the bottom and a little extra weight at the top so you get some training out of it.

POWER: Regarding your deadlift, I noticed that you used to use a hook grip but have since converted to a mixed grip. Why the switch?

CHRISTENSEN: Every time I came up to around 777-lbs. and over I felt the hook grip start to slip. At the Arnold in 2011 I lost my grip with 815-lbs. After that, I thought that it was ridiculous to let the grip decide the deadlift, especially when you have big hands and you normally don't have grip problems. Unfortunately, I don't have quite big enough hands for a heavy hook grip.

Everything is better with a double overhand grip, so it is best to pull with a hook grip. I have this problem with the deadlift where the bar digs into my thighs and it stops. This often gives big guys trouble with their deadlift lockout, and the problem is worse on the side of the supinated/under hand because that shoulder is automatically a little more behind than the other. So, on that side it digs even more into the thigh.

I am now trying a little more with hook grip again in training to see if I can get it to work. If only my hands were a little bigger! Damn, I would give so much for an extra centimeter of fingers!

POWER: Do you have any affiliation with www.thepowerlifters.com? If so, what can you tell us about that site?

CHRISTENSEN: That's Stian Walgermo's site. He is a fellow lifter of mine on the national team. It's actually a site that started out from his bachelor's degree in computer engineering. It's a very good site for training journals with all sorts of statistics and graphs and whatnot. He has asked me over a hundred times to start a jour-

nal there but I'm too lazy! Dietmar keeps track of my training and statistics for me, so I see no reason to keep track of it myself. It's a great site that I would recommend to everyone that makes their own training routine.

POWER: I saw an article about how you won the sports award in Hedmark, and apparently you got \$10,000. Tell us about this award and what you did to earn it.

CHRISTENSEN: I received the award for sport in Hedmark based on my achievements in the year 2010 (Hedmark is my region, Norway is divided into 19 regions). I got 10,000 Norwegian kroner, which is about \$1,692, I think. I was presented with the award at Norway's Idrettsgallaen ("the Sports Gala," a televised show that honors the past year's Norwegian sports and athletes' achievements).

POWER: Speaking of money, let's talk about the Cup of Titans. Your recent 2,502 total would've earned you second place this year (15 kg behind Malanichev), and you would've won 350,000 rubles (more than \$10,000). Any chance we'll see you at a future Cup of Titans meet?

CHRISTENSEN: Unfortunately, it's not allowed for IPF lifters to compete in the Cup of Titans anymore. For that reason, you won't see me in that competition ever, but it's a really interesting meet so I enjoy watching it, just like I enjoy watching WPC meets, Strongman, etc. For me, it's only drug-free sport that I will do. Besides, if one chooses IPF competition and drug-free lifting, it's certainly not for the money, because there is none!

POWER: Would you ever compete raw? Perhaps in the IPF's new classic division?

CHRISTENSEN: First, I have to say that I like the equipment. I do hope the equipment will stay forever. Not any new and more extreme equipment, or less, but just like it is now. I would compete raw if the IPF took the equipment away, but I hope the equipment stays.

I can accept people's arguments against equipment, such as they want to see what the lifter can lift without "help," it's easier and the sport becomes available to more people but there is one argument I hate, and that is when people say the equipment is unfair because one lifter "gets" more from it than another. Bullshit! Then, everything is unfair. It's about training with the gear and how tight the gear is, nothing else! Short arms, long arms, short thighs, blah blah blah, those factors will be at play in raw lifting, as well.

I will agree with one thing: Powerlifting can take away the equipment, no problem. In fact, that would be easier, but I don't want "easier". Then again, I'm not doing powerlifting because I love wearing a tight shirt, I do it because I like measuring my strength and striving to be the best. That can be done fine with or without gear. Bottom line: Gear is not unfair!

POWER: Is there anyone you'd like to thank?

CHRISTENSEN: I would like to thank my family and my friends. As for powerlifting, I would like to thank my former trainer Jørgen Haug and my current trainer Dietmar Wolf. PM

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