



# MUSCLEPHARM POWER SPOTLIGHT:

BY MICHELE ATKINSON

## DEBBIE SCHWARTZ DAMMINGA

BY MIKE REILLY

At the 2012 APF Master Nationals, the 50-year-old Debbie Damminga set national and world records in squat, deadlifts and total. She won best lifter and is an all around badass – a true inspiration to all her teammates and to lifters everywhere. Damminga is not strong for a 50-year-old woman; she is just flat-out strong and demonstrates that there is no excuse for being anything other than exceptional.

**POWER:** What are your stats?

**DAMMINGA:** I'm 50 years old (I turn 51 on July 4), I'm 5'7" and usually compete in the 148-lb. weight class.

**POWER:** What are your best lifts?

**DAMMINGA:** My best multi-ply full meet lifts are 465-lb. squat, 275-lb. bench and 460-lb. deadlift for a 1,200-lb. total. I've also pulled 501.55 in a deadlift-only multi-ply meet. I've benched 253 lbs. and deadlifted 457 lbs. in a WABDL meet, for the best women's coefficient deadlift in WABDL history.

**POWER:** What are your biggest powerlifting accomplishments?

**DAMMINGA:** The 501.55 deadlift was a big deal for me. It's a number I never imagined I'd lift.

**POWER:** What's your favorite lift? Why?

**DAMMINGA:** I love to deadlift, probably because I'm built right for it. My arms are ridiculously long and my torso is very short. I have a pretty nasty case of scoliosis, which helps my deadlift but hinders my bench.

**POWER:** Where do you train?

**DAMMINGA:** My husband, Gregg, and I have a gym in our home in Eagan, Minn., called Twin Cities Barbell.

**POWER:** Do you have a coach?

**DAMMINGA:** Gregg is my coach and is genius at seeing corrections I can make with my form, and saying just the right thing to help me make them. I am so fortunate to have his help.

**POWER:** How and when did you get into powerlifting?

**DAMMINGA:** I started powerlifting in 2004 when I was 43. I competed in three bodybuilding shows, had lots of fun, but knew the sport was not really for me. Some powerlifters in the gym noticed how strong I had become from the bodybuilding training and asked if I'd like to join them on bench days. Gregg became involved and I started deadlifting and squatting soon after.

**POWER:** Do you have a background in other sports?

**DAMMINGA:** In high school I played basketball. "Played" might be too strong a word. I was on the team. I was not a good player, but loved the team, the competition and being on the court. In my early 40s I rowed for a few years and again loved the competition, the team and the training.

**POWER:** Lifting seems like a family affair. Tell us more about that.

**DAMMINGA:** Gregg and I began powerlifting in 2004 and our son, Dave, joined us in 2008 after he graduated from Yale. Our daughter, Cara, is a competitive runner and a big supporter of our lifting. I have such a wonderful opportunity to share a hobby with my husband and son that we all enjoy so much. It's a way for Gregg and me to spend free time together doing something we both love. It gives me the opportunity to know Dave not only as a mom, but also as a teammate and friend. I can't imagine another activity that we all would enjoy so much. All that, plus I have the best spotters in the world, two huge strong men who make sure I'm always safe and taken care of.

**POWER:** What are your goals for 2012?

**DAMMINGA:** First and foremost, keep improving and stay healthy. I've squatted down and up with 501 lbs. in a meet, but was red-lighted for depth. I know I can come back and get that. Also, I can't help but have an eye on a 1,300-lb. total.

**POWER:** Long-term goals?

**DAMMINGA:** Staying in the sport as long as I can and breaking as many records as I can. I really like records.

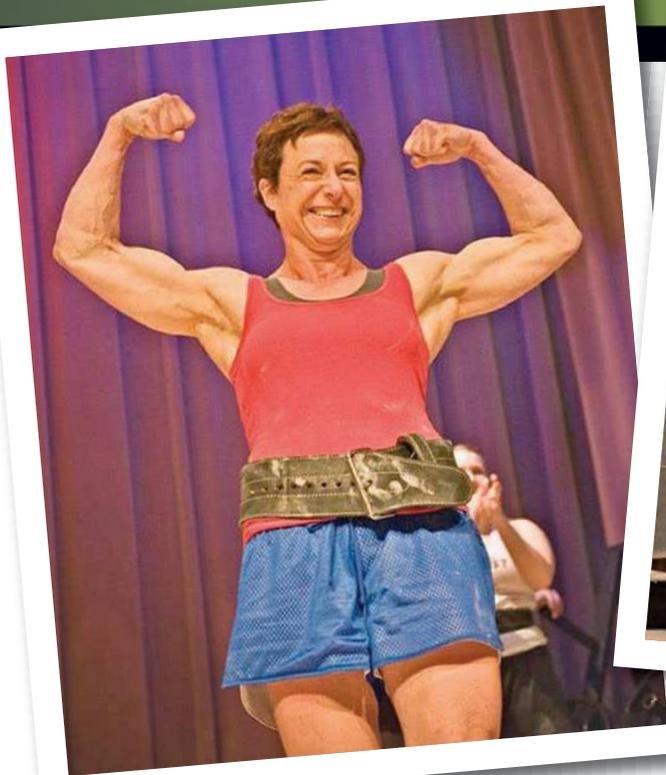
**POWER:** What do you do for work?

**DAMMINGA:** I am fortunate that I don't have to work outside of our home. Gregg does wish, however, that I would learn to mow the yard.

**POWER:** Who are your biggest fans?

**DAMMINGA:** My family and our team.

**POWER:** Do you have any superstitions?



**DAMMINGA:** You betcha I do. I like to think of them as consistent habits that help me to succeed, but others have pointed out that they are indeed superstitions. Let's see ... salted nut bar after weigh ins, lucky underwear, special pen in my training notebook, TicTac powermints in my bag, the list goes on. But all these things are within my control and it makes me feel prepared when I have them. I feel like I can roll with anything that goes wrong in the meet, that's just liftin'.

**POWER:** What do you do to get amped for a meet or attempt?

**DAMMINGA:** I'm pretty quietly focused when I lift, but really hate to fail when people are watching me, so I'm a good meet lifter. I can always count on Gregg or Dave to get me ready for a lift in exactly the way I prefer. I'll run through a list of cues in my head while I'm getting wrapped or strapped and ask them to yell a cue or two to remind me during the lift. Aside from that, I'm a big fan of '70s funk when I'm training and love it when I can get some played at a meet.

**POWER:** If you weren't powerlifting, what would you be doing?

**DAMMINGA:** I don't know, but I would still find a way to compete, either in a different sport or in some other competitive endeavor. Powerlifting has shown me that I can accomplish things I never imagined I could do by consistently training and just flat

out being stubborn. I think I could apply what I've learned here to many other challenges.

**POWER:** What lifters do you admire most? Why?

**DAMMINGA:** When I began powerlifting I met a lovely lady in her 70s named Melicent Whinston. She's still competing in her 80s, in both bench and deadlift. That's just incredible. Also, I met Kara Bohigian-Smith soon after I began powerlifting. Kara has always been there to answer questions and provide encouragement. Not only does Kara inspire with her lifting accomplishment, but also with her unassuming nature and sweetness. But more than anyone, I am inspired by my husband, who gives so much to our team. He provides so much advice and guidance to our team, coaching many of us while sacrificing some of his own gym time and focus. He is what makes our team possible.

**POWER:** What influenced you to start competing?

**DAMMINGA:** When I began training in 2004 I saw that the Washington State WABDL bench record for my age was 159.7 lbs. That felt challenging, but attainable, and I really wanted it. I didn't get it at that meet, but I came back and got it in another meet. I fell in love with the platform, the camaraderie at meets, the great feeling of accomplishment when things go well and the opportunity to set and achieve goals.

**POWER:** Is there anything you would like to add?

**DAMMINGA:** I'd like to say how much I appreciate our team and how we are able to support one another. I'd also like to thank Mike Reilly for hooking me up with Mark Bell and giving me this opportunity to tell my story in Power. **PM**