

BIDING HIS TIME CHRIS DELLA FAVE

BY JEFF "ROBOT" IRION

PHOTOS BY POWERSHOTS PHOTOGRAPHY, COURTESY OF MHP

H

ow old are you, how tall are you, what weight class do you compete in and what are your best lifts? I am 26, I'm 6 feet tall and compete in the multi-ply 242-lb.

class. My best competition lifts are a 1,000 squat, 705 bench and 843 deadlift. My best total was 2,465, done in a drug-tested meet.

How long have you been competing and what were your lifts when you started out? I did my first meet when I was 18. I competed at 220 and I went 600-400-600, but I started really competing after I was done playing football at the University of Rhode Island, so I have been competing for around six years.

Where do you train? I train out of my gym in New Jersey, called Bergen County Barbell. It is a sports performance center mainly for athletes, but I have a group of powerlifters who train with me.

I used to own my own gym with a friend of mine. It was called Iron Lion, and it was awesome. It was a warehouse gym. Probably around 2,000 square feet of blood, sweat and puke. We trained a few local football teams, baseball players, wrestlers and powerlifters, but then my friend moved to the middle of nowhere and we had to sell it. So after a while of not training people, I got bored and decided to start a new business. Instead of going through

all the bullshit of buying equipment and finding a place, I decided to train my clients out of an existing gym — and Bergen County Barbell was born.

It's located inside of FORCE Performance in Ho-Ho-Kus, N.J. FORCE is a massive 20,000-square-foot athletic performance complex. It has 40 yards of turf on one side and 30 yards on the other side. It has eight power racks, four platforms, my monolift, competition bench, and all the specialty bars, bands, chains and weight you could possibly need. Bergen County Barbell/FORCE is the best place in the area to train not only because of the facility, but because of the people in there busting their asses day in and day out, getting results. Check it out at facebook.com/bergen-countybarbell.

You work as a high school teacher in New Jersey. Do your students ever ask why you're so jacked? Do they give you crap for not being tan? Yes, along with everyone else who works in the school. They usually ask if I am a bodybuilder, and then I have to explain that I am too pretty to be a bodybuilder, and what powerlifting is. From October through March I get a ton of crap for not being tan, but it's beach season now so I'm jacked and tan!

You played Division I collegiate football, and coach high school football. What elements of powerlifting do you use when training high school football players? And just as importantly, what elements of powerlifting do you leave out? I have been the strength and conditioning coach at every



school I have coached at, and I do use a lot of powerlifting "elements" — but not as many as you would think. Two out of the three schools were smaller public schools that never really had a "strength coach," so the players never really trained the way I would want them to. With them there are a lot of basic movements, just trying to get them strong enough to hopefully be able to use more powerlifting elements down the road. I have them squat and bench every week. Their accessory varies depending on their strength levels. I like to have my athletes do a lot of single leg movements because they are usually weak and imbalanced, so I want to fix that as early as possible. On their bench day I have them do a lot of triceps work because it is the most applicable to football. Their other day would be a mix of some type of explosive movement, like cleans or dumbbell snatches, depending on the kids, and back and shoulder work. The main goal is to get these kids in the weight room three or four days a week training together and building that camaraderie they're going to need to last throughout the season.

Enough about high school kids, let's talk about you. What does your training system look like? I can't say

I follow one distinct training system. Although I have only been in the sport for a few years, I was able to meet and become friends with some strong dudes — and I pick their brains whenever I can to tweak what I do with myself, as well as with my athletes.

My personal training system is different from what I have my training partners do, and really different from what I have my athletes do, but it all revolves around the big three and other compound movements like rows, shoulder presses, hang cleans, etc. Everything I have myself and my athletes do is going to make them stronger by focusing on their weak points. The stronger I can make their weak points, the stronger they will be overall. For example, one of my training partners is awful out of the hole in his squat, so I have him hammer his paused squats, lower/upper back work and quads. Another training partner is great out of the hole but stalls halfway up, so he does a lot of hamstring, hip, glute and oblique work to fix the issues.

Something I do, as well, is to make sure that everyone is always working on their core. I have seen, and dealt with personally, some low back issues. That isn't something you want to have

to worry about now or in 10 years, so we focus on really warming up that low back before we train and then hammer the core work afterward. It has paid big dividends so far.

What kind of core work do you find most effective? I spoke a lot with Brian Carroll after he hurt his back and worked with Dr. McGill to rehab his injuries. Much of what he said made sense, so I applied it to my training. Getting not only my abs strong with weighted ab movements, but getting my low back stronger — as well as my obliques — has made a huge difference in my training.

Some things I do are weighted sit-ups, heavy side bends, McGill crunches, weighted leg raises and planks. But I think that what helps my core the most is all the compound movements I do. I am keeping my core so tight when I squat, bench and deadlift, my abs are continually getting work throughout my workout.

Since you mentioned that you've dealt with some low back issues, let's talk about injuries. Have you had any serious injuries? If so, how did you come back from them? If not, to what do you attribute this? Knock on wood, but I have not had any serious issues come from powerlifting. I have strained

1076.9 Pound Bench. Any Questions?

Tiny Meeker



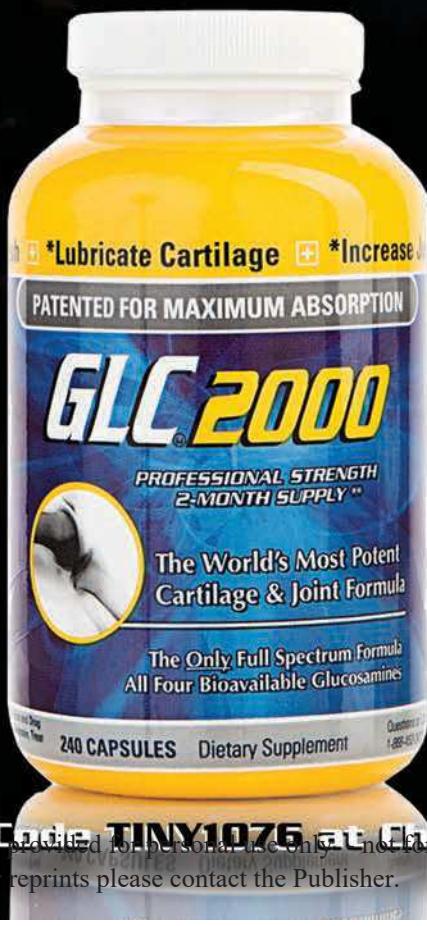
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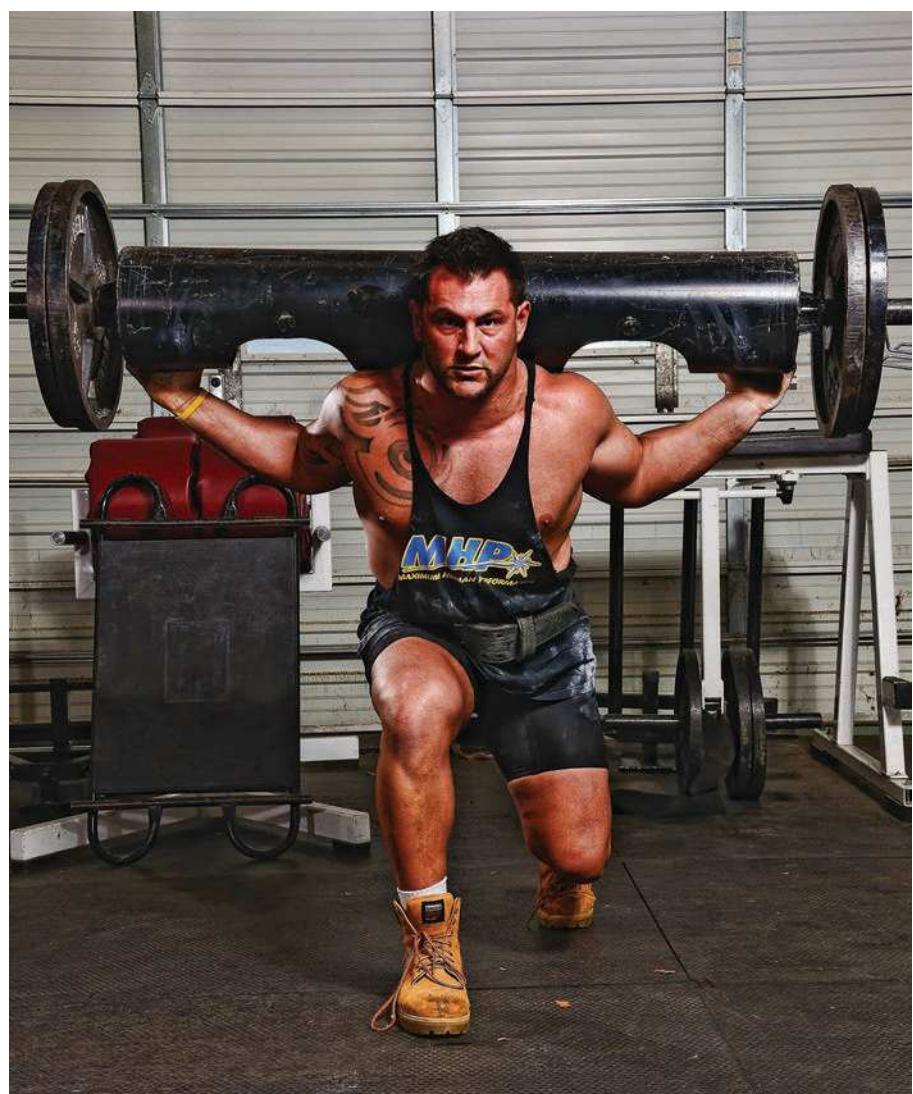
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my low back a few times, but I attribute this more to not listening to my body and neglecting core work. Besides that, I've had some minor tendonitis, but again I think that was more of me just being stubborn and not listening to my body. I actually got hurt more playing football than I have powerlifting. I have broken my ankle and hand, sustained more concussions than I can count, and had some shoulder problems. But the most serious injury was probably my freshman year of college when I ruptured my quad tendon, tore my quad and tore my meniscus in my right knee. I actually finished that game and played the week after because I thought it was just a knot in my knee, but really it was my quad tendon rolled into a little ball! I never got surgery on the quad, just the knee, and I've never had an issue with it — knock on wood. The recovery time from that wasn't too bad, just four to six weeks after getting my knee scoped. But the idea of not being able to play and/or lift drove me absolutely insane, so I used that and applied the same work ethic with my rehab as I did with my training. Luckily things worked out.

You used to squat without knee wraps, but now you use them. What were your reasons for not wearing them in the past? What did you do to help you get accustomed to knee wraps? When I first started lifting, I never used them — and especially when I was training for football, I never saw a reason to put them on. So when I started competing, it wasn't something I thought about. I tried them a couple times in the past and they really threw off my form and technique.

What people don't understand about raw vs. multi-ply lifting is that you can't just put on some type of equipment — whether it is knee wraps, a bench shirt or a squat suit — and just expect to lift 50/100/200 more pounds. It comes from practice, a lot of practice. So that is why I ignore all the people out there who say that geared lifting is cheating because I've never seen a bench shirt or squat suit with no one in it lift any weight before. Okay, off-topic, sorry.

After tweaking my knee and my back in training during a training cycle, it made sense to be smart and start using wraps. So, to get used to them, I did what any meathead would do:



have someone put them on as tight as possible every squat so that I got used to the pain and go from there. Looking back at it, it probably wasn't the smartest idea, but it worked for me.

Why are you so good at deadlifting? I wouldn't say I'm good at deadlifting, but it would have to be my best lift out of the big three and it is by far my favorite to do. There is nothing better than walking up to a bar with 800-plus lbs. on it and picking it up — it's a real primal thing. But as far as the reasons why I do pull well, I think it's a combination of my build (long arms) plus my strong hips, both of which definitely help me pull sumo. Something that really helped my deadlift was doing low box squats as a secondary movement. I would do them super wide, really low (like 12 inches), and beltless. That may be the big thing that helped me pull my 843 at the Night of the Living Deadlift a few years ago.

You might not say that you're good at deadlifting, but we'll say it! An 843 deadlift is very good! Share the wealth and the weight and give us three deadlift tips. Don't neglect your grip. I luckily have big meaty hands and I have never had grip issues, but I know a ton of guys who have been so close to locking out a big pull, and it just starts to slip and they lose it. So make sure not to use straps all the time. I use them sometimes if I deadlift for higher reps, but never with low reps. Work with thicker bars in training, if possible, and make sure that in all training you are squeezing the hell out of the bar.

Something that really added pounds to my pull, after I figured out how to do it, was pulling the slack out of the bar before you start to pull. When done correctly, you can take anywhere from one to three inches off your pull. That's a lot, especially if you pull sumo. It is hard to explain, but to understand what I mean,

go look up Andy Bolton's pulls and see how much slack he gets out of the bar before he starts. A good way to practice this is to put enough weight on the bar so it won't lift up with one hand. Then get into a good position and try and lift the bar using one hand. If you are doing it right, it will feel like the bar is coming off the ground, but it's not. That's the slack coming out.

Hip position is something a lot of guys don't get when they're deadlifting. We are not Olympic lifters, so there is no need to start our pull in the same position as they do. They are strong as hell, but they need to get the bar over their head, while all we need to do is stand up with it. So with that being the case, we need to find the best position for our hips that creates the most torque and helps with the explosion of the bar off the floor.

So your deadlift is your best lift, but which lift has been the most difficult for you? And what helped you bring it up to where it is today? In the past, my bench always lagged behind my other two lifts. Granted, it still does and I lose a ton of poundage on my total because of it, but it has slowly been making a turn for the better. Some things that have really helped are triples to different boards. I would usually go from a three-board to a two-board down to a one-board. This way I was feeling the weight as well as working with it closer to my chest. It is a goal of mine to bench 800 lbs., and with the team I have in my corner I see it as a realistic possibility.

Your YouTube username is The-BigD2800. Were you trying to send a message to the ladies when you chose that username? You weren't supposed to tell anyone about that. They need to figure it out on their own!

But speaking of 2,800, that brings us to our next question. What are your goals in the sport? Hitting 2,800 is the long-term goal for me at 242. It is a way away right now, but I have no doubt in my mind that it is doable. Some shorter-term goals are to break the US 242 record (2,630) and the 242 world record (2,690), and to do it drug-free.

You've mentioned a few times now that you're drug-free. That begs the question: Why not compete in the IPF? Many consider it to be the most prestigious powerlifting federation. And

while the equipment is different (raw or single-ply as opposed to multi-ply) and the judging is stricter, you're a strong guy. I get that question all the time, or "Why aren't/don't you go on?" My response has been the same since I started competing: When it's time for that, I most likely will, but for now, I have some things to prove without it. Do I think it will give me an edge? Yes. Will it level the playing field? Yes. But why not see how strong I can possibly get without them and go from there? And besides, it makes it even better when I beat people who are on.

As far as the IPF goes, I have coached some guys who have competed in the IPF, as well as spoken to guys who have lifted in that federation, and I always get the same consensus: The IPF is more worried about themselves than the lifter. Some examples of this include not passing lifts that are obviously good, giving people a hard time about equipment, as well as other things that I'm not going to get into. To top it all off, have you ever been to an IPF meet? It feels like you're at a funeral, not a powerlifting competition. Powerlifting does not pay the bills, so it seems dumb for me to choose to lift in a federation that is going to make the sport harder than it already is.

You've also dabbled in Strongman. What success have you had in that sport? Is it something you're going to seriously pursue, or is it just for fun? While getting ready for football in college the gym, I competed in three of Strongman competitions. It was fun because all the college guys would get together every weekend and train, and the competition would be the last workout we all had together before we all went to camp. I won the one my senior year, took second one year and took third another. The one professional Strongman competition I did was in Philadelphia three years ago. I was approached during a powerlifting meet by the director, and he set everything up. It was a great experience, and those pro Strongmen are total freaks. We were outside on concrete, in the middle of July in about 110-degree sun, and those guys did two other events before we did the tire deadlift. That was a great time, but I think I am going to stick to powerlifting for the time being. I have too many things left that I still need to accomplish

You pull sumo in powerlifting and conventional in Strongman (because sumo isn't allowed). Do you train the conventional deadlift much? Do you find that it carries over to your sumo pull? When I first started lifting in high school, as well as competing, I pulled conventional. I switched over to sumo after realizing that I should use my long arms for something other than hurting my bench. I never really trained my conventional pull from the floor, but did do a lot of block pulls conventionally, until recently. I am currently in the middle of my offseason training, and pulling strictly conventional because I feel that if I can get my lower back stronger, it will help my squat as well as my sumo pull.

What does your diet look like? My diet is put together entirely by Nick Shaw at Renaissance Personalization (RPS). I was lucky enough to become part of team RPS and have been working with him since March. I don't want to give away all of his secrets, but it involves manipulating carbs and is backed by science. The guys over at RPS are awesome and do a great job with their clients. On top of that, I am lucky enough to be sponsored by the best supplement company on the market, MHP, so I'm able to supplement the diet from RPS with the best supplements out there.

How did your MHP sponsorship come about? My MHP sponsorship came about, as weird as it is, while I was with another company. I was having problems with my sponsor at the time and happened to be at the Arnold in Columbus. I was talking to friends of mine who were with MHP and told them what was going on and to see if they could do anything for me. Once my contract ended with my other sponsor, I reached out to them again and MHP was more than happy to pick me up. I have been with them going on three years and it was the best decision I made.

Is there anyone you'd like to thank? First, I would like to thank Power for putting my pretty face in the magazine. My awesome sponsors, MHP, Overkill Strength and Renaissance Periodization, for providing me with the best supplements, equipment and nutrition in the industry. My family, my girlfriend and my friends for putting up with all my crap, as well as my training partners for always having my back. **PM**