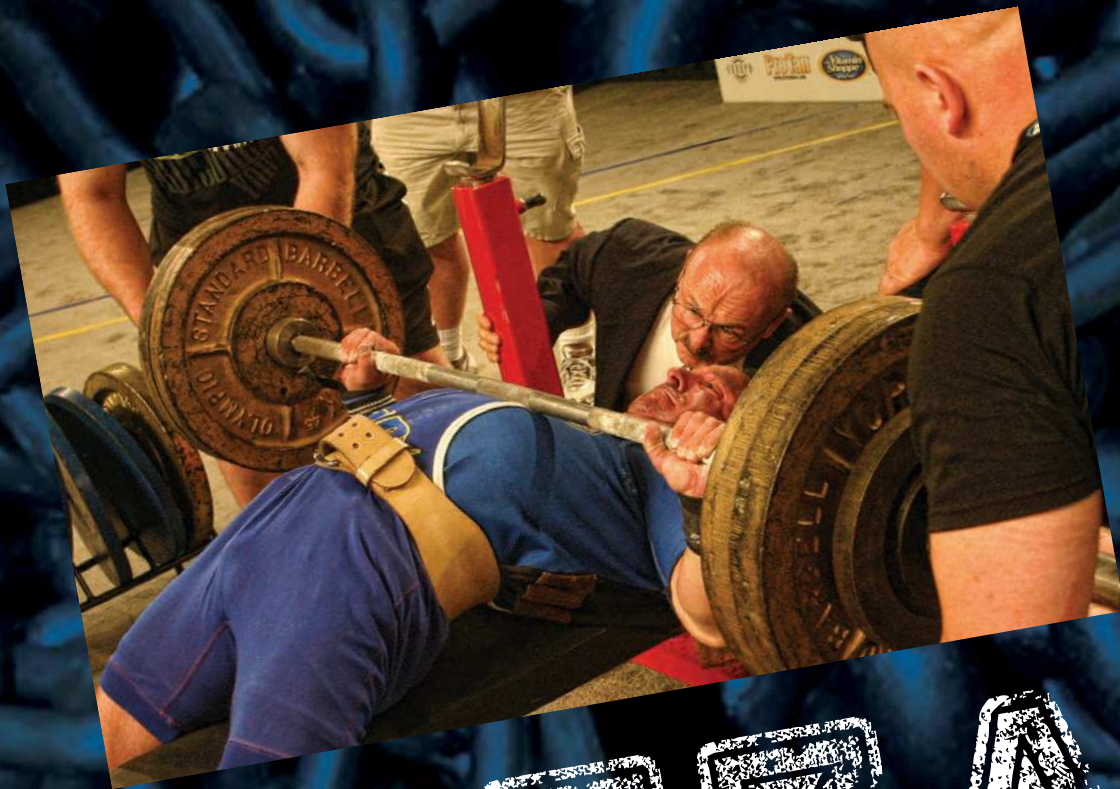




# GETTING TO KNOW JOE

BY MICHAEL OCHNICKI  
PHOTOS BY MHP



# MAZZA

## **Who is Joe Mazza?**

Well, Joe Mazza is a father, a retired police officer, and someone who really enjoys powerlifting. I live in Roxbury, New Jersey. I hold the all-time 165 lb multi-ply, 165 lb single-ply, and 181 lb single ply bench press records (705, 635, and 640). I've moved up to 181's and haven't been doing as much multi-ply work anymore - I've been doing a lot of single-ply.

## **What are some of your other big numbers?**

I won the Olympia for the fourth time this year. At the Arnold this year, I benched 800 off of a 2-board. I still flirt around with the heavier weight, but I just feel much better now with single-ply. You know, I'm going to be 49 years old next month. It just seems that the multi-ply stuff takes a lot longer to recover from for me, and I just feel more comfortable now in a single-ply shirt, even though those weights aren't far off.

## **Why did you choose to get into geared lifting? Do you ever do any raw training?**

Early on, the attraction for me was the Arnold Classic. That was the big show, with all of the big names - all of the guys that I wanted to be with were all competing there on the main stage. That's when I was first introduced to multi-ply, and that became my goal. That's pretty much why I got into the equipment. Those were the best times - I met all of the best lifters, and we would all be at the biggest events, and it was a lot of fun!



At the time, I was using one of those blast shirts, and I couldn't understand how guys were doing that much more weight than me. I learned more about the equipment from the guy I train with now, Jim Parish, and it just took off from there. We started winning a couple of big events and putting up bigger numbers. I actually got invited to Bench America, where I met Billy Carpenter and some other big names. I won that [competition] and things took off from there.

**Who do you train with besides Jim? Where do you train?**

I train at a small lifting club with Jim. We have called it Joe Average Strength with a bunch of guys who love the sport. I train a whole bunch of kids in town since my son was a big wrestler there. It just steamrolled ever since he was done with high school. I also coach my little son in wrestling now. I've been training kids for about 8 years nonstop now. It's great, it's rewarding. I don't charge anybody a dime. They come here and they like to get strong and they've been having a lot of success, and it keeps my kids into it, too.

**How long have you been lifting? Were you the guy that benched 225 the first time he laid down on the bench, or is your success mostly just a result of hard work over a long time?**

I got into lifting probably when I was around 13. My older brother was a very good lifter and was very strong, so I did have some natural ability. I was always a little bit stronger than anybody my weight, and I just really enjoyed lifting from the start. I loved to play football and baseball when I was young, and then lifting took over. I stayed with it through college at Kutztown University, when I started doing a few meets. There was a very good powerlifting team there, and as soon as I graduated and got into law enforcement, I started doing the police and fire meets, and that's when it took off. That's when I met Jim Parish and started training with him, back in 1996, and it hasn't stopped since.

**What would you say is the single most important factor in your progress with the bench press?**

The number one thing that helped me through my career was that I trained

with bands, and I continue to train with bands. The system that Jim has developed has really strengthened my joints, and I've been very lucky with injuries. The only injury that seems to keep coming back with me is my neck. At one point, I was doing very well with raw benching. I had actually broken that record with a 487.5 lb bench, and at that same time, I held all three records, raw, single-ply, and multi-ply—it's since been broken. But the more that I would raw bench, the way the bar came down, it caused me to herniate the disks in my neck. Each time that I've raw benched since, I've gotten severe shoulder pain, and it has nothing to do with my actual shoulder; it's the nerves in my neck. The equipped benching just doesn't bother me—the groove of the bar doesn't aggravate that injury, and that's why I've been focusing on it more, especially at this age. It's been a great career.

**What other help have you received along the way?**

MHP [Maximum Human Performance] has been with me from the start. They were also getting started [at the same time] and had only been on the market

for a few years, and I came to them and asked them if they would support me when I was going to Bench America. I told them that I thought I had a shot at winning, and they believed in me. That's when our relationship started. I've never looked elsewhere. They're fantastic and we've had a great relationship ever since.

**Which of their products do you use the most?**

Oh man, I use them all to be honest. Anytime they come out with something, I love to try it. A couple of the things that I always keep with me are the preworkout, Dark Rage, their Probiotic, and I use their BCAA's [Branched-chain amino acids] during my workout. The one product that I've been taking now for the last year or so is the Secretagogue Gold. Especially for me, being up there in age, I feel fantastic.

**You said that you train with a group of guys. We're seeing that Westside**



**Barbell concept of a serious group training environment catching on more now these days with gyms like Super Training, Elite Performance Center, and Barbell Brigade. Do you believe that, after a certain point, having a team—even in an individual**


**sport like powerlifting—becomes essential to progress?**

Absolutely. You have to have the faith in your team to push your body to the limits. You see injuries popping up all over now, and it's so important to trust your team around you so that you can attempt things and push your body to the limits. Westside – they were the founders. Our system that we use was based on their system. Those guys have done some phenomenal things in the world of powerlifting and everybody else has benefited from it.

**What kind of mental preparation goes into a big lift on the platform for you?**

Well, I've never really been intimidated by the big stage. It's actually pretty calming for me, and I think a lot of it has to do with the situations that I was put in throughout my career. I was undercover for 20 years in narcotics, so the platform was actually a place that I went to so that I wouldn't

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have to worry about whatever else was going on in the world. I try to treat each contest like, "this is what I do." I spend more time bench pressing than anything else in the world, so to me, I should be the best at this as far as my own talents. Of course, you're not going to be at 100% of your game all of the time. I have definitely learned to adjust and adapt to my body, which has certainly changed over the years, and certainly needs more recovery and training time. But, you know, the big stage is where I like to thrive. I've won Bench America 3 times, I won the Olympia 4 times and I've placed at the Arnold 3 times. I've had my share of the big events and I've been blessed just to be there.

#### **How do you prepare for meets?**

Things have changed a lot for me. My training cycles have shortened dramatically, simply because I learned that my body was always peaking before the meet! I'd have my best lifts in the gym, and I realized that I wasn't timing things correctly, and I wasn't giving my body enough time to heal. A frame of 175 lbs consistently benching over 600... well, I'd have great weeks where I'd hit 725 in the gym and then I'd get to the meet and I'd only get my 665 opener. I knew it even in the warm-ups at the meet - feeling that arm trauma, feeling that your arms aren't fully healed. That's been my biggest battle - learning to time everything correctly. Even at this last Olympia, which I was blessed to win and take the single-ply record at, it was only my opener. I haven't had a 3 for 3 meet in a while now.

#### **So you've come to see a greater need for an emphasis on recovery. What kind of additional mobility or recovery work do you do or have you done now?**

I do go to the chiropractor at least twice a month for e-stim treatment on my lower back and neck. I try to take care of myself the best that I can and eat as clean as possible. I'm not a dieter by any stretch of the word, but I do try to eat clean most of the time.

#### **You've been in the gym for a long time. What lessons have you learned there that you've been able to take outside into your life?**

There's a lot of negativity on the internet amongst powerlifters over what is or isn't raw, "equipped is the best," and all of this, and all I can say is, do what you love. Do what makes you happy. Compete in the federation that makes you happy. Promote your federation but don't hate on the others; there's room for everybody to compete. Enjoy it! You're never going to be a millionaire from powerlifting, it's a hobby, and a passion for me. I've met so many great people who compete both raw and equipped, and it's been such a positive experience for me. Like you said, I've been in the mix for a while now, and I've made the best friends you could ever imagine. Take advantage of it; it's a great, great sport. Just promote it and stop with the hate.

#### **What would be your top 3 tips to a new lifter getting into the sport?**

I would first decide on what federations [to compete in] and what type of

bench suits your specialty, whether you want to go raw or equipped. Then, train with a group of guys who are dedicated and enjoy the sport as much as you do. Try different training tips and listen to different benchers. What works for you might not work for somebody else, but you can pick up tips from each professional powerlifter. Sooner or later you're going to find something that works for you. Nothing beats hard work and dedications. Take MHP supplements, too!

#### **You said you train some kids in your town. What does their training look like?**

I try to get these kids kicked off on the right foot. We work on their technique and start them slowly. I recently took 4 of them, all wrestlers, to their first powerlifting meet, and they all went 3 for 3 on all of their lifts after just finishing up their wrestling season. It's rewarding for me to give back like this. Like I said, I don't take any money. I have all of these kids chugging through my house and my wife's like, "Oh, who's coming tonight?"

In the offseason, in consideration of their high school coach's program for them, we have two training days: a bench day, where we rotate bands on and off weekly, with some power cleans, and then a shoulder exercise, like an upright or a shrug. Day two is our squat and deadlift day, and we also rotate bands on and off weekly for that day. With the bands, they're not only working their muscle, but also their stability and core. So, we're doing each lift once a week, heavy. They do assistance work with their regular program at school,

and the coach is actually very thankful that they come to me.

We start off with lighter bands and weights, and we build up by small percentages as we rotate bands on and off, bringing the weight up and lowering the sets. We see how big and strong we can get them in that amount of time, and then when the season starts, they still come to my house once a week just to do a band workout to keep all of their stability and muscles strong, and it's paid off great dividends. One of the high school kids that I trained went to state championships this year.

**Do you think that new competitors should cut weight for their first meet?**

Well, it depends. If you're using gear, one of the things you have to be careful about is losing weight and gaining weight back in the wrong places. When this happens, all that you trained and how you felt, when you throw on that squat suit at the meet, everything



changes when it doesn't fit quite the same as last time. So, I would recommend going with what you're best at and being as comfortable as possible. Start off smart. The only goal that you should have is hitting a PR and having fun.

**What does your own training look**

**like?**

If anybody wants to see exactly what I do, it's on JoeAverageStrength.com, but basically I'm training my heavy bench just once a week. That's how much recovery I need; if I try to do something bench-related in less than like 5 days, I will not be recovered for the next bench workout. It's just how my body is. I can do all the assistance work I want, but when I bench, I really tax my stabilizers and all of the muscles involved in the bench get so beat up. When I go in and actually feel like I haven't lifted in 5 days, that's when I'm at my best.

**Where can people find you online?**

If you want to follow my training, it's JoeAverageStrength.com, and I'm on the MHP website. I also have a Facebook and I welcome anybody who wants to get in touch with me. I have a couple thousand friends, I get a lot of questions, and I enjoy it. **PM**