

INTERVIEW

Personal dialogue between
PL USA Magazine and the
Sport's Greatest Names.

ED COAN as interviewed by Marty Gallagher



Ed Coan is, as Winston Churchill once described the Soviet Union, "a riddle wrapped inside a paradox wrapped inside an enigma." Ed is tough to figure both personally and physically. Personality-wise, Ed can be alternately gruff and temperamental, friendly and open, shy and introverted, aggressive and opinionated. We got a glimpse of all of these intertwined personalities during the course of this interview - the most extensive the Great One has ever given.

The conversation rambled and tumbled, covering every conceivable powerlifting related topic. We flowed from training to personalities to politics, back to training and stopped at all points in between. In one sense the interview is confusing. It covers so many areas - some extremely technical (particularly on the training) - that the reader can get lost. But, rather than break Coan's rhythm, we decided to let him flow and let the reader fend for himself. We started off a little stiff and formal but, by the conclusion, the juices were flowing and the tibias came in torrents....

We mentioned that in addition to being tough to figure as a person, Ed was also tough to figure physically. Here's a guy who looks rather ordinary - certainly well built and powerful looking - but more along the lines of Mr. Detroit's physique winner, certainly not what one would expect (physically) of the world's strongest man. When you look at a Kaz or a Gable or a Furnas or a Karwowski, you go, "Yeah, it's no mystery how that guy can move those giant weights!" You look at Ed Coan and the sense of mystery deepens. How does this guy do it? How does this little (relatively) guy squat 1000 and bench 600 and deadlift 900 for a dead-stop double? When you see him lift these giant weights, you leave shaking your head, seeing but still not quite believing....

My original intention was to edit the dialogue own to a 2000 word single article. After reading the transcripts, Mike Lambert and I felt there was too much information and insight to chop down and lose, so we left the whole taped interview intact and decided to run it in two parts. The interview is verbatim, of course, raw, and unvarnished. It might wander a bit, but it makes for damned interesting reading.

We spoke at length with Mr. Coan at the USPF National Bench

sets of front lateral raises and two sets of side lateral raises.

PL USA: What does your Sumo deadlift routine look like?

COAN: Four weeks of dead-stop triples. The final two weeks are dead-stop doubles. The first two weeks of triples are performed without a belt. I continue to do conventional deadlifts after I finish my Sumo pulls. The conventionalists become assistance work. I stop the conventional deadlifts 23 days prior to the contest and I stop all deadlifting 16 days prior to the contest.

PL USA: What assistance work do you favor in the deadlift?

COAN: Stiff-legged deadlifts, bent rows, chins.

PL USA: Any work off a box?

COAN: No. Mystron point is off the floor, and deadlifting off a block or plate strengthens the initial pull off the floor, which I'm already good at. My problem is the lock-out phase. The stiff-legged deadlifts work the top portion of the pull, so I work them every back workout. I keep the bar away from me as I do them. A lot of folks drag the bar up the shins and thighs - I keep it away from me....

PL USA: ...Which decreases the leverage and makes it harder...

COAN: Exactly. I try to stay on my toes; i.e., keep bodyweight forward on the foot as I perform the movement. I pause it on the floor and pull the weight with a completely locked knee. When you start the set, just get the technique on the first rep to get it up, pull it erect, and don't worry about anything. Now that you have the bar aloft, you're ready to begin your stiff-legged deadlifts. Your upper back rounds slightly as you lower the weight on locked knees. The bar naturally moves forward to a point in front of you. Pause it on the floor, maintaining your muscular tightness and tension; pull it up tight and controlled. I use 450 for 8-10 reps, pausing them and using no belt.

PL USA: So, since you're a 900 deadlifter, you use roughly 50% of your max regular deadlift for your stiff-legged deads?

COAN: Yep. A 500 pound deadlifter would use 250 pounds for 8-10 reps, overhead grip, no straps. I never use straps.

PL USA: What about rows?

COAN: Barbell. One set off a three inch block, not letting the barbell touch the floor for a set of 8-10. I've done 440 for 8-10 reps in this fashion. Again, no straps. I then do one heavy of rows, letting it touch the floor between

sets, paused as it were. I've done 510 for five reps in this fashion. In all my assistance work I do about two, maybe three sets max of each assistance exercise.

My back assistance work consists of two sets of stiff-legged deadlifts, two sets of rows, and two sets of chins. On Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday, I do three sets of calfs and three sets of abs.

PL USA: You view conventional deadlifts as the best assistance exercise for your sumo-style competitive deadlifting. Why?

COAN: The technique is the same... Or should I say, for me it's the same. I use conventional pulling because it is the best way for me to strengthen my back muscles. The first time I walked into a gym, I weighed 135 pounds; a guy named Mike Larson said, "Hey, try this!" He showed me how to sumo. Knees barely outside the legs and using a lot of dead. I think I went to like 430x2 conventional and using sumo I

did 430x10 in the same workout.

My best conventional pull is 855x2. This is a dead-stop double with no suit or lifting belt. So much of deadlifting is position and technique... I don't use a mental checklist... that would drive me crazy; but I have years and years of being totally focused on technique and position and explosion and tightness... after a while the neuromuscular pathways are set and though you're not yet conscious and aware on every rep of every set, an efficient technical form takes root.... At that point, the lift just happens.

PL USA: That's a Zen concept.

COAN: Whatever. I know how the deadlift has to feel; I know if my position is intact, if my butt is coming up to last.... All of these things flush through your mind as the lift is happening; you make split-second corrections on your dead.

PL USA: How long does it take you to finish your workouts?

COAN: That depends when in

the cycle your talking. If I'm training heavy like at the ass-end of a cycle, it takes longer. On squat day, on average, a couple of hours. Bench day takes one-and-a-half, maybe two hours; back, two-and-a-half hours.

PL USA: Where are your right now in your training? The World Championships are on December 11th, and today is the 28th of August.

COAN: I've got two weeks left in my off-season training program. I am not wearing any equipment; i.e., no suit, wraps, belt, or bench shirt. In the squat I have two more weeks of five rep top sets. I will go 710x3 and 725x3 for the final two pre-season weeks, again wearing no equipment. I'll start my regular training to jump 20 pounds a week. The most I've ever squatted without equipment is 815x1. Most lifters make a big mistake by never getting out of their equipment. If I didn't have the Worlds coming up, I would definitely push my no-equipment squat up to 825x1. You need to squat without equipment for long periods; it builds strength and power. It strengthens your weak points.

PL USA: What do you want to do at the Worlds?

COAN: I want to go for 900. I would like to squat 959 and total between 2409 and 2420. I would like to bench 573 and pull between 891 and 903. Who knows? I want to lift conservatively and within my limits, making a 2400+ total with IPF judging - the strictest, toughest judging in the world. No one has ever done 2400 under these conditions and I would like to be the first.

PL USA: I guess the biggest IPF world championships total would be Lars Noren's 2370 made a few years back as a Super.

COAN: Correct.

PL USA: What are you weighing now?

COAN: 220. I'll push that up to 227 or 228 over the course of the cycle.

PL USA: Any change in your training strategy this year as opposed to years gone by?

COAN: No, not really....

PL USA: What's the strongest you've ever been?

COAN: In the squat, when I made my training video and doubled 950 in the bench, when I was a 198 pounder I benched 540 in the gym without a bench shirt. I force a pec muscle shortly thereafter. In the deadlift, I have done a dead-stop double with 900 pounds. That was in 1991. One point: I've used basically the same cycling philosophy for years; it works well.



Ed sat out a drug test suspension since that 1989 meet, where he totaled 2237 at 220. This time, he expects to see a different outcome.