

JON ELICK

as told to *Powerlifting USA* by Ben Tatar of *Critical Bench*

Jon, welcome to *Powerlifting USA*. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

My name is Jon Elick. I've been involved in bench competitions since 1995. I live in Circleville, OH, and have been a corrections officer there for over 10 years. I've been married to my wife, Renee, for 4 years and have 4 step-children. I was manager of a hardcore gym for about 10 years, but recently decided to open my own gym, called Ironworx Gym. I've competed at 165, 181, 198, and 220. In addition to competing, I've also hosted over 25 meets and still put on a couple every year. I have a small t-shirt line for hardcore lifters called "Darksyde Ironwear" and will hopefully get a website up soon.

Wow, you have taking the powerlifting world by storm! From putting on over 25 meets, to having your own clothing line, and competing in many different weight classes, you have really made your mark in powerlifting. Jon, I'm going to name a bench press milestone, and I'd like you tell me what each experience was like.

135: The dreaded "big plate." I hit this while working out at the YMCA when I was 14. I think everyone in the facility heard me jump off the bench and yell.

225: Pretty respectable for a high school sophomore with no guidance. Another big milestone for me.

315: Hitting this one gives you bragging rights to anyone who'll listen.

This is when I realized I had a particular affinity for benching. I might

have weighed 165 at the time. Some of the old-timers at the gym took notice and started training me to compete.

350: Not really that much of a big deal. I had my eyes on the next plate by this time.

405: A major milestone for me. I hit this when I weighed 180. At this point I had the biggest raw bench in my gym, regardless of bodyweight.

450 raw: At this point I was starting to think how well I would fare in the rankings for raw lifting, even though most of my meets were equipped. Hitting 450 made me realize that 500 was possible.

500: My best official raw was 485, but I have just barely missed 500 a handful of times. If I can stay healthy, I guarantee I'll nail this in competition. My first 500 equipped was at 181 in a loose double denim. I was beside myself. It had been a goal of mine for a long time.

600: Damn-near hit this as a 198-er...but finally nailed it at an IPA meet, as a light 220, in a single-ply Katana. Another hurdle jumped...time to move to bigger weights.

700: My best official lift was 665, but I have taken 700 for a number of close rides. This is my current goal in my double-ply gear.



Jon Elick with Titan sponsor Ken Anderson

That's impressive! What a journey you've had! Every milestone had meaning, and what a strong animal monster bench press warrior you have become! How would you compare the shirt and raw game? How does your training and mindset differ between training for a bigger raw bench versus a bigger shirt bench?

The shirt and the raw game are two different animals. You can improve your shirt bench with better technique, better gear, or stronger lockouts in a shorter amount of time. Raw improvements take much more time and patience. I think it's tough to improve your raw and geared bench at the same time. My training differs drastically for the two. When trying to up my raw, I focus a lot more on full-range pectoral movements and getting more recovery time between heavy workouts. For geared training, I work a lot of partial movements and overloads with bands or chains. I also pound my triceps a lot harder.

Tell us about your bench routine. How often do you change it up?

I bench Mondays and Fridays. Monday is a full-range day, where I do either flat bench, reverse bands, decline, or heavy dumbbells. I follow that with some close-grip movement like DB floor-presses or close-grip flat bench. I'll finish up with rear-delt work and some form or

triceps isolation. Fridays is for partial-movement or accommodating resistance. I cycle through either floor presses, board presses, chains, or adding bands under the bench. I'll then work on some front delts, hammer curls, and rolling DB extensions.

For other benchers who want to be more competitive, what would be your top five tips for a raw bencher? What about the shirted bencher?

Raw: Allow for plenty of recovery time, work your minor muscle groups in the shoulder joint, alternate between heavy days and rep days, keep your technique consistent, realize that Rome wasn't built in a day—be patient.

Shirted: Practice as much as possible in your gear, alternate your overload work between boards/bands/chains, have competent training partners to critique your lifts. Pound the hell outta your triceps. Understand that good form will contribute to more PRs than anything else.

What are your 10 favorite assistance exercises for a bigger bench?

DB floor presses, reverse band floor presses, close-grip declines, heavy seated rows, rolling DB extensions, triceps pushdowns with an added mini band, wide-grip inclines, that's about it...most of my other stuff would be considered "primary" exercises.



That is some valuable information right there! Readers take note. Tell us about the Ironworx Gym that you own?

Ironworx Gym is hardcore in every sense of the word. I wanted to create an atmosphere where anyone would be comfortable coming to lift there. I don't tolerate bullshit. You either respect the other members or go somewhere else. We all have goals, but we don't all have to have the same ones. We have a good blend of powerlifters, bodybuilders, and guys/girls who just want to work out. We let the chalk fly, rattle the chains hanging off the bar, drag the sled in the alley. We have every piece of equipment you could possibly need to get the job done. It's open 24/7 via a door code so you can lift whenever you want.

Wow, gyms like that are rare. That's great. What kind of people are welcomed to train at Ironworx?

Anyone can join as long as they choose to be dedicated. There's nothing that pisses me off more than someone who joins and quits after a month or two. As far as training partners are concerned, I look for those who express an interest in what my crew and I are doing, someone I see at the gym consistently, and someone who is willing to be coached.

Tell us about the federation you compete in, the meets and what they are like.

I have competed in numerous feds over the years: UPA, APF, NASA, IPA, USPF, and SLP. I will go to just about any multi-ply fed to compete. For single-ply, I prefer the USPF. I like the rules and they keep a lot of the favoritism and politics out of it. There's nothing that compares to meet day...all the training gets funneled into a few brief moments on the platform.

As a strong, successful bench presser, have you encountered a lot of jealousy? How do people respond to you being so much stronger than the average person? What are your thoughts when it comes to the jealous?

Jealousy is for the insecure. Those who can't lift what you do always have an excuse for

why they aren't on your level or why you are successful. I've never been jealous of those who outlift me. I just wonder what I can improve to up my game. People usually respond with awe, but most people can't comprehend what a 600 or 700 pound bench feels like, so it's kind of pointless to even mention it.

How do you get fired up to lift such insane iron?

I don't really. I visualize and focus on the lift in my mind. I make my mind fire a shot of adrenaline right before I get on the bench.

What are your future goals?

At 37 years old and recovering from numerous lifting-related surgeries, my main goal is to just keep competing. However, I would like to drop to 198 again and hit 600 in a single-ply. I'm gonna knock off 650 in a single-ply and 700 in my double at 220.

Tell us about your diet and what supplements do you take?

My diet is not as clean as it should be, but I do eat plenty of dead animals, fruits, and veggies. I try to keep it basic. I don't do much cake, candy, ice-cream, chips, etc. However, I don't shy away from an occasional pizza or indulge in Rooster's Wings, though. Supplement-wise, I like AtLarge Nutrition Nitrean, Con-Cret, Optimum Amino2222, and a good multi.

Jon, let's go back down memory lane for a minute. So far in your powerlifting journey, list your favorite, most hardcore, funniest moment and the moment that has changed you the most.

My favorite moment was the first lift of my first meet. I've been hooked ever since. *The most hardcore moment* was when I missed 640 and 650, then came back to hit a PR 665 on my final attempt. *The funniest moment* was watching Mike Wolfe get a guy fired up by smacking him in the head. Hit him so hard, he fell off the bench and was too stunned to get back up. *A moment that had a major impact on me* was a

meet where I had missed my first two attempts and was feeling bummed. Jay Fry, who I had known for a long time, came over to me and said, "You got this one, you're a professional." I hit the lift, but more importantly, it was nice to have a lifter who was better than me consider me a "professional," too.

Those are some big moments. From your first meet—which sky-rocketed your bench press journey into personal record setting superstardom—to later in your bench press journey missing 640, and then hitting 665. You're an adversity killer! I love your story involving Mike Wolfe; everyone has a Mike Wolfe story. Being called a professional, by a long time world record champion like Jay Fry must have been awesome. I guess there is one thing that remains with hardcore powerlifters, they all have great stories. So, Jon, say a bench presser has not been as fortunate with his bench press journey as you have. He comes up to you and says, "I haven't gotten stronger in years. I need help! I feel like I have reached my potential and I'm just not into it." What do you say to get them going again?

I'd first want to evaluate their routine, form, gear, etc. to see if I could make any improvements. I'd then ask them to re-evaluate their goals. Maybe pick a different weight-class or switch gear-plys. Sometimes all you need is a change of direction to stoke the fires again.

Awesome. I'm going to list five aspects of powerlifting. Please rank in order of importance and explain why: Diet, Genetics, Mind/Heart, Training Partners, and Rest.

1. Mind/Heart. If you don't have the dedication and desire, you'll always be limited. Powerlifting is all-or-nothing. I don't know any "recreational powerlifters."

2. Training Partners. I don't know anyone who can do what we do by themselves.

3. Rest. This gets more important the older you get. Sometimes backing off is the best thing you can do.

4. Diet. Feed the machine. We brutalize our

bodies and refilling the tank is crucial.

5. **Genetics.** Get the above 4 aspects right and genetics aren't as much of a factor. My folks are short and have small frames. I was lucky enough to be a few inches taller than my dad, but had to work hard to pack on the muscle that I didn't inherit.

Jon, how do you want to be remembered?

I want to be remembered for putting on great meets, for always helping others improve their lifting, and for being a worthy competitor.

That you have done. What makes you happy?

Having the most understanding wife in the world, seeing my crew have success and knowing I helped get them there, nailing a PR.

It looks like you have a great support team.

After your success with the Powerlifting Iron World, you attended the Arnold to work with MuscleDog. What did you think of the Arnold? What did you do with MuscleDog?

The Arnold needs to improve the powerlifting exposure; bring back the monsters. I can go to

any local meet and see 500 pound benches and 700 pound squats. I represented *Muscledog.com* at the Arnold this year. They are a great company who will be coming out with a cutting-edge supplement line very soon. They have an extensive online forum that caters to lifters and fitness enthusiasts of all kinds. You can get free advice from professionals regarding diet, routines, physiology, or anything else related to lifting.

I agree. The Arnold should take notes and bring back more powerlifting monsters. How do you see the future of powerlifting?

Bleak. It's too fractured because of the 30-plus federations. Too many "national" or "world" champs, judging inconsistencies, and crazy gear.

You are so right. There are 1,800 different possible divisions in powerlifting. However, the younger generation is powerlifting's future, and if their lifting gets on the fast track to a bigger bench press early, (much like yours has,) that can start a strong matrix that evolves the powerlifting future forever. So, Jon, what

is your advice for the younger generation of powerlifting?

Get a good foundation under the guidance of an accomplished lifter. Compete raw your first couple years. Keep your ego in check as you improve. Enjoy the friendships you'll make through powerlifting

Great advice, Jon! What a powerlifting journey you have had. You have left your mark in the powerlifting world, and we all wish you the best ahead. Is there anything else you would like to say in closing?

I'd like to thank Ken Anderson, who sponsors me with Titan gear; APT Pro Gear, who also sponsors me and provides the best wraps in the world; and my final sponsor *Muscledog.com*. I'd like to thank my wife, who puts up with my obsession and helps at the meets I host. A big shout-out to Wade Butcher and the crew at Butch's Barbell for all your help, and Scott, Dustin, Chris, and the rest of my Ironworx Gym team. Thanks to *Powerlifting USA* for covering the sport we all love, and Critical Bench for allowing me to have my 15 minutes! See you all on the platform. «

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