

Training

SOLO

Sumner Style

Is he really the world's strongest powerlifter? PLT examines one of America's youngest and strongest of today

I've trained with Preston Sumner, Blaine's dad for several years and kept track of Blaine's progress. He's hitting huge numbers so I flew out to Oklahoma City to interview him and train with him on rep day. He is unique in that he squats at least 1000 pounds every week by himself with no spotters or training partners.

How old are you, and what do you do for a living?

I'm 26, and I'm a petroleum engineer in Oklahoma City. My girlfriend is studying to be a mechanical engineer in Utah, and we've discussed marriage.

How many meets have you been in, and in how many were you tested?

I've been in 21 meets, and tested in at least 10, along with random out of meet tests several times.

When did you start powerlifting?

I was a football player first at Colorado School of Mines on the defensive line, and wanted to get stronger. When I graduated, I

wanted to try out for the NFL, but 2012 was the year of the lockout. That definitely put a damper on my NFL career, and there were no rookie mini camps that year to help the transition from a D2 school to the NFL. I did well in the combine (55 bench reps with 225, and they disallowed 3), so 52 reps still stands. I had a verbal agreement with the Eagles, but they didn't call, so my pro career was over before it started.

I was training, and ran into one of your Mines teammates a while ago. He said, "The NFL didn't work out for Blaine, so he had to take a high paying job as a petroleum engineer. Not a bad plan B."

Yeah, it worked out OK, but my mom is glad I didn't play pro ball. With all the research about brain damage and concussions coming out, she's glad I didn't play.

Go get some more breakfast from the buffet line.

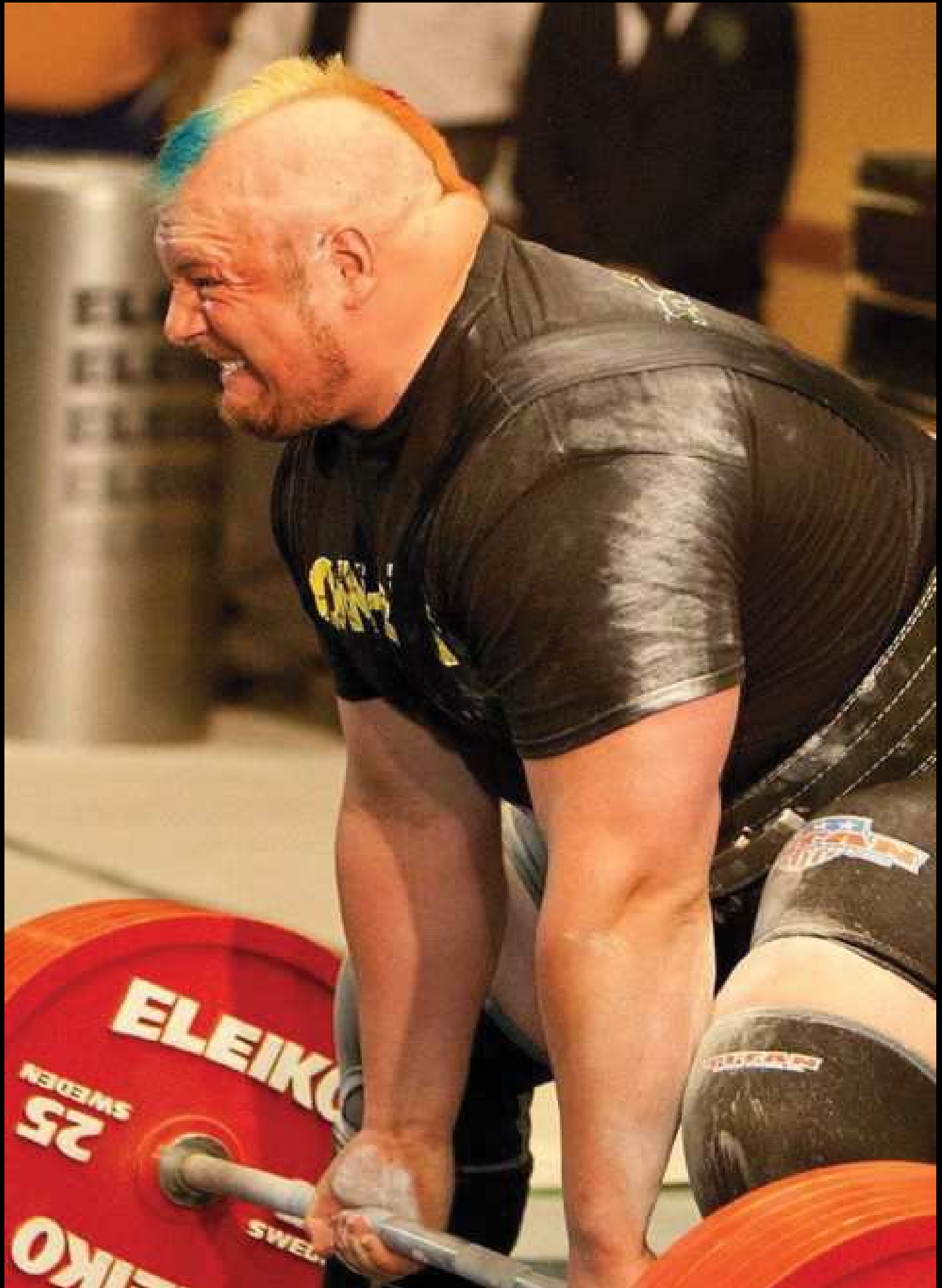
I'm surprised how small my appetite is for weighing 360. I consume a lot of calories, around 6,000 per day, but it's hard to get

enough calories from meals. I actually have trouble keeping my weight up, so I end up drinking a lot of shakes throughout the day. I like chicken shakes and oatmeal shakes.

Tell me about chicken shakes.

I buy ground chicken breast, cook it, weigh it out so that I'm getting around 70 grams of protein. I throw in some spinach so it has a better taste and texture. I have a high end blender, a Blendtec, that pulverizes any food. It works great with oatmeal too, because if there are chunks in the shake, I gag. I drink three of those chicken shakes a day, and I follow it with a shake that has finely ground oatmeal and flax seed oil, so I'm getting real food. I couldn't sit down to eat that many calories at a meal, multiple times a day, so the shakes work really well. Lunch is my biggest meal, but the shakes are the main calorie source. I drink flavored fish oil, rather than capsules.

What are your biggest lifts, raw and equipped, in meets in the last year?





I've done two raw meets and two equipped meets in the last year. My raw lifts are down a little from tearing my hip labrums, but raw squat, walked out, deep IPF style, is 881. Bench is 501, and deadlift is 717. Best equipped squat is 1009, best shirted bench is 810, and deadlift 750. The raw 881 squat was sleeves and belt only. My best raw set of 8, with sleeves, in the squat is 725. Bench is 405 x 10, and deadlift is 590 x 8.

Your raw bench is 501, you put on a single ply bench shirt and bench over 800. How do you lose the fear of having an additional 300 pounds over your face, or squat 881 in a singlet?

I'm typically pretty calm, but I psych myself up into believing I can do anything, and put it all out there. When I squat, I thump my back into the bar, or I slap my legs – anything to get psyched. I don't use ammonia in training, and I never, ever miss a training lift in the gym. I'll work up to my openers, but save

the big lifts for the meet. You get hurt trying to max every week.

What are your goals for USAPL equipped world in November?

1113 squat.

Not 1100 or 1115?

I'm a very visual person, and I have my own set of Eleiko plates. I like 10 red plates, and a blue. I just like the way the plates look on the bar, and they total 1113.

How about bench and deadlift?

871 bench, 804 deadlift, and 2788

total. These are obviously third attempts, and everything has to line up perfectly, but those are the goals. I have those numbers on a sheet of paper that I keep in my truck, they're taped to my bathroom mirror, they're taped to my kitchen table – those numbers are always in my mind.

Do you always train with your dad, Preston, when you're in Denver?

I don't get back to Denver much anymore, but yeah, we do. It's fun training with him.

“... THEY'RE TAPED TO MY BATHROOM MIRROR, THEY'RE TAPED TO MY KITCHEN TABLE - THOSE NUMBERS ARE ALWAYS IN MY MIND.”

**FAR LEFT**

Raw IPF World Records
Blaine Sumner
400kg/881lbs Raw IPF
Squat World Record at the
Raw Pacific Invitational in
Melbourne.

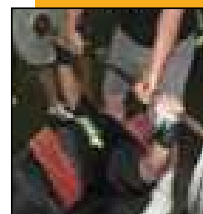
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Traps!

At a glance Sumner stats

**SQUAT**

Raw - 849
Equipped - 1009
Goal - 1113

**BENCH**

Raw - 501
Equipped - 783
Goal - 871

**DEADLIFT**

Raw - 717
Equipped - 750
Goal - 804

What does your training week look like?

It's high frequency linear periodization. What that means is I treat raw and equipped as two different sports. I squat, bench, and deadlift every day, four days a week, but raw is classic progressive overload, i.e., 3 sets of 8 reps for 3 or 4 weeks, 5x5 for 3 or 4 weeks, and 6 or 8 sets of doubles working up to a meet. The next training day that week, I'll gear up and just work up to singles (planned meet opener). The next training day that week is back to raw reps, and the next training day is geared singles again.

No assistance work?

I'll throw in variations of the classic lifts, like front squats, good mornings, pin press, floor press.

No lat pulldowns, chins, side laterals, biceps curls, anything like that?

Nope. When you reach a certain level, the things you need to do get

narrower and narrower. When you're first starting out, anything will make your competition lifts go up, but as your strength increases, working the three lifts are what make the three lifts go up. I've tried a lot of systems and templates, but this has evolved over time to be the system that works best for me. This too, will likely change over time, but right now, it works.

What do you do for "trunk", or core work?

More squats and deadlifts!

How long is the typical training day, and how do you recover from that?

Typical workout is about 3 ½ hours. As far as recovery, I just think that the body adapts to the load placed on it.

On your gear day, do you do reps in the gear?

This is just my opinion, but if you can do reps in gear, it's not adjusted properly, or it doesn't fit correctly. You should be able to hit a big single,

maybe 2 or 3 sets of 1, and then you're so exhausted that reps can't be done.

Are you a sumo or conventional puller?

I train them both, just to hit all the muscles involved in deadlifting, but I compete sumo. My speed off the floor is never a problem, but at the very top, my fingers catch on my leg. The first 7/8 of the deadlift is always fast, even with a max effort lift, but the top gives me problems.

I've seen video of you block pulling 827 off 3.5" blocks. What do you think you're capable of, even in the next ten years?

The way my mind works, 900 is the attainable goal. Got to always have the goal in front of you.

Ever thought about gaining more weight, since you're already in the supers?

If I do, I have to go up slowly, because my lower back gets too pumped. I have to adapt to it slowly.

Have you ever thought about training for strongman competition?

It looks fun, and I could probably be fairly good at it, but the injury rate is much higher with some of those awkward events. I like powerlifting too much, so that's what I'm going to stick with.

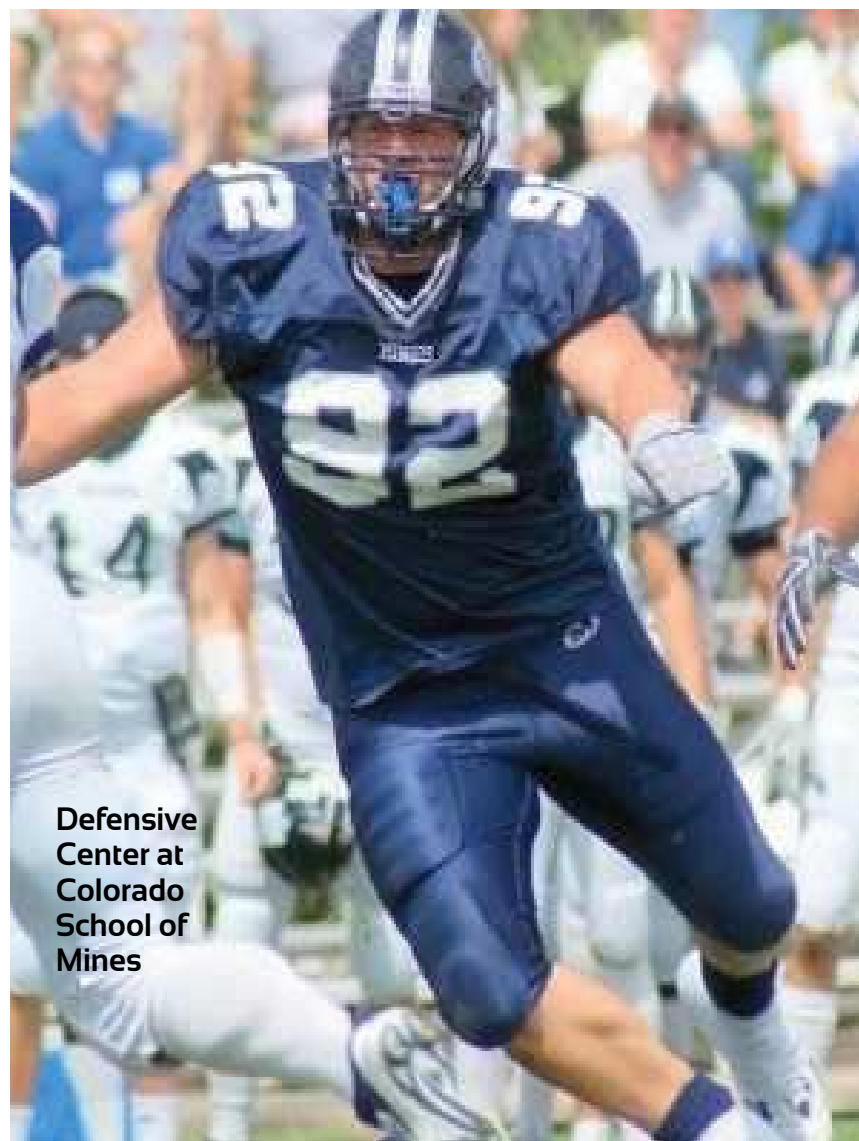
You're a USAPL lifter. Have you ever thought about investing in double ply predator briefs, a canvas suit, and multi ply bench shirt and see what you could do

in another federations meet?

Sure, but since I train by myself, even my shirt and squat suit are loose so that I can get them on myself. I'd have to have training partners to help with all the multi ply gear.

Why do you train by yourself?

It's not by choice. When I first moved here, I tried to get a crew together, but people had different goals, schedules, etc. I'm with Team Juggernaut, and people will pay hundreds of dollars to have me coach them in the squat, but I can't get local guys to drive 10 or 20 miles to train. I can count on myself, so I'm always there after work. When the IPF changed benchpress rules so that we could belly bench, I decided to learn from the best, who I think is Mike



Defensive Center at Colorado School of Mines



Blaine's badass bass in Oklahoma



Womack in Dallas. Every other Saturday, for about 9 months, I'd get up at 3 am to make the 3.5 hour drive to Dallas, because they start early, about 7:30 am. There would be 15 or 20 guys in shirts, and Mike would be coaching all of them, including me. After a hard workout, I'd drive the three and a half hours back to Oklahoma City. I don't know why I can't find training partners, but I've just accepted it, and training by myself is how it's got to be.

Where do you train?

It's a private gym, called Oklahoma Strength, or Tireys' Gym, depending on the day. They're waiting to move into a bigger space, but right now, it's basically in a large storage unit. I've had some specialized equipment built

so that I can train by myself (ed. – see photos). The owner lets me bring my own stuff in – an Eleiko power bar, 1400 pounds of certified Eleiko weight plates, and the squat supports and mini monolift that I attach to a combo rack that lets me bench without a spotter. I have my own corner set up there, so Ralph Crepinsek (1500lb.com) built those, and they help a lot.

Hey Oklahoma lifters, you've got a world class lifter here in OKC, and he's on Facebook. He's a nice, level headed guy who could likely help you, while you help him. Think you might improve a little by training with him? I've got to ask you, Blaine, have you ever thought about getting some double ply Predator briefs, a canvas suit, a double ply open back

shirt, and seeing how much you could lift with mondo gear?

Sure, but the problem is training by myself. You need a lot of help to get the gear on, not to mention spotting, someone operating the monolift, etc. If I had consistent, strong training partners, I'd like to see what I could do.

You mentioned that you tore your hip labrums. Will this affect your lifting in the future? Can you get them repaired?

Raw squats really hurt them, but a squat suit compresses and supports them, so I don't feel them much. They're not vascular, so there's no blood flow to them, no natural healing mechanism. The labrums are in the hip capsule, and the cartilage lubricates the femur, so it's actually the cartilage that is torn. The surgery to repair them is serious – they would have to cut through and sever the glutes and hip flexors just to get at them. The recovery process is longer than a total hip replacement, so I'd never be able to return to the level of lifting where I am now. I'm doing a modality called "dry healing" right now. A physical therapist inserts a needle, similar to acupuncture, and wiggles the needle around to break up scar tissue, and that has given me relief for the tight hips.

What was your most recent meet, and how did you do?

I did the Arnold about a month ago. I did the full raw meet Friday, the equipped meet Saturday, and the bench only meet Sunday.

Friday raw – 849 squat, 501 bench, 717 deadlift, 2066 total.

Saturday equipped – 1009 squat, 783 bench, 672 token deadlift to get the money, 2464 total.

Sunday bench only – Bombed. 827 came up strong on second attempt, felt great, but got 2 red lights for head movement. I didn't feel my

"I'M YOUNG BUT I'VE ALREADY SUSTAINED SOME PRETTY SERIOUS INJURIES LIFTING RAW"

head moving at all, but oh well. Made \$1400, and got drug tested.

At the time of this interview, you had squatted over 1,000 once a week, for 17 weeks in a row, often hitting 1025. That's your opener for the equipped USAPL nationals in July. Aren't you getting a little fried? Do you still get excited about squatting 1025?

I'm moving the opener up to 1073. All red plates on the bar, and the way my mind works, I can get stoked to get to the point where I can do 1073 without thinking about it. In the deadlift I'm working on locking out the last inch – that's my weakest link in the pull.

At this point, are you leaning more toward raw, or geared meets? Certainly you have to have raw strength to lift geared, but how do you feel about it down the road?

I'm young, but I've already sustained some pretty serious injuries lifting raw. Raw lifting is experiencing unprecedented popularity in the last couple years, compared to single ply or multi ply, but I don't see how top level raw lifters can keep doing it for decades to come, like I want to do. A big draw to the gear for me, is that I feel like I'm so close to my peak raw, how much stronger can I really get without major injuries? With gear, I can learn a new little trick or adjustment, and I lift 20 or 30 pounds more.

Agreed! I applaud USAPLs efforts to "mainstream" the sport, by maybe making powerlifting an Olympic sport, but it would have to be raw. Gear is just too weird for the public to understand, and the perception is it's "cheating." I lifted raw in the early nineties before it was even called "raw." I got injured, always got my butt kicked in meets, and then one day I realized that I was involved in a niche, somewhat underground sport, and it was always going to be just that. My goal is to lift more weight, even against the

ravages of time and age, so I like gear. I also like the fact that the sport of powerlifting is a perfect example of a free market economy, driven by self interest and competition, and I think it will always be that. So I choose gear.

Yeah, it sounds weird, but when I do a geared 1025 squat, I'm not sore, or really even tired. Technique is really important, and like I said earlier, raw and geared are really two different sports.

We're now at the gym. What are you doing today? Does that dew rag I see you wear a lot add 50 pounds to your squat?

Raw squat and bench, and yeah, the rag helps! It sets me apart.

Preston, your dad, lifted in the early eighties, quit, and started up again 7 or 8 years ago. Was that connected to your powerlifting?

Yeah, when he lifted, steroids were cheap, common, and not really even illegal. He didn't want me involved in that world, so he checked out USAPL and RMLC (story elsewhere in this issue). He liked a drug tested fed and gym, so he decided to start training and competing again.

So you're going to do raw hypertrophy, 3x8 on squat and bench?

I do more volume on bench, usually five sets. I've seen my bench improve with more volume. I'm doing 3x8 raw squat with 606. (He did it, easily and explosively, with just belt and sleeves. Onto benchpress, where he knocked off 385 x 10 x 5.) I like the mini monolift. It's almost better than a spotter. (PLT – These things are really cool!).

Got any plans to climb the corporate ladder?

I like the technical side of what I do, the engineering. Usually it's a 40 hour week, so I leave and go to the gym, even though I'm always responding

to questions from the field on the phone. My training is really important to me, so I don't want to spend 80 hour weeks at work and have to skip training. I also like to fish to relax, and my weekends are usually free for that.

Great talking and training with you today. Thanks Blaine!

Is Blaine Sumner the world's strongest powerlifter? To answer that, we have to compare the proverbial apples to apples. What kind of powerlifting are we talking about? Raw? Raw with wraps? Sleeves? Single ply suit, or multi ply? How about briefs? Lots of rule differences in those. Same with bench and deadlift. What about a lighter guy who has a formula applied to his total, to compensate for bodyweight differential? What about correct squat depth? Every rulebook line drawing of depth shows the hip joint crease below the top of the knee, and yet some "world record" squats are so far above that, it's almost a joke. And last of all (do we dare mention it?), how about performance enhancing drugs, aka anabolic steroids?

Suppose a meet was held with the following rules:

2300 total to qualify (in any fed), Double ply suits and shirts permitted, single ply briefs permitted, long knee wraps and wrist wraps permitted, monolift permitted.

Squat rules – top of crease in hip joint must pass below top of knee. Video at all three angles for arbitration purposes.

Benchpress – bar must pause on chest, wait for press command. Full lockout of arms must occur.

Deadlift – No hitching, knees must be locked at completion of lift, shoulders back. Wait for "down" command.

Meet would be held 6 months in the future from announcement date, drug testing would commence at 90 days out from meet and occur every 30 days until meet. All lifters would be subject to the testing rules, and again after meet completion.

This is my opinion, but Blaine Sumner is such a motivated, driven, monster of a lifter (and is itching to see what he could do in multi ply gear), that he would win, where squat depth and drug testing were key factors, and allowing for multi ply gear to cover the whole spectrum of gear.

If this hypothetical meet never occurs, there will continue to be multiple "worlds' strongest powerlifters", because of all the variations and different criteria in federations. For all the lifters that say "only raw and drug free" count, there are just as many that say "take whatever you want, wear whatever you want, just try and beat me on the platform". Powerlifting is both an odd and wonderful arena, totally unregulated, where each individual can decide what best suits their needs and wants. I like it, despite fragmentation, "disunity", differences of opinions on nearly every aspect of the sport, and I expect it will always be that way. PTL

Equipment Modifications:

How Blaine is able to train solo



Height adjustable squat support stand. Indicates depth, but lifter can bail out safely. Holds 1,200 pounds, and can be raised to use on bench press.



Starting position for bench "mini monolift." Counterweight swings apparatus back, and when lift is completed, or just off chest, Blaine can "throw" bar back to the rack.



Adjustable deadlift blocks.



This is how he can bench by himself. If he fails the lift, he can crawl out from under the bar, as the support stands will hold the weight just below chest level.

