

weights at age 12, picking up the sport before his father's friend discarded an unwanted weight set.

The emphasis is on becoming as big and strong as possible while maintaining the technique and flexibility to avoid injuries and not expend unnecessary energy while lifting these tremendous weights.

"A lot of this sport is staying injury-free and keeping my body healthy," Yard said. "I haven't had any substantial injuries. That's because of stretching and common sense.

"A lot of strong people can't move their arms over their shoulders. It's about 80 percent technique. What makes it a sport is that it's more than just brute strength. There's a skill aspect to it."

Naturally, Yard works up quite an appetite lifting so much weight.

The Kenwood High graduate relies heavily on protein shakes, supplements and other vitamins. A 2,000-calorie meal is a routine repaste.

"It's not cheap, it's quite an investment to feed me," Yard said. "My philosophy is that I'm working toward something. None of this could be done without the support of my fiancée. She and my parents and the people I train with are very supportive."

Yard graduated in 2004 from WMC, now McDaniel College, with a degree in sociology. He's a mild-mannered insurance executive by day, and an intense weightlifter the rest of the time.

Yard's personal bests are 1,050 pounds in the squat and 715 pounds in the deadlift. For one week last year, he held the world record with a powerlifting total of 2,605 pounds.

He's one of a dozen powerlifters sponsored by Elite Fitness System, and even has a training blog where he interacts with visitors at www.elitefts.com.

Practically nothing satisfies Yard more than being the strongest out there, but he hasn't exactly bought into the "Meathead" image.

"Some people are like that, but I look at myself like I'm that big, fat teddy bear," Yard said. "I consider myself a gentle giant. Me and my buddies try not to be those big meatheads with the macho image. I don't take myself too seriously."

But Yard does approach his chosen sport with the intensity of a man on a mission.

He would like to win the entire competition, even if it takes benching nearly 900 pounds. One deep breath, exhale and he's strong enough to lift a small car off the ground.

"I'm pretty pumped up about it," Yard said. "We're talking about competing with the best in the world. On any given day, anyone can walk in there and win. My success will depend on other people's failure."

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