

POWER INTERVIEW

A. On Powerlifting

SS: How did you get started in powerlifting?

DT: My dad knew Tom Davis, who trained at Findlay Barbell Club. My father arranged for me to train there shortly after I started lifting. This was a private key club where many of the members were competitive powerlifters. When I joined, I was 13 years old, and I competed in my first meet one year later. The guys at the club took me under their wings and taught me the lifts and how to train. I was extremely lucky to have this coaching from the very beginning.

SS: Did you try any other sports first?

DT: I competed in wrestling and football and liked both sports very much, but nothing was like powerlifting. Regardless of the sport or the practice schedule, I always made it to the gym after practice so that I wouldn't miss any workouts. It was hard to compete in meets while in-season with other sports, but the training remained as if I had a meet every 12 weeks.

SS: When was your first meet?

DT: My first meet was the Zanesville Open. I remember the meet very well. Just like sex, we never forget the first time. This was also before the system we use now. The weight was loaded on the bar, and it moved up with each attempt. It never went back down. I remember doing all of my squats one after another with a two-minute break because, as I discovered, my squat wasn't very strong. That day, I squatted 400 lbs, bench pressed 400 lbs, and deadlifted 400 lbs. There were over 30 people in my class, and I was next to last, but I was hooked. I remember meeting Matt Dimel, Dave Waddington, John Florio, and many other lifters who at the time were at the top of the game. They all took time to answer my questions and offer encouragement. Louie Simmons even gave me his phone number and told me to call him anytime. I saw the weights that these guys were lifting, and I wanted to be a part of it. The thrill was greater than any sport I had done up to that point.

SS: What are your best lifts so far?

DT: I have squatted 936 lbs, bench pressed 605 lbs, and deadlifted 740 lbs.

SS: What are your goals in the future as a lifter?

DT: My goals are to continue

Dave Tate of Elite Fitness interviewed by Sakari Selkainaho

educating and inspiring powerlifters by drawing on my many years of experience. I've had an incredible opportunity. I've been able to combine my passion (powerlifting and other strength sports) and my business (Elite Fitness) aspirations into a way of life for me and my family.

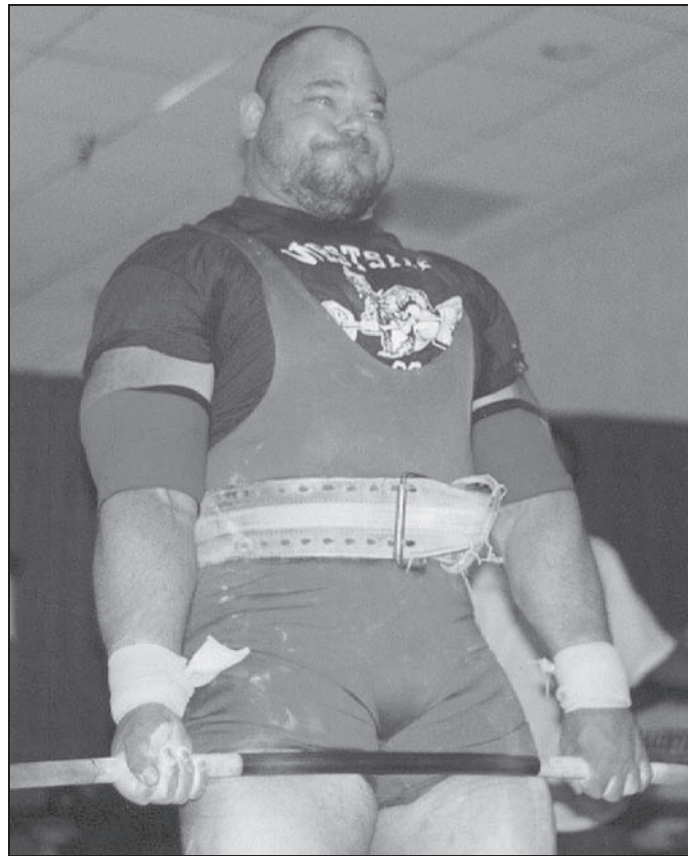
SS: How has the sport changed over the last few decades?

DT: I'm going to go out on a limb here and say something that may set most people back. The sport has NOT changed that much. The "core" of the sport is and has always been the same. It has always been about the development of the squat, bench press, deadlift, and total. This "challenge" is what makes us all the same, regardless of gear or federations. Yet, when you read about the sport or talk to lifters, this isn't realized. We all have our different preferences, but we all strive for the exact same

thing. The problem is and has always been the same since Day One.

Now I got in the sport right about the same time as bench shirts. Gear has changed over the years, the rounds systems were added, federations have come and gone, and bench only and bench deadlift meets came on the scene. So training has improved.*

*I feel this way for several reasons, the most important one being the information passed down over the years. I was able to learn from many of the best in the sport at a young age. I spent many years training and learning from Louie Simmons. I made many mistakes, but most were NOT the same ones that they made because they taught me better than that. This continues to happen today, and it is one thing that makes powerlifting one of the greatest sports in the world.



A Prime Citizen of Today's Powerlifting Community Dave Tate.

SS: What are the major changes that you've seen since 2000?

DT: Many would say that the gear has improved, but I disagree. The lifters using the gear have improved. Like it or not, there's now a skill aspect to the sport. You still need to be strong, but you'd better know your gear or you're going to get beat by someone weaker than you. This can be good and bad. The good is that the stronger guy can be beat by those with better skills (much the same as in any other sport). The bad is that the stronger can be beat by the weaker with better skills. It's the same situation, just with a different perspective. I've also seen money come into play. Prize money is being paid out at more and more meets. As long as these meets and the lifters bring value and a return of investment to the sponsors, the trend will continue. All and all, the sport still has the same purpose -- bigger lifts.

SS: What do you think about the money meets that are now very common in powerlifting?

DT: Because I've been on both sides of this issue, I can see both perspectives. The lifters and the promoters want more money from sponsors, which is great. It's great to offer prize money to lifters, but money doesn't grow on trees. When you're in business, you can spend your money on so many things, and money spent isn't equal to money earned. I'll keep this short because I could write an entire article on this one.

Let's say company X operates on a 10% profit margin, and you're asking for one thousand dollars. While one thousand dollars may not seem like much to you, company X will need to sell ten thousand dollars worth of products to make the one thousand dollars that you're requesting. Company X will also need to sell another ten thousand dollars just to recover the loss. Can that extra revenue be covered by what you're bringing to the table? Have you shown and proven that to company X? Now keep in mind, those who deal with lifters will look at this somewhat differently and be willing to do this at a break even point. Those outside this industry will want to see a return on their investment equal to or greater than what they could earn in other sectors (new inventory, investments, and other advertising and marketing sources). When you bring "money" into the

game, you're bringing "business" into the game. If you're looking for money, you need to know how to play the business game. Would you give a couple thousand dollars of your own money to someone you didn't know without knowing how or when it would be paid back? I'm not saying that it's a bad thing to involve money in the sport. I think it's great, but the presentation of how it's being asked for needs to change. I've had too many phone calls from lifters who stumble around asking for sponsorship or money and I have no idea who they are or what they've done. They expect me to pull all of the back issues of PL USA and look them up.

For us, we try to form "business relationships" with those we sponsor so that we can fulfill their short-term needs and also help them develop long-term business relationships. We can offer them exposure to a much wider market than they're used to. There may be 20,000 competitive lifters, but 800,000 people read our website. We can provide an active market and the exposure to it for them to sell their own products, DVDs, manuals, services, and seminars. A few have even landed strength and conditioning jobs, business support, and other benefits from being part of what we bring to the market.

SS: How do you like the format that the WPO uses?

DT: I'm not qualified to answer this. Those who lift and work with the WPO can better respond.

SS: Over the past years, you've put on some very nice meets yourself. Are you planning on promoting any meets in the future?

DT: I've been so busy that there's no way I could devote the time needed to pull this off.

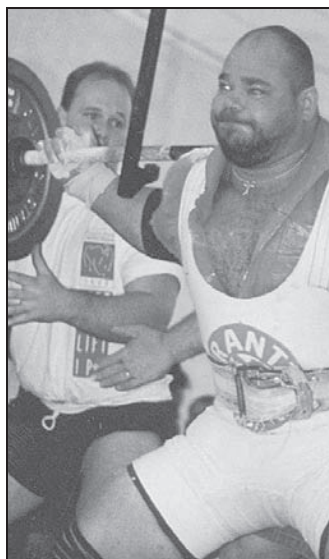
SS: The results have gone sky high during the last five years. Where do you see the limit?

DT: I don't see a limit, and none of us should. Let the lifters cut the path and lead the way much like a musher with sled dogs. All we can do is set the course the best that we can and let the dogs go. Right now they're running like wild in every federation, and it's very cool to watch.

B. Westside and Louie

SS: When did you first meet Louie?

DT: As mentioned earlier, I first met Louie during my first meet. Over the years, we would see each other at meets, and he would give me advice and ask how things were going. Keep in mind, I was just a kid, and he had much better things to do. However, he took the time to really care about my training. I started to call him and ask for advice. It was after I tore my pec that Louie walked up to me and



Dave has done his share of major league lifting, including a 936 SQ

told me that if I didn't change my ways I'd be out of the sport very quickly. That was in 1991. After my surgery, I decided to move to Columbus and train at Westside.

SS: What did you think about his ideas at first?

DT: Honestly, I hated them. I had my elite total and was doing okay on my own. I was studying to be a strength coach and was well read in the field. His stuff didn't make any sense to me, so I fought it. I even told those who trained with me not to do it. I thought Louie was out of his mind. I later discovered that I was studying the wrong stuff and that the material in the US was far behind the rest of the world.

SS: When did you start training at Westside?

DT: I began making weekend trips in 1992 every month or so. Then I moved in 1993.

SS: What were the major changes?

DT: Everything changed. I was advised to increase my body weight. Up to this point, I had used progressive overload, and now I was using dynamic and max effort days. Let's just say that nothing stayed the same.

SS: How different is training at Westside compared to a regular gym?

DT: Actually, outside of the lifters' strength, the gym was much the same. I've always trained in small, hardcore gyms. I've always tried to find and train with people who were better than me. It makes me work my ass off to try and be top dog. This never happened at Westside so I knew it was and is the best place to train if you're in this sport. Westside as a "gym" is the same as thousands of others. It's the attitude, coaching, and lifters that make it what it is.

SS: People talk about the pressure when training at Westside. Did you feel it?

DT: Many of those who speak

about this fail to realize that the pressure is self imposed. It's a competitive environment. I always want to see lifters become better than me because then I become better. Westside is all about powerlifting. It's NOT a gym with members. It isn't a place to go workout. It's a place where you go to be better at your sport. To be the best takes persistence, discipline, and intensity. At Westside, training for powerlifting is NOT a hobby. It's a serious sport that needs to be taken seriously. Yes, there is pressure, but this is true with any sport. It's part of the game.

SS: I know that you could name dozens, but name the five most important things you've learned from Louie.

DT: 1. The first and most important lesson doesn't have anything to do with training. Always "give back" for all that you've been given. I've had coaches, trainers, and lifters help me along the way, and they never once asked for a dime. They shared information because it was the right thing to do. This is why we publish over 200 articles and answer over 10,000 questions per year at www.elitefts.com for free.

2. Surround yourself with lifters who are better than you. You can learn from them, and they will motivate you to improve yourself.

3. Realize the value of the dynamic effort method. For me this was the most important aspect and made the biggest difference.

4. It's important to bring up your weak points.

5. Learn how to effectually use the max effort method.

There are many more things, but these are the biggest. With Louie, it's not what you learned that has the most value—it's what you failed to learn. I'll let you all figure that one out.

SS: Many talk about training Westside style, but it seems that training at Westside changes all the time?

DT: It's always changing. I'm no longer training there, but I just wrote an article for our website that listed 100 changes that I saw between 1991 and 2005. I didn't have to think very hard to come up with them. I'm sure if I sat down with a few other guys we could come up with 500 very easily. It's all about experimentation and evolution. Plus, I've seen Louie with a yellow, green, red, black, brown, blue, and gray goatee. I forgot to add that one to the list.

SS: Tell us some funny stories that you saw while training there.

DT: You know, I've been asked to write a book and many articles on this one, but I have to politely decline this request. Yes, there are great stories, but my respect for the gym and those who I trained with are worth more to me than a couple laughs. Each and every per-

son that I trained with there was an important piece of my experience. I would never want to overshadow those experiences.

SS: What were the funniest things that Louie had you doing?

DT: Are you serious? Take an outsider's view on this. Everything all of us do or have done as lifters is funny, but hey, it works.

C. Strength Training

SS: Name the three most important, special exercises for each lift.

DT: This has always depended on the weakness of each lifter, but for the sake of answering this question I'm defining special exercises as supplemental and accessory movements (those that aren't used as max effort or dynamic effort).

Squat: reverse hypers, glute ham raises, standing ab work

Bench press: tolerated triceps work (I would say extensions and JM presses, but if they kill your elbows, then do 4-board presses), rows, upper back work

Deadlift: same as the squat

SS: Name the three most important max efforts lifts for each power lift.

DT: Once again this will depend on the lifter. Some max effort movements will be a test of strength for some and a builder of strength for others.

Squat: safety squat bar close stance box squats, any good morning variation, cambered bar squats

Bench Press*: floor presses, board presses, reverse presses

Deadlift: pulls against bands, pin pulls, suspended good mornings

*I would read some of Louie's new stuff. They're doing some things now that should be looked into. Like I said before, this depends on many things, but you should check them all out. You'll see in the training logs we have on our site (<http://www.elitefts.com>) that each lifter has things they like to do best. Many times they're different than other lifters. The key is to find what works best for you.

SS: Name the three most common mistakes that beginners make.

DT: I'll make this easy and keep it down to one because this is HUGE. Everyone is too concerned with what cycle to use, what gear to use, and what movements to use, but their form looks like crap. Look at it this way—regardless of the federation, go look at the form of the top guys at the Nationals or Worlds. With a few exceptions, you'll see outstanding technique. Now go to a few local meets and tell me what you see. Do you see a pattern? This is what many people would call a "clue."

SS: What are the most common training mistakes in powerlifting overall?

(interview continued on page 18)

(continued from page 15)

DT: I think "overall" powerlifting is far ahead of the rest of the strength and conditioning world. There, I said it. Let the flames begin. Lifters will do anything and invent anything to try and get better. How many bars have been invented by lifters? How many techniques from the sport are now being used in other conditioning programs? I think as a whole powerlifting is leading the way for the rest of the strength and conditioning world as far as absolute strength development. Now, what are the biggest mistakes that I see? One is a lack of willingness to change. Regardless of what you're doing, if you're not making progress, you need to change what you're doing. This seems simple, but most people who I speak to have been doing the same things over and over and waiting for some miracle to happen.

SS: What advice would you give to a novice powerlifter?

DT: 1. Hang around other lifters.

2. Learn the lifts.

3. Compete in as many meets as you can.

4. Don't get caught up in the BS that you read online. You haven't earned the right to have an opinion so stick to the game and keep your thoughts to yourself. What you think now won't be the same as what you'll think after you have a few meets under your belt or after you spend two years trying to break a PR.

5. Be proud of the sport and of what you do. Powerlifting is a great sport. Spread the word!

SS: How much of a difference have bands and chains made in strength training?

DT: They've made a HUGE difference, but there's always give and take. Many seem to forget that Westside was lifting huge weights before bands and chains. They're a must for maximum development, but I think many lifters (beginners) jump into things way too soon.

SS: What value do power lifts have in other sports like football or track and field?

DT: Because of my background, I'll always have a very biased opinion on this. I've never discussed and will never discuss what is optimal for a sport that I've never coached or competed at a high level in. What I do know though is that absolute strength is absolute strength. Most strength coaches include the squat and bench in their programs. They are usually performed first in training sessions, demonstrating that they have a high priority value. The lifts are trained in the weight room to make athletes stronger at them. Who would place a lift in any program for it to stay the same or get



Westside Training has been the foundation for Dave and many others.

weaker? So if the lifts are in the program, have prioritized value, and are designed to be made stronger, why not use the principles utilized by those whose sport depends on these lifts getting better?

SS: How has strength training changed, for example in football, over the last 10 years?

DT: It's always changing and has made great strides over the past ten years. It would take a book to detail all of these. The biggest and the best change is how coaches are now communicating with each other more. Having them share their ideas and successes has really made a difference.

SS: How do people see the value of strength training in their sports?

DT: I think everyone sees value in strength training for sports. This has even come at the expense of devaluing SPP development for certain sports. Regardless of an athlete's strength, the skill level will always determine the better athlete. This is why the strongest are not always the best. This is not the fault of the "strongest" guys. They are doing the work in the weight room and have a very high work ethic. This is the fault of the coaches because they don't help to further develop the skills of the sport. Here's the typical conversa-

tion that I find myself in many times a year.

You have to make people stronger in the weight room...

"But our strongest guys aren't that good."

But they bust ass in the weight room, do what you say, and make progress?

"Yes, but they're not the best that we have."

So are you saying that strength has no value?

"No not at all. I'm just not convinced that they all need to be stronger."

So, if your high skilled guy got stronger, he wouldn't get better?

"Yes, he would be more durable and stronger on the field."

So are you focusing on bringing up his weaknesses?

"Yes, this is my job."

Really? So why aren't you using skill development drills as part of the dynamic warm up for the strong guys? Why aren't you giving them skill development drills so that they improve? Have you asked the position coach how you can help to implement skill development in their program?

"No, I never thought of that."

So his training is great. You just missed a huge aspect of coaching, and because of his excellence in one area, you ignored another.

Yet when the excellence is in skills, you never miss the strength aspect.

SS: What kind of meaning do you see personal training and PTs having in strength training?

DT: It all has meaning. It's just a different perspective based on the client base and needs.

SS: Do you think strength training fits into a commercial gym?

DT: I think strength training fits wherever it is welcome. If your gym restricts your training, find another place. This is happening more and more in today's environment. I can't begin to count the number of home, garage, and key clubs that we've helped set up in the past couple years.

D. Business

SS: How did you get started in business?

DT: I was working as a trainer at the time, and I received a computer for Christmas (kind of ... it was rebuilt out of spare parts). I started reading training information online, and I stumbled across a site called deepsquatter.com. I started a Q&A page there, one thing lead to another, and the Elite Fitness Systems site was created. Our goal was to answer training related questions. I also wanted to find a way to merge the three worlds that I was involved in—strength coaching, personal training, and powerlifting.

SS: What were the first products that you had?

DT: Sleds, Manta Rays, and a few books.

SS: What is EFS's main mission?

DT: The primary aim at EFS is "to lead, learn, and pass on." Our mission statement is: "Elite Fitness Systems strives to be a recognized leader in the strength training industry by providing the highest quality strength training products and services while providing the highest level of customer service in the industry." Our purpose is: "With continuous improvement, we provide strength coaches, athletes, and trainers with the highest quality equipment, personalized service, and knowledge that they need to advance their training programs."

SS: How has EFS evolved over the years?

DT: I can define this in several ways. I went from working on a fold-out table in my spare bedroom to being unable to pay myself for over three years. Now, I have a 7000 square foot facility with ten employees, and I'm starting to run out of room. We started with just me on the Q&A. Now, we have a team of some of the best strength coaches, trainers, PTs, and powerlifters in the world. In the first year of the Q&A, we answered 1500 questions. This past

year we answered over 15,000. We also have gone from publishing three articles every month to publishing four to five per week. Our product line has increased to over 3500 SKUs. Our mission, however, has remained the same.

SS: How do you see the meaning of your team around you?

DT: My team is everything. Without my staff, we wouldn't be able to do what we do today. Without the Q&A team, we wouldn't be able to put out the great content that we do. The meaning? They are EliteFTS.

SS: What are the major mistakes you see with internet businesses?

DT: I'll make this easy. Some major mistakes are not knowing the internet market and hiring graphics people who think they know marketing and coding. The other thing is to understand that it's a business, and you must have a strong USP.

SS: What's most important for success?

DT: To be successful, you must lose the ego and find people better at things than you. You must be willing to take risks. Also, know your business and who your market really is, not who you think it is.

SS: What are your future plans for EFS and the website?

DT: We're always working on new content and will continue to put out the best articles that we can. The Q&A team and our sponsored guys have been unbelievable. I couldn't ask for a better staff. This past year we were very close to having one million unique visitors per month. Our future plans are all based on serving our customers in the best way possible. We have some very exciting things in the works. Just stay tuned...

SS: Name the top three or the top ten best selling items for EFS.

DT: If this is based on gross sales, our GHR, reverse hyps, and power racks are leading the way. Equipment makes up 40% of our gross sales. As for the rest of the

pack... bands, chains, the EliteFTS manuals, DeFranco's DVDs, the Parisi DVDs, sleds, the Under the Bar book, and apparel. This is a general list, as our bestsellers change every month. We're adding close to 400 new SKUs a month right now, but the items in the list above are always in the top 20. The Metal gear as a whole makes up for 10% percent of all sales so it's a good selling product line.

SS: What are the most interesting items coming up in the near future?

DT: We're always looking for great stuff. When we find it, we jump on it fast. We do have some things that we've been working on in the equipment sector. We plan to roll those out in the third quarter of the year.

E. Education

SS: What has been your most valuable education in powerlifting?

DT: Two things - experience and Louie.

SS: What kind of services does EFS provide for powerlifting coaches?

DT: We offer a world of information for free at www.elitefts.com. We can also help coaches with all of their training equipment needs from board press boards to monolifts.

SS: What are the biggest coaching errors in powerlifting today?

DT: There aren't any errors. There just aren't enough people trying to bring more lifters into the sport.

SS: What do you think about system strength coaches who are educated in the US?

DT: I'm not sure that there really is a set system.

SS: What would change on that system?

DT: I'm not sure.

SS: What kind of impact does attitude have on education?

DT: Attitude is everything.

Follow Up Questions

SS: Name the three most important factors for developing a big squat, bench, and deadlift.

DT: There are universal factors for each lift-mental abilities (do you have what it takes?), physical abilities (can you physically do it?), and technical abilities (can you do it in the most efficient manner?).

SS: Name the three most common mistakes for each lift.

DT: These are the most common technical issues that I've seen.

Squat: falling forward half up, setting up, and keeping the knees out in the hole

Bench press: stability at the start, keeping the elbows in line with the bar, leg drive

Deadlift: head position, start position, keeping weight on heels

SS: Who are the people who you think have learned the most in the

sport?

DT: I have and continue to learn from everyone. I've learned a great deal from the lifters we sponsor, but nothing compares to what Louie and the guys at Westside have taught me.

SS: Name some lifters that you respect.

DT: There's no way that I could do this without leaving someone out. I respect all lifters who have the courage to get into a meet.

SS: Now this is something that we've all been waiting for. When does Dave Tate make a comeback?

DT: As Louie has always said, "Come back from what?" You have to do something first. I was never a great lifter. I did better than some, but not as well as others. So, in the words of Louie, come back from what?

SS: How would you use plyometrics for a shot putter?

DT: I've always made it a habit to only speak or write about what I know best. I've never trained shot putters. I could guess, but I don't think that's the best way to service the question. There are coaches on our Q&A who have great experience with this and could offer better advice than I could. Now, if you were to ask me how a shot putter could get stronger in the weight room, I could help you there. I feel too many coaches overstep their bounds and give advice about stuff that they don't have experience with. This isn't fair to the marketplace or to the person asking the question.

SS: What is the most important thing you've learned during the years in EFS?

DT: The most important thing is the value of having great people around you. I'm very lucky to have the staff that I do. They're all highly motivated and bust their butts to make EliteFTS better. I would say that they're the backbone of the operation, but that would be the understatement of the century.

SS: What types of seminars and conferences will EFS put up in the future?

DT: We're actually taking these back to our old school way of doing them. I've done large and small seminars in conference centers and bomb shelters. The best results (from the attendees' perspective) always came from the smaller seminars. I still won't do very many of these a year, but they'll all be held in a weight room and limited to 20 people.

SS: In Finland, people know you mostly from two things-Westside and Metal gear. How large of a part is Metal gear in your company?

DT: Right now, Metal gear makes up just less than 10% of our total sales but has great growth potential.

SS: How did you decide to put training logs on your website? It's

quite famous now, I believe.

DT: We did this for several reasons. We came up with the idea of putting our training logs on the site after realizing that all of the lifters were using the same basic methods, just in slightly different ways. We wanted to show the readers that it's okay to make adjustments and personalize your programming, and we wanted readers to see what the top guys were "really" doing in their training. We wanted to show the "real" training volume, but also offer a way for people to ask the guys questions if they wanted. We also wanted to "introduce" the team lifters to a larger audience and give them more exposure than they would get through other means.

SS: You sponsor many powerlifters. Does this pay off?

DT: There's a payoff any time you can help others reach their goals. We're happy to have the crew that we have, and they've done a great job selecting lifters who embellish the same values as EliteFTS.

SS: What was it like to train with Matt Dimel?

DT: I could go on for a long time about Matt. He was one of the big reasons I decided to move to Columbus. Matt did a lot for me and was great to train with. He had great drive and intensity and was a great coach. I only have great things to say about Matt Dimel. He is truly missed.

SS: Name your favorite lifters over the years at Westside.

DT: I liked them all and hated them all as I hope they liked and hated me. No one was valued more than anyone else because we all knew that we were only as good as our weakest link.

SS: Visitors are a mainstay at Westside. Tell us some funny story about the visitors.

DT: I'll leave this one for private conversations. While there are some great and very funny stories, you have to respect the person who uses their vacation time and spends their hard-earned money to make a trip to see and spend time at Westside.

SS: How do you see the role of speed in strength training?

DT: I think it's a very vital and underutilized tool in the weight room. I'll use myself as an example. I wasn't very strong on any max effort work. As a matter of fact, I was one of the worst in the gym. I would get beat by those who lifted 200-300 pounds less than me in meets, but I lifted more weight in meets because I could generate force at a more rapid rate than they could. The dynamic work was the most important to me. I was much faster than I was strong. I had to harness this aspect to my best advantage. Through the use of various dynamic method cycles, we learned how to maximize this.



Dave is setting a standard for young people to draw from, in strength training, for years to come