

Tea and Crumpets with Glenn Pendlay

by **Matt Reynolds**

Glenn Pendlay is a guy you've probably never heard of. Unless you're into hanging out with Exercise Physiology or Kinesiology professors or actually attend those strength symposiums, then you most likely have no idea who he is. But if you do know anything about the aforementioned subjects, then you know exactly who he is. He's one of the best...ever.

He's also one of the best Olympic Weightlifting coaches in the nation. His kids have won Junior and Collegiate Nationals so many times that if they handed out rings to the champs, Glenn would soon be looking for toes to display the bling*.

And oh yeah, he's one hell of an athlete too.

I had the opportunity to train with Glenn Pendlay a few weekends ago, and while I was there I convinced him to sit down and do an interview for CORE Performance.

Glenn is a big scary bastard. He runs about 6'2" and 330 these days, down from 370 at his peak in Olympic strength. After training, Glenn offered to give me a ride to a pizza joint where we planned to put the place out of business. He had an enormous pickup truck (as you would expect from most 300lb+ Olympic weightlifting coaches from Texas.) Inside the truck sat a 357 magnum in a holster on the passenger seat. On the console was a can of Copenhagen. The stereo was playing Waylon Jennings. And Glenn had a handwritten note to himself on the driver's side sun visor. It read "DON'T BE A PUSSY!"

After we arrived at our destination and began our marathon of pizza eating gluttony, I started in...

Matt Reynolds: Give us a little info on your background. What is your age, height, weight? Where are you originally from? What is your educational background? Where and who do you coach?

Glenn Pendlay: I'm 33, about 6'2" or so, and currently weigh 330lbs, down from 370lbs back in my strong days. I'm originally from Kansas. I got my undergraduate degree in Kinesiology from Kansas State University, then started my Masters degree at Montana State but finished it at Midwestern State in Wichita Falls, Texas. I coach the MSU weightlifting team, as well as a team of younger lifters from Wichita Falls. I am the head coach of a Regional Olympic Development Center, which involves mostly weightlifting, but I also get athletes in sports from cycling to football.

MR: What sports have you competed in? Did you play sports in high school and college? How did you get into strength training?

GP: I threw some in track and field when I was young, and did tennis and cross country, but wrestling was my main sport in high school. I had planned to wrestle in college but I got my

shoulder hurt my senior year at the state tournament really bad. I started lifting to rehab, discovered powerlifting, and started competing in that. During my powerlifting career I did some Scottish Highland Games, tried a bit of the strong man stuff, and did some more wrestling when I was at Montana State. I eventually went on to Olympic Weightlifting and everything else took a back seat to competing and coaching in that sport. I wouldn't rule out some more Highland Games or strongman in the future, or even some masters track and field, but I doubt I'll ever do any more powerlifting. That sport has changed a lot from when I was doing it and I still like it but don't think I want to do it anymore.

MR: Wow! You've been active in almost every strength sport imaginable! What are some of your best lifts, or lifts you're most proud of? Include "odd" feats of strength.

GP: Well, I snatched 170kilos (375lbs) with only a few years of training in that lift, which I'm pretty proud of. Its not the best that's been done by far, but for a guy taking up the sport late in life and not training all that long, I think its ok. I've also cleaned 210kilos (463lbs), push pressed 200kilos (440lbs), military pressed within 5 or 10lbs of the magic 400lb mark several times but never got 400.

I know you probably want to know about squatting, but honestly I'm not sure what my best squat was or could have been, which is stupid because squatting is the most natural movement to me. It's always been what I've been strongest at. When I was at my strongest I never really tried to max out on the squat. It's also so hard to discuss squat numbers, because you run into what you were wearing or weren't wearing, how low you went, etc. It's almost to the point where the numbers mean less than the apparel.

I did squat over 800 several times off a below parallel box wearing just a belt. I also did 606lbs for a set of 10 with a lot of gas left in the tank, high bar and close stance Olympic style, without wearing a belt, or any other equipment. Other "odd" feats related to the squat would be a set of 5 on the front squat with 550lb, and an Olympic style back squat single with 600lbs done fast enough to throw the bar over my head at the end of the squat and have it land in front of me, which I tried because I had heard that David Rigert did it years ago in training before a World Championships.

As far as odd lifts go, I've done strict barbell rows for reps with 425, and that's without lifting the back past parallel with the ground. I never curl but on a bet once I did 235lbs for a set of 8 on the barbell curl with fairly good form. Back when I was younger and weighing around 275-285lbs I benched a bit over 500 without a shirt. But I tore my pec and never got to try more than that. Probably not much of a loss, as I wasn't really suited to the bench and would probably have never been good at it anyway.

I've done stiff leg deadlifts and Romanian deadlifts with over 700lbs, and a few other odd things like that. I've done a lot of weird things regarding hand and forearm strength , but nothing I can really set numbers to except for squeezing the Ironmind number 1 gripper 100 times in a row, and 1000 times within the space of a few hours, and squeezing the number two 28 times in a row and 500 times in 5 hours.

MR: Your athletes are also capable of some very impressive "odd" feats of strength and athletic ability...such as 300 pound 50 rep rock bottom squats, back and front flips, and the ability to dunk basketballs at 5'7" tall. What are some of the most impressive feats outside of competition lifts your athletes have done?

GP: Well the neatest looking thing I can think of is what Justin Brimhall sometimes does. He can hold a 55lb plate over his head with both hands, and bounce up and down on one leg or from one leg to another, and I mean FULL one legged squats, all the way down butt to ankle with the other leg held straight out in front of him. He doesn't simply stand up from that position, he literally jumps up and lands on the other leg 3 or 4 feet across the floor and with no pause for balance descends to a full squat on the other leg and jumps again. He can cross a room in a few seconds doing this. I've never seen anyone else capable of doing this the way he does it. I'm sure he could hold something heavier over his head and do it, but that's the heaviest plate I've got. Of course at 16 years old and 165lbs he also cleaned 352lbs and jerked 374lbs, so he's a good athlete; he can do all sorts of strange and unusual things. I've also got a 350lb guy named Adam Weaver who can do beautiful handsprings front and back, as well as various other gymnastics things that a 6'4" 350lb guy shouldn't be able to do, like the best cartwheels on the team. We have some former female cheerleaders and gymnasts here, but Adam is just good at this sort of thing. Adam can't do a backflip though. As far as I know, Shane Hamman is the only 350lb guy around who can do that.

MR: Are you still competing in strength sports?

GP: I still train, but not really on a competitive level. My goal right now is just to stay as strong as I can with the limited amount of training that I can do. Coaching takes up most of my time. I don't need to be huge and heavy anymore, so I'm trying to cut my weight down to around 300lb right now, well see how I feel when I get there and if I want to go down any further.

MR: We hear you and your wife just had a baby girl. Congratulations! Tell us about your family.

GP: I have a wonderful wife who I've been married to for 10 years and dated for 6 years before that. I have a 2 ½ year old son, and a one month old daughter. My wife is the true athlete in the family. With about 6 months training back in college, she squatted 330lbs at a 125lb bodyweight. She could have been way better than me in any strength sport if she had wanted to pursue it. Her brother is so freaky I shouldn't even go into it, and you probably won't believe it anyway. Things like cleaning over double bodyweight as a 15 year old (315lbs weighing 155lbs) and benching over double bodyweight in high school without any equipment (340lbs at 165lb bodyweight). Both of these examples were done without any real training on those lifts, just natural strength. He quit athletics after high school to concentrate on college and becoming a veterinarian, and is about to graduate from vet school at the end of the present semester.

MR: Who are your heroes and/or role models?

GP: My wife is the epitome of responsibility and loyalty and many other good traits. I'd have had an easier life if I were more like her. Hell, she'd have had a better life if I were more like

her! George Patton is another one I admire. I have no heroes in the lifting world, because I always thought that if I set someone else up like that, it would mentally prevent me from ever beating them. I have lots of people I admire, but no one else really that I could call a hero or role model.



MR: You've enjoyed a lot of success as a coach; tell us about some of your athletes...from Olympic lifters to cyclists.

GP: Andy Sparks, Chris Ronin, and Mark Earnsting are the best 3 cyclists I have been associated with. Andy trained with us for about 18 months and then went to Colorado Springs and rode the second best time in American history in one of the sprint events. In the process got himself on the cover of USA Cycling. I'm certainly not trying to take credit for his accomplishments (or any of the others), but I'd like to think that the things he did here helped him a little. Earnsting would probably have gone to the 2000 Olympics for Canada, but Canada got disqualified in his event for cheating at Worlds, and couldn't send an athlete. Ronin was probably the most talented of any of them, but I made the mistake of introducing him to a girl I knew, and a couple of years later he married her and quit riding. He would have been a real star if I hadn't interfered in his love life. I've seen him push his heart rate over 250 when doing a set of squats, which shouldn't be humanly possible. I've seen him get 30 reps on a set of squats when I didn't think he could get 10 after watching the first 5 grind up. In weightlifting I've had some good guys and have more coming. Rob McAdams had an honest shot at the Olympics this year, but just couldn't put it together at the trials. He was close in training, doing lifts just about 5kilos below what he needed to make the team. He had a knee injury and I believe that without that he would have been in Athens. Donny Shankle has only trained for about a year, and is already Olympic style squatting over 600lbs (that's completely raw, close stance, high bar, and butt to ankles) at 215lb

bodyweight, and snatching about 10kilos below the American record. He will break the American record in the snatch within the next 6 months. Trey Goodwin was on the Junior World team last year, and is currently ranked 3rd in his weight in the country and about 10th overall. Josh Wells went to junior worlds this year, and is lifting better in the same weight class than Trey did last year. Both he and Trey will clean and jerk over 400lbs in the upcoming year at bodyweights of around 180-190lbs. Both can already jerk it, they just need slight improvements in the clean. Both are very young and have a lot of improvement left. Justin Brimhall came really close to being the first guy I have seen to jerk over 400lbs while 16 years old this year, he did 375lbs at only 165lb bodyweight. I would like to add that all these guys are 100% drug free, and tested often. Overall my lifters have done well the last few years. Counting all age groups, from Junior Olympics and Schoolage up to the Open class, I've had over 50 National Champions since 2000, and a lot of team championships and international team members.

MR: You've also had your fair share of injuries...give us a little summary and how they have affected your athletic ability.

GP: I got shot in the stomach when I was 15, part of the bullet nicked my spinal cord, and I have gone through life ever since without any feeling on part of my left calf. I also don't have full use of the muscles of my left calf, and the nerve supply for part of my left hamstring was destroyed, resulting in that muscle basically just withering away to nothing. Now it's like it was never even there. This injury also resulted in a small knot of burning pain in my back that never goes away but that I have learned to live with. It took me a couple of years after the incident to walk without a limp, and I still can't run without a noticeable limp. I've torn the hell out of both knees, including ACL and PCL and medial collateral, have broken toes by setting deadlifts on them, have a completely torn pec that I have never had fixed, had a torn meniscus, had both shoulders dislocated several times, various hand and finger injuries. There are so many that there's no way I can remember it all at one sitting. I never let any injury interfere with training much. Things hurt but I always trained anyway. When I completely tore my right pectoral muscle in half at 10PM one night, I got up the next morning and snatched over 300lbs about 10AM, or twelve hours later. It hurt and wasn't very smart, but I did it. When I tore up one knee so bad that the swelling went down to the ankle and I couldn't get a shoe on or bend the leg, I was in the gym doing hang power cleans on one bare foot. Again, not smart, but I was young and stupid and didn't want to lose too much training time. The accumulation of things as you get older isn't that great, even if one bad injury can't stop you, the lingering effects of 10 bad injuries will eventually get in the way.

MR: So why the hell should we listen to your ideas about strength training and muscular development?

GP: This is a very hard question to answer. It certainly is NOT because I've had any sort of success as an athlete. Guys with strong backs and legs are a dime a dozen and as many get that way in spite of their training knowledge as because of it. However, I suppose my time in the trenches of strength training and my clawing my way to respectability in a couple of events does lend me a perspective on the whole thing that many coaches don't have. My education sometimes gets a certain amount of respect, but I feel there are a lot more guys in the strength and conditioning field with masters degrees or PhD's who don't know anything about strength

training and coaching than there are those who do, so I don't think that just having an advanced degree means you are an authority. Basically I think that any respect I get as a coach should result from my success as a coach, or just from the people I work with knowing that they are getting results. I think there is only a certain amount of respect you can get in this field. Everyone is an expert and a coach. If you benched 500lbs, someone's cousin did 600 - things like that. I don't expect respect from people who don't know me. Tommy Suggs, who was a lifter on and then helped coach the old York Barbell Club back when it was not only winning nationals but winning Olympic medals, was a writer for and editor of the old Strength and Health Magazine, was a coach on the '68 Olympic team, and was one of the first strength coaches in the NFL, sent his grandson to Wichita Falls to train with us. That type of thing means more to me than all the high school powerlifters and bodybuilders on the whole internet listening to me. I don't think that I'm the most knowledgeable guy out there in any certain field, I learn things every day from people most of you have never heard of and will never hear of, people with a wealth of knowledge built up over years of experience, guys like Mark Rippetoe, Steve Gough, Lon Kilgore, Jim O'Malley, Tommy Suggs, Mike Burgener, and many others. I've only had some success because I was smart enough to listen and apply what I learned.

MR: To what do you attribute the success Europeans (Russia, Bulgaria, etc) have had with Olympic Weightlifting?

GP: They get more good athletes in the sport, and they train harder and under more competitive circumstances.

MR: On a similar note, what's America lacking?

GP: We need more good athletes in the sport. Everything stems from that. If we want another Olympic gold medal, we need to search out potential stars from track and field, powerlifting, and other strength sports, as well as doing a better job of recruiting kids. I bet there are 10 potential Olympic medalists doing powerlifting right now. One or two of them might like a chance to go to the Olympics if they had the opportunity. I'd love to find the right one and help them achieve that. There are a lot of high school football players who could be great weightlifters yet are too small to ever be big-time football players. Some of those kids love to lift weights, and there are some of them out there that could really help US Weightlifting to be better on the international level.

MR: So are you hinting at the fact that big team sports like football has ruined American strength training?

GP: I think the average quality of strength training in football is low, and very, very low if you are talking about high school or smaller colleges. So many young boys play football, and if they have the wrong strength coach they end up at a serious disadvantage if they want to do any sport other than football either concurrently or after their football career. I would like to add that there are some great strength coaches in football, all the way from big D1 programs down to small high schools...just not enough of the good ones to go around.

MR: Why are the best powerlifters American, but the best Oly Lifters and Strongmen tend to be European of some sort? Why do we succeed in one and fail in the others?

GP: Are the best powerlifters American? Or do we just generally not compete with the best from other countries? I think in general, the best from other countries are mostly in the IPF, but the best from the USA are not. I think that if you were able to put the best Europeans on an even playing field with the best Americans, it wouldn't be dominated by Americans. To ask a question that goes to the heart of the matter, all the biggest lifts come from Americans in feds like the IPA or APF. But could any of those guys beat the IPF world records under the IPF conditions that the best Europeans compete under, such as drug testing, IPF equipment, and judging standards? I don't know. That's one of the things I don't like about PL, even though I really love the sport. I'd like to know who the best really is and be able, as a lifter, to really know how I stacked up against everyone else. I don't think that's possible right now.



MR: You're an advocate of the basics; lots of squatting, pulling, and pressing. Why is this the case?

GP: Because over the time that I've been training and coaching, those things have given me the most success. They are the most stressful exercises for the body to do. It's really nothing other than that. I could probably think up some complicated reason to make myself sound smart, but I'll resist the temptation.

MR: Why do you feel that squats are the most important lift for gaining bodyweight?

GP: Well, this is a little like the last question. I could answer with some theory and act as though I have some educated reason, but the real reason is again just because in my experience concentrating on squats puts muscle on people better than anything else. Mark Rippetoe is

probably the best guy for putting muscular bodyweight on beginners that I have ever seen; probably the best in the USA. His beginners program is basically squats, deadlifts, sometimes cleans, bench presses, military presses, chinups, and some sort of back extension, glute-ham raise, or reverse hyper. He has the athletes train their whole body 3 days a week and doing about 4 exercises each day, but usually squatting first in the workout and putting a lot of energy into the squat.

MR: You've used a variety of different training programs over the years, including Westside Barbell, Bill Starr's programs, Bulgarian and Russian influenced programs. Can you describe what you liked about them? What do they all have in common that makes a good program, or what does a good program need?

GP: The best programs have lots of heavy and hard full body lifts, tend to mostly train the body as a unit instead of breaking everything down into too many segments, and have built in ways to vary the training stress over a training cycle. Westside did a world of good for PL training in general because it got PLers to train harder. It's also great because it's a wonderful "template" that people can use, they can individualize and change things but stay within the template and still be doing a program that makes sense even after they have tinkered with it. Bill Starr wrote simple programs that used whole body lifts like squats, cleans, deadlifts, and bench presses when most people were going to isolation and bodybuilding stuff, and he advocated training the whole body 3 times a week when everyone was convinced that you had to have a week of rest every time you did a curl. The Bulgarians just plain work harder than anyone - someone has to do that just to show the rest of the world that they can train harder and have to train harder. The Russians just flat out knew how to train. I don't think a lot of their stuff is applicable in this country for various reasons, but their ideas of periodization were the real beginnings of sports science as it applies to strength sports.

MR: You've met and trained with some of the most successful and important athletes and coaches from around the world. Can you tell us about some of your experiences with them?

GP: It's hard to be too specific, because most good athletes are crazy, and much of what transpires when they get together is best left without a permanent record. There is a mindset that goes along with breaking barriers, and the people who do it in training and competition also tend to do it on Saturday night.

MR: What's your opinion on the superstars of the weight training world? Kaz? Ed Coan? Ronnie Coleman? Others?

GP: I don't really know Kaz, though I've met and talked to him a couple of times. He's like a whole other species. Anyone who isn't scared of Kaz is either stupid or part Grizzly bear. Ed Coan is simply the best powerlifter ever. I really wish he would have tried OL. I won't comment on Ronnie Coleman. Wes Barnett is the greatest weightlifter the US has ever produced in my opinion, and should be considered a superstar of the weight training world. I think he was the overall best athlete in the US prior to the 2000 Olympics. He stopped competing in 2000. The Russians couldn't believe he was clean, they didn't think it was humanly possible to do what he did clean, but he was and he did. I think he could have won Olympic gold in the Decathlon if he

had done that instead of OL. His OL coach took him out and tested him on the ten events and was convinced that even with limited training he could have been at the top in that sport. Pete Kelley is the object of a lot of admiration from the guys in Wichita Falls, lots of the kids on the team really like him. Pete is as nice as any person I've ever met. If you were not a weightlifter, and the subject never came up, I think you could know Pete for years and never know he'd been to the Olympics and held American records. If everyone was more like Pete the world would be a better place. Shane Hamman and Chad Vaughn are both on the 2004 Olympic team, both have trained here with us, and Chad has competed in a couple of our local meets. Shane did some "exhibition" lifts here at the end of a local meet and then signed autographs for the younger kids. He did this even though it was during his only week off from training all year and he had to come and do a heavy clean and jerk to excite the audience. Both are great people. Both are humble and hardworking and very nice.



MR: What strength coach has had the most impact on you? What was the best advice you ever received?

GP: Lon Kilgore, Mark Rippetoe and Tommy Suggs are the three I learned the most from, and continue to learn from. As far as the best single piece of advice, Lon Kilgore relayed something to me that Lyn Jones said once, that the single most important thing was to have a plan and believe in it, this is much more important than what the plan actually is. Now I don't really agree with Lyn Jones on many things, but I really do think that was a great observation and very useful to remember.

MR: I believe you spent time in Russia, how did that affect your approach to training?

GP: Well, it showed me I wasn't training hard enough for one thing. I did learn to snatch while over there and picked up a lot of minor stuff, but all that stuff I would have come by eventually anyway. The thing that made a lasting impression was just how hard they trained. It was much harder than anything I'd seen to that point.

MR: Ok, let's talk specifics for a moment. How would you typically train someone who was fairly inexperienced and wanted to get into OLY weightlifting?

GP: Well, first you have to learn the movements. I typically do this in stages and don't rush it. At the same time as this is happening, you have to get strong, or at least begin to get strong. This means that three days a week, in addition to learning technique, you should be doing squats and overhead squats and Romanian deadlifts and push presses and stuff like that. Weightlifting has a large technique component, but at its base it is just like powerlifting in that the main goal is to be strong, and be able to demonstrate great strength and power. You have to keep this in mind and make it a training priority from day one. I also do lots of compound exercises at first, like 2 snatches followed by 2 drop snatches followed by 2 overhead squats, or 2 cleans followed by 2 front squats followed by 2 jerks. All this is done without ever putting the bar down. This is good for strength and teaching you to balance and tough it out when you are tired and hurting.

MR: How does that change as your athletes become more and more experienced in the sport?

GP: When you get more experienced, you have to work harder and harder. That's the main change. You also have to become more specific, and do more of what you are actually going to do in competition. And you have to pay more and more attention to variations of training stress, because with all the workload it becomes easier to overtrain. The training also gets a little more individualized as lifters get more experienced... for example some lifters have problems with leg strength and have to practically bleed in the squat rack and try to do anything possible to get the squat up. Some seem to always have a surplus of leg and back strength and struggle with speed and technique, and need to spend more time with other training methods.

MR: Ok, here's a list of different types of athletes. I'd like to get your opinion on generally what should be addressed by their training programs.

A relatively inexperienced athlete who wants to train for general strength and size.

He should live and die in the squat rack. Most put too much emphasis on the barbell bench press and not enough emphasis on other types of pressing, including not enough on overhead pressing. Bench pressing is great but if you do it to the exclusion of everything else you won't get as big or strong and you can have some stability and structural problems as the years go by. Also most don't work the back hard enough or often enough. But if you're a beginner and want to get strong, squats are the main thing. An alternative to that would be to just go to Mark Rippetoe and get a program and do what he tells you. It's normal for him to take a high school kid and put 30-40lbs of muscle on them in a period of less than 6 months, without drugs and without ever spending more than 3 days a week in the gym. I should say it's normal IF they listen to him, most won't listen to anyone.

A sprinter.

A sprinter should learn how to run properly. Many who want to become fast don't do this. Everyone should spend some time gaining basic strength. Kids who can't squat bodyweight and run like they are swatting mosquitos are paying big money to be in programs where they do hours of plyos and jumping every week, doing drills modeled off of elite sprinters. They would be better off learning to run and laying a base of basic leg and hip strength. They want to be too

specific too fast and don't lay a base. Once you have the base, however, you have to train to sprint. Some people whose main goal is to run fast just can't get away from the heavy and slow lifts in the weight room when it is time, they have gotten to tied up in benching and squatting big numbers. People get too emotionally tied to goals that aren't their main goal, and derail themselves. You have to remember why you are training, keep the big picture in mind, and think long-term. That's true whether you're a sprinter or any other type of athlete.

A thrower (shot, discuss, etc.)

A thrower has to be explosive and have a high squat to bodyweight ratio. Sammy Walker was the only guy ever to make the Olympic team in both throwing and Olympic weightlifting AND he trained Carter, who holds the high school shot put national record with I think 84 feet and some odd inches. I believe the second best ever is in the mid 70's, so that throw was kind of crazy. Sammy Walker's son is throwing over 60 feet at 15 or 16 years old now, and his main training is squats and cleans. He cleans over 350lbs already. Based on Sammy's success throwing and coaching, I'd say it's a winning formula. Sammy put in a throw circle behind his barbeque joint a few years back, so that he could assist anyone who wanted with the throws, since he's there all day working anyway. I don't think many people come by, which is a shame and stupid.

Football or Rugby Player

Football players need more variety in training than throwers, because they have to perform a wider variety of movements and are exposed to a wider variety of stresses in competition, but still the same basics; squats and pulling and pressing. 99% of football players do too many exercises. Many who have the ability to get really strong stay embarrassingly weak. Greg Henderson started training at Wichita Falls Athletic Club when he was in the sixth grade. Now he's the quarterback for Rice University. He's a 5'10" kid who weighs about 195lbs. He holds all the strength and conditioning records for Rice. 620lb OL style raw squat, 420 raw bench press, 390lb clean, 40 inch honest vertical, and 4.42 electronically timed 40 yard dash. Not bad for an under 200lb quarterback who is MOST DEFINITELY clean as a whistle. Many of the kids in big time college football could be even stronger and faster than this, but their training keeps them weak. There are tons of kids in college football who could clean over 400lbs and do raw Olympic style squats with over 600lbs, but never get anywhere near those strength numbers. If you want to get strong like that, you have to be willing to go to the gym and squat and do the basic "big" exercises, things with lots of weight on the bar that work large portions of the body in one exercise, and do that hard enough that you have little energy left over for the extras. Lot's of kids are afraid to do any of the "big" exercises like the squat more than once a week, which I don't understand. Maybe it's the influence of Muscle and Fitness type magazines, or maybe it a fear of hard work.

Basketball Player

I try to stay away from basketball players. After a couple of years of trying I found that a basketball player who will train hard is rare.

Baseball Player

See note about basketball players..

Fighter (Boxer, Martial Arts, Pride, K1, MMA, etc.)

I've never worked with any such person who was any good. But if I did I'd do the same basic things I do with everyone else, but with maybe more emphasis on upper body strength. Getting strong is getting strong is getting strong. There's just no getting around that no matter how you want to apply the strength. The closest I've gotten to a fighter is wrestling, where I helped coach a kid who was 4 time state champion, national champion, and then won the junior worlds. He was tougher than his competitors. I'd like to think that his training made him that way, but in reality that's something you are either born with or not.

Why are wrestlers so tough? It seems that they could potentially benefit from a lot of cleans and snatches. Are the Olympic lifts something they should include in their training?

Wrestlers are tough because wrestling is a tough sport; the weak get weeded out or they get tough to survive. If you can survive a season of collegiate wrestling, I don't think there's much that you can't survive. I do think that the Olympic lifts are things that wrestlers should do. Steve Miller in Norman, Oklahoma, a guy who got Shane Hamman started in Olympic Weightlifting, and currently trains Chad Vaughn, also coaches a lot of submission fighters of various styles and wrestlers, and he is using the clean and snatch with great, great success in training his fighters and wrestlers.

MR: Are there any exercises you think every strength athlete should be doing regardless of sport?

GP: Squats and cleans.

MR: Are there any glaring weaknesses you see in most athletes?

GP: Not strong enough and don't work hard enough to get strong is the major problem with a lot of people who don't get where they want. Other major problem is goal setting, many athletes have their priorities all screwed up and aren't chasing the right things. They aren't doing what they need to do. Too many athletes are closet bodybuilders.

MR: Why is training volume important? Don't you also advocate keeping intensity high for a strength athlete regardless of how far out he is from a competition?

GP: Yes, I like to keep intensity high. The best way to get strong is to lift heavy weights, not light weights. The best way to get your body to accept training heavy much of the time is to just do it and adapt. Nobody ever got strong without training heavy and going after personal records on a consistent basis. Training volume is important because after a while your body gets used to a certain amount of training, and you have to do more. But in doing more, you overcome your ability to adapt. The further you get in sport, the faster this happens, so manipulating volume so that you cause an adaptation but then backing off before you tear yourself apart becomes a more and more difficult proposition.

MR: Talk to us about the importance of manipulating the overall stress of a program from week to week in order to load, deload, and peak.

GP: In my opinion, most people don't vary the difficulty of training enough. They may go heavy or they may go light, but if they go light they go high reps and higher volume, and if they go heavy they cut the volume, so the overall difficulty of what they are doing doesn't change all that much. I think its better to have harder weeks and easier weeks, and you can set that up a variety of ways, 6 or 8 week cycles, or even 3 or 4 week cycles. It varies with the person. You must be fully recovered and ready to really attack a 14 day stressful training period. And after that stressful period, your body is going to need a few weeks to adapt. That won't happen if you just keep on training hard. So the overall stress on the body has to go up and down to stimulate an adaptation and then to let it happen. But by easier weeks I don't mean light weeks, at least not usually. Usually it's still heavy but just with less lifts. This style of training was researched at Midwestern State University by myself, Dr. Lon Kilgore, and Michael Hartman, some of the research has been published in peer reviewed journals and more will be soon. It has been validated with in the trenches of experience and with science and peer review.

MR: You are also an advocate of what I've heard you call "gut-busting" sets. Tell us about those and why they are important?

GP: Well, that's part of my belief that there is no substitute for effort. Heavy, hard, intense sets with medium reps build strength and muscle. Five sets of five reps with as heavy a weight as you can handle in an exercise like the squat is not new or exciting, but it produces results. This type of training should be in everyone's program, not as the only method but certainly as a method used for some of the year. Its like a base, it sets up everything else. But it's also very hard. Doing 5 by 5 with a weight that is only 5 or 10lbs under your best ever single set of 5 is a "gut-buster", it's really hard and even painful. Many people shy away from this sort of thing and use all sorts of methods which are more fashionable, and in reality, easier. Dan John wrote that the best methods look easy on paper. I've never heard his thoughts on doing 5 sets of 5, but I like to think its something he would like... looks easy but painful to do, and produces results.

MR: What's your take on food and nutrition for strength athletes?

GP: My general take is that they need lots of it. I believe in meat and vegetables making up the bulk of a diet and carb rich foods playing a smaller role. Carbs are what we use to manipulate weight. More carbs to gain weight, cut them back to lose or maintain. But we don't count calories or grams of protein or carbs. I encourage the kids to eat good food and lot's of it. I don't think you can train as hard if you don't eat enough protein and fat, a lifters diet should have some red meat in it. This isn't something I got out of a nutrition book or even believe to be supported by any nutrition experts. But based on experience I believe it to be true.

MR: Your athletes stay pretty lean throughout the year. Is this a product of diet or more so just a result of their level of training?

GP: My better athletes train very hard and train a lot. For most people, staying lean isn't a problem if they train hard enough.

MR: What are the most common mistakes that you see strength coaches and athletes make? What mistakes have you made as a strength coach? How have you learned from your mistakes and the mistakes of others?

GP: That's a broad question. I think a lot of strength coaches use plans they don't really understand, copying someone else's successful plan without ever really realizing that the devil is in all the little details that aren't written down on paper. For example, Westside style training has been successful in powerlifting, and even in strength training for various sports, but there are a lot of high school coaches trying to use it who just don't understand it. They have never used it themselves, and they are trying to fit it to a situation where they are getting 100 kids through the weight room in 50 minutes and in the process are leaving out the major things that makes Westside successful. Other coaches think that just because they have cleans written on the workout sheet their athletes are going to be more explosive, but they don't know how to coach the Olympic lifts and they don't know how to program training for them. Being a successful strength coach is just as hard and demanding as being successful at anything else. Its not a case of being able to copy some numbers and exercises and give them to the kids and then sitting back and watch. You have to have high expectations, measure progress, put some serious though in as to why your expectations aren't being met, and try like hell to change what needs to be changed. This is an on-going process all the time, if your not thinking everyday about how to make things better, what to do differently and why to do it, then you're not doing your job.

On a similar note, many coaches don't realize that what makes a program successful is how it fits the situation that it is used in. You cant just copy something used by a different coach in a different place by different athletes and use it successfully. There are a million reasons why a certain style of training might be used with great success by one group but a different group will not be successful with it.

Most athletes do too many exercises. Many times they look over other peoples programs like they are at a buffet. They pick a little of this and a little of that from a variety of programs, and end up with something useless. People think you have to train each muscle with a different specific exercise. Many guys in college athletics would do better if they would just randomly slash off half of what they are doing, and then work twice as hard on the half that is left.

I've made every mistake in the book. I'm sure I'm continuing to make a lot of them. One thing I have realized that has helped me is that getting stronger is indeed a great mystery that you never quite get unraveled. You have to come to the decision that this whole process is not easy and requires the same amount of study and thoughtfulness as any other profession before you can really begin to learn.

MR: What is the biggest obstacle you've had to face as a Strength and Conditioning Coach?

GP: I'm not sure how to answer this. I'm not even sure I really recognize any obstacles. I've just basically always tried to find a way to do what I wanted, and let everything else fall from that. Of course it would be nice to make a million a year and get to pick the top 10 guys each year from

the NFL draft to train for any sport I wanted, and if I'm ever elected dictator or develop mind control I'll get right on that.

MR: What advice would you have for those wishing to become a strength coach at the collegiate level or beyond?

GP: Well, if a prestigious position and financial success are what you want, get your CSCS, find a school with a good football or basketball program and an Ex. Phys program that has close ties to the athletic dept, do an internship or two, develop friendships with important people, don't ever contradict or question anyone, then get a good job and live happily ever after with your pretty wife and 2 kids.

If you really want to know how to get people stronger, train yourself like a madman, learn all you can from that, seek out people who know more than you do and learn from them. Learn all you can about track and field training and Olympic lifting and powerlifting. Learn from the people in those sports that are actually producing athletes, and not the ones who are simply famous. Compete in those sports yourself even if you suck. Bookmark Medline and read all the research you can. Develop an affinity for the local university library where you can photocopy the full articles you saw on Medline. Call foreign coaches and talk to them. Read all the books available on training. Never assume that any one person has all the answers or get so carried away on one thing that you never learn or adapt your ideas again. Train or assist in the training of any athlete you can lay hands on, and then repeat each of the above steps consistently for somewhere between 10 and 20 years and you'll probably be there. I'm currently involved in this very program that I am recommending, I figure I have about 5 more years to go and ill actually know something useful.

MR: Thanks again Glenn!

If you want to catch up with Glenn, you're gonna have to take a trip down I-44 to Wichita Falls, Texas, where he'll be yelling at school kids at Wichita Falls Athletic Club. But if you can't make it down in person you can keep up with Glenn and the team at www.wichitafallweightlifting.com. Glenn posts weekly pics, a review of good lifts for the week, an e-store, and an upcoming events page. He also frequently posts on the TotalElite forums at www.MidwestBarbell.com which is home to the strongest humans in the world.

