



ED COAN

THE LEGEND

BY JEFF "ROBOT" IRION
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL OCHNICKI

Somewhere in Chicago, IL, there's a 51-year-old retired powerlifter warming up with your max. His name is Ed Coan and he is the greatest powerlifter of all-time. We sat down with Ed to recap his past and talk about what he's up to now.

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For classic footage of Ed at his best, check out www.youtube.com/user/flyinonout



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What got you into lifting weights in the first place?

I started before I went into high school in a friend's basement. He had a universal machine in the basement and a little bit of free weights. He didn't have anything to squat, bench, or deadlift with, so we did everything on that universal machine. The real reason I started [lifting weights] was because I watched Pumping Iron, like a million other people! I tried to be Arnold until I realized Arnold was 6'2", so I tried to be Franco. Franco was a strong guy - I saw Bill Kazmaier win the national championships on TV and I said, "Wait a minute...you can be big and strong and not have to diet for a contest? That's what I want to do!"

What got you to enter your first powerlifting meet? How old were you and how did you do?

There was a lifter at the gym named Jim Rouse - he was mainly a bench press guy. He had the world record in the bench at 165 lbs. with 479, which was raw and with a 2 hour weigh-in and in a full meet. He was always top

3 at nationals, along with Mike Bridges and Rick Gaugler. He managed the health club that I worked out at. One of the guys at the gym who I ended up being training partners with had already done his first meet, so I decided to do the same thing. I was 16. I probably weighed barely over 150, so I was in the 165s. I squatted 501, benched 325, and deadlifted 545.

Who was your first coach or mentor in powerlifting?

Probably just the magazines. I started reading the magazines and following the routines that were in there. When I first started, I squatted twice a week and maxed out both times until I got up to 500 lbs! The rest was just reading, as well as trial and error.

Tell us about training at Ernie Frantz's place in your early years of powerlifting.

On Saturdays, there would be a bunch of good lifters from Illinois who would meet at Ernie's. Those guys would pretty much do all three lifts in one day. I'd go there and do my deadlift workout and all of my assistance stuff. I'd get help

and encouragement from all those guys, but I already had my routine in my head and I knew what I was going to do.

What was your relationship with Marty Gallagher?

Marty would run my numbers at meets. Doug Furnas would pick all of my numbers and Marty would coach us. He'd help us through our warm-ups and get us ready for the platform. Marty put me in touch with Kirk Karwoski after nationals one year and I put him on one of my routines -that is when his lifts went up like crazy.

When did you win your first world championship? How many world championships did you win?

My first world championship was in 1984 in the IPF [International Powerlifting Federation]. I don't know how many I've won - you'd have to go back and count them. There were a few APF [American Powerlifting Federation] things and a few that were affiliated with the USPF [United States Powerlifting Federation], once the USPF was no longer affiliated with the IPF. I never cared about that - I just wanted to lift.

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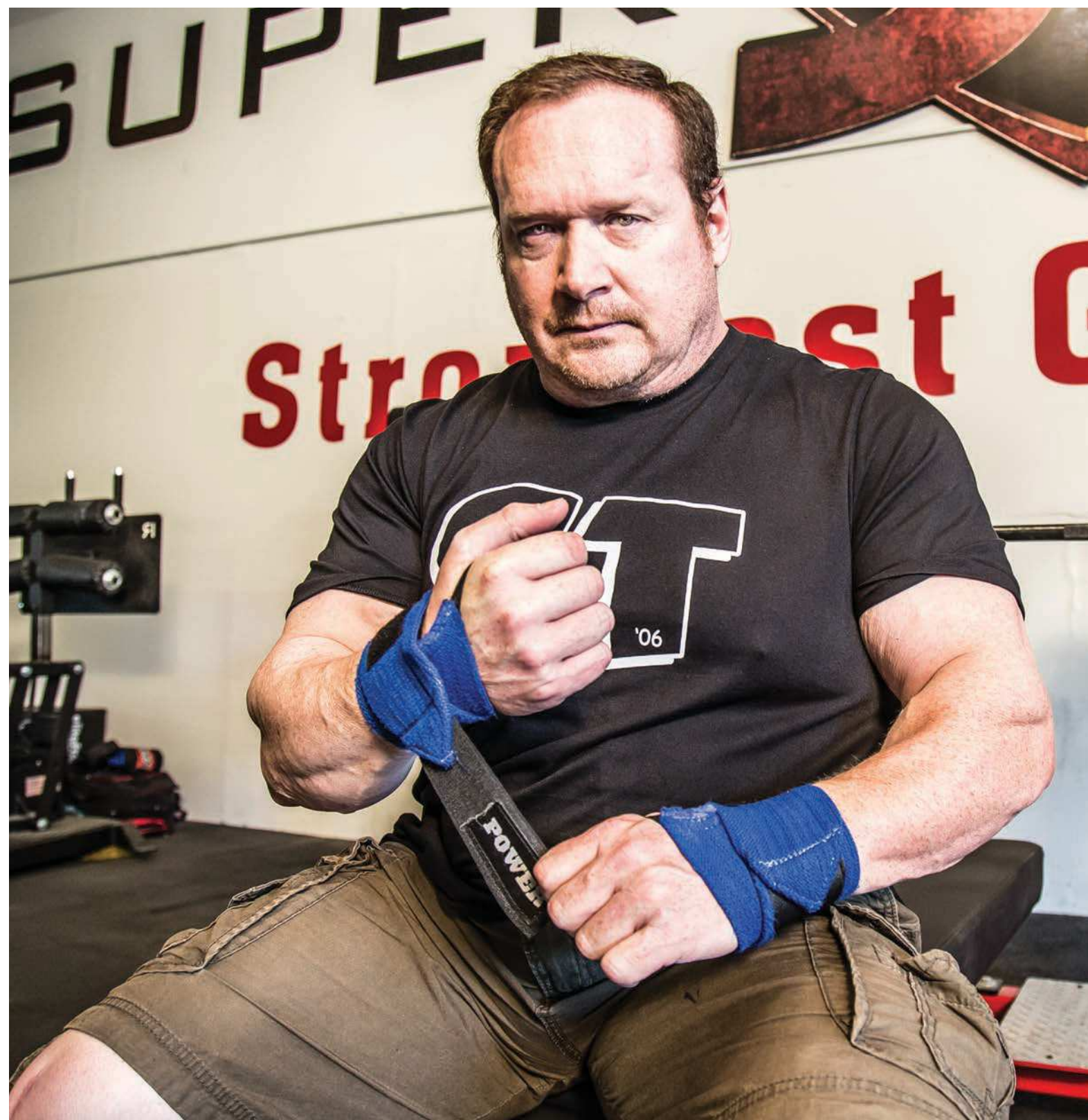
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Over the course of your career, how many world records did you set? Feel free to round to the nearest dozen.

I never counted them. There were some meets in Hawaii where I hit 7 in one meet: 2 squats, 2 deadlifts, and 3 total records.

I saw online that you've set 71 world records.

I think that's a number someone made

up, but I'll go with that.

Let's talk for a second about the mental aspect of powerlifting. You broke world records over and over again. You were constantly pushing the limits, even when the next guy in your weight class was hundreds of pounds behind you. In 1998, you totaled 2,463 and in 1999, you squatted 1,019. That was the biggest

total and the biggest single-ply squat ever at the time, regardless of weight class, and you were only 242 pounds! What kind of mindset did it take for you to keep pushing the limits higher and higher?

I just wanted to get better. As long as I knew I could get better and stronger, I didn't think of it as anything beyond that. I just thought of it as progress.



You were always quiet and focused before your lifts. What was going through your head?

I just tried to maintain focus and positivity. As long as I could do that, everything was the same: from getting under the bar, twisting underneath it, walking it out, etc. As long as I could keep that positivity and focus, I knew I'd get the lift.

Is it true that Mike Bridges is the only lifter to ever beat you head-to-head, and that only happened one time?

As far as in a big meet, yes. And that's only because I missed weight, by 1 lb. I was 19 and trying to make 165s at nationals in 1983. I tried everything to make weight, but I couldn't get that last pound off, so I competed at 181. I

squatted 699, benched 429, deadlifted 727, and totaled 1,857. I think that the deadlift and total would have been world records at 165 at the time. (Editor's note: the deadlift would still be a raw world record at 165. Also, Mike Bridges' lifts were an 804 squat, 501 bench, 705 deadlift, and 2,011 total.)

Who were some of the big names in powerlifting during your heyday?



Larry Pacifico lifted a little bit up until 1985. Kaz was at my first nationals in 1983, and that was his last. Mike Bridges also did his last nationals in 1983. John Gamble was still around for a couple of years after I got into it. Rickey Dale Crain was still lifting up until 1991 or so. You've also got Doyle Kennedy, Doug Furnas, George Hector, Lamar Gant (we were on the world team together in 1988), and Gene Bell. And you can't forget Kirk Karwoski!

Speaking of Kirk, he said that "[Ed Coan] is all that and a bowl of grits with cheese." How do you feel about that statement?

From Kirk, I feel pretty good! Kirk was one of the funniest guys to be around.

How long did your competitive powerlifting career last? You had a squat injury in a meet in 2002 - did that mark the end of your time at the top of the sport?

My first meet was in 1980 and the last one was in 2007. That injury didn't really end my career - I just wanted to come back to see if I could do it. I hit an easy 931 squat at USPF Nationals in 2007 and could have gone over 950 that day. That was my last meet. After that

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is when I started to feel my hip getting bad.

What injuries did you sustain during powerlifting? In hindsight, is there something you could've done to

avoid them or did they simply come with the territory of training and competing at such a high level for so long?

They pretty much come with the territory. When you have such a large amount of weight in your hands or on your back, you can't afford any mistakes. A little mistake is going to be more than just a pulled hamstring. I've torn one of my pecs twice, so I have a chunk missing. I've torn a bicep and a tricep, and both of those have chunks missing. I switched over to conventional [deadlifting] because I tore an adductor on one side. I had the knee injury from that fall, and I've had a hip replacement. With the exceptions of the knee and the hip closer to the end, it was just muscle tears. Nothing I couldn't overcome and figure out a way to get around.

Is there anything you wish you had done differently during your powerlifting career?

Yeah, I wish I'd focused more on nutrition and mobility work. But hindsight is 20/20.

I believe that you used a simple linear periodization program the en-

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tire time that you were competing in powerlifting. Looking back, is there anything you would have changed about your training?

Nope. Every program looks pretty simple on paper, but when you get into it and you have to pick the right numbers, training cycle after training cycle, it's not as easy anymore. Everyone starts at week 1 and has to get to week 12. It's all some form of periodization anyways. My way worked and it continues to work.

People like to say that there's nothing new under the sun. Are there any new training methods, techniques, or tools that you feel are valuable and that you wish you could've used in the past?

Some of the equipment. Knee wraps alone are so much better now. But I'm happy with how everything turned out. There are always a couple little things here and there that you wish you could've done, but the way I did things kind of made me who I was.

Over the course of your powerlifting career, you went from about 160 lbs to 245 lbs, and you were pretty

"I DON'T KNOW. THE MOST I EVER DID IN TRAINING, WITH A BELT AND KNEE WRAPS, WAS 925 FOR 2 IN THE SQUAT PRETTY EASILY. I PAUSE BENCHED 565 AND DOUBLED 900 IN THE DEADLIFT WITHOUT A DEADLIFT BAR"

solid the entire time. What was your diet like?

I couldn't stop myself from growing! I kind of ate whatever I wanted, but I made sure I got enough protein. I'd look in the mirror and pay attention to how I felt, and I'd base my eating on that. It was more instinctive, I'd say. I steadily went up over time. 165 and 181 were hard to stay at, though. I'd have to drop

20 lbs and there was only a 2 hour weigh-in, which was enough time to drink some fluids but not enough time to put much weight back on. 198 was a good weight class for me because I started filling out. I think 220 was probably my best weight class.

You were recently inducted into the International Sports Hall of Fame. Tell us about that experience.

It's run by Dr. Bob Goldman, along with Arnold Schwarzenegger. They have a board that picks people that they think are worthy. I was really fortunate to be selected.

Time for some point-blank questions! What is your proudest accomplishment in powerlifting?

If we're talking about the sport of powerlifting, I'd say the 2,403 total at 220, considering how it was done: a 2 hour weigh-in, raw bench, raw deadlift, no deadlift bar, no squat bar, no monolift, and IPF judges. But beyond that, I got to see the world, be in the magazines, and be famous in our little sport. And I've made a bunch of really cool friends out of it. I think the friendships I've made are better than all of the

trophies I've won.

That 2,403 total at 220 was done in 1991 at USPF Seniors via a 959 squat, 545 bench, and 901 deadlift. As you said, the bench and deadlift were both raw. What could you have totaled raw?

I don't know. The most I ever did in training, with a belt and knee wraps, was 925 for 2 in the squat pretty easily. I pause benched 565 and doubled 900 in the deadlift without a deadlift bar. The deadlift was done at about 220, and the squat and bench were done at a little over 230.

925 + 565 + 901 = 2,391! It's crazy to think that you could've totaled that or maybe even more as a 220! Was your 901 deadlift done with a deadlift bar?

No. And the squats on that day weren't done with a squat bar either. We used a regular power bar for all 3 lifts.

The world record raw squat with wraps at 220 is 915, held by Sam Byrd. Since you doubled 925 in training, I think it's safe to say you could have beaten that! I'm sure the answer is yes, but could you have also beaten Dan Green's world record 783 raw squat without wraps at 220?

Those times are over so I don't think about it, but yeah, I could've hit it without a problem. Weighing just over 230, I walked out 865 in the gym and squatted it pretty easily in just a belt, without even using knee sleeves. (Editor's note: 865 would also beat out Kirk Karwoski's 826 at 242 and Stan Efferding's 854 at 275 world records.)

Whether or not you consider yourself the greatest powerlifter of all-time, let's leave you out of the question. Excluding people named "Ed Coan," who is the greatest powerlifter of all-time?

There's a few that it could be. From the old days, it could be someone like Hideaki Inaba or Lamar Gant. You can always throw Larry Pacifico in there.

Who is the best powerlifter in the sport today? You can only pick one! But you can have some honorable mentions, if you want.

I would say Jaroslaw Olech from Poland, followed by Sergey Fedosienko from Russia. You can't discount Eric Lilliebridge and Andrey Malanichev. And

"THERE'S TOO MANY FEDERATIONS THAT ALLOW FOR EVERYONE TO DO WHATEVER THEY WANT AND GET AWAY WITH A LOT OF BS LIFTS"

look what Carl Yngvar Christensen is doing in the IPF. He might get a 500 freakin' kg squat this year!

Excluding things that you've done, what is the most impressive feat ever in the sport of powerlifting?

Lamar Gant's 683 deadlift at 132 was pretty damn cool. Considering we flew all the way to Perth, Australia and it was done with a 2 hour weigh-in, IPF rules, and no deadlift bar, it was pretty amazing. And I've seen some non-world record lifts where the guy really fought it out when I was thinking "No way in hell he's gonna get it!" Eric Lilliebridge did a 1025 squat. Even though it's out of a monolift, it's still 10-freakin'-25! Everything Malanichev has done so far has looked like a warm-up. I've had the pleasure of watching Koklyayev lift - he's probably the greatest overall strength athlete we've seen. I've watched KK lift and I've talked to him for a while. I even got to watch and judge Kirill Sarychev's 694 bench. Zahir Khudayarov is strong as hell, and he's a really nice guy in person. There are some really good US lifters coming up, if they can last. I've helped out Derek Kendall. If he can put it together, he's going to be a monster if he can last.

What is good about the sport of powerlifting today?

The good thing is that there are so many more lifters now and it's gotten so much more popular.

On the flip side, what's wrong with the current state of powerlifting?

There's too many federations that allow for everyone to do whatever they want and get away with a lot of BS lifts. So many people now have become pussies. You see these lifts on Facebook that are high as sh*t, but 40 people respond and say, "That was beast mode!" or "That was incredible!" People can't

handle it if you just tell them the truth anymore. Everyone has to be coddled. They go to a meet where they know the judges, so they get whatever they want. It's like everyone's afraid nowadays to give a big lift a red light.

What do you consider to be your current role in the sport of powerlifting?

It's weird to be considered an old timer. I think I have a lot of words of wisdom. A lot of the things that I did to last a long time and to get stronger can play a huge role for the guys training now.

You had a hip replacement in November 2010. I've heard that since then, you've gotten back up to a 700+ deadlift in the gym. Is that true?

Oh, God yeah!

And in 2014, you did an exhibition 661 raw squat without wraps at GPA [Global Powerlifting Alliance] Worlds. While those aren't as good as your lifts from when you were younger, they're still some very good lifts, and they're all the more impressive for a 51-year-old retired middleweight powerlifter! Do you have any intentions to compete again?

I don't know. Wayne Howlett asked me to do that squat at the last moment. I asked him what he was going to do and he said he was just going to take 300 kg, so I said I'd do the same. I'm pretty sure I could've done 750 that day.

What are you up to these days?

Just training and training some people. I've been traveling a lot and running a lot of seminars and workshops all over the place.

That about wraps things up. It's been an honor interviewing you. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I'd like to thank Mark and Andee Bell for keeping everything going with their magazine and for being fans of the sport. I know Mark is still a huge fan of powerlifting, and it's great that he's been able to turn his passion into a business. And thanks for keeping Power magazine still going, people need that and they love it. You have no idea how much I enjoyed reading the magazines when I was a kid, so they're helping out the future of lifting just by having the magazine alone, and they may not even realize it. **PM**