





JENNIFER 'JEN' THOMPSON

WEIGHT CLASS 63 KG. | 138 LBS.

CURRENT IPF RAW WORLD
RECORD HOLDER IN BENCH PRESS
WITH 141.5 KG. | 312 LBS.

CURRENT IPF RAW WORLD
RECORD HOLDER IN TOTAL
WITH 486 KG. | 1071 LBS.

BY HANI JAZAYRLI

HANI: Jennifer, thank you so much for making time for this interview. I'd say that your accomplishments don't require mention, but I suspect some people may not know just how deep the rabbit hole goes. You have broken 34 world records and are a 19-time national champion, a four-time IPF world bench press champion, a three-time IPF classic world powerlifting champion, and a member of the USA Powerlifting Women's Hall of Fame. Does that about cover it?

JENNIFER: That nearly covers it! One of my greatest accomplishments is having the highest raw bench press Wilks score for men or women in history at over 156 points. At the IPF Classic World Championships, one of the German male lifters tried to break it, but he missed his lift. I will have to keep working on improving it.

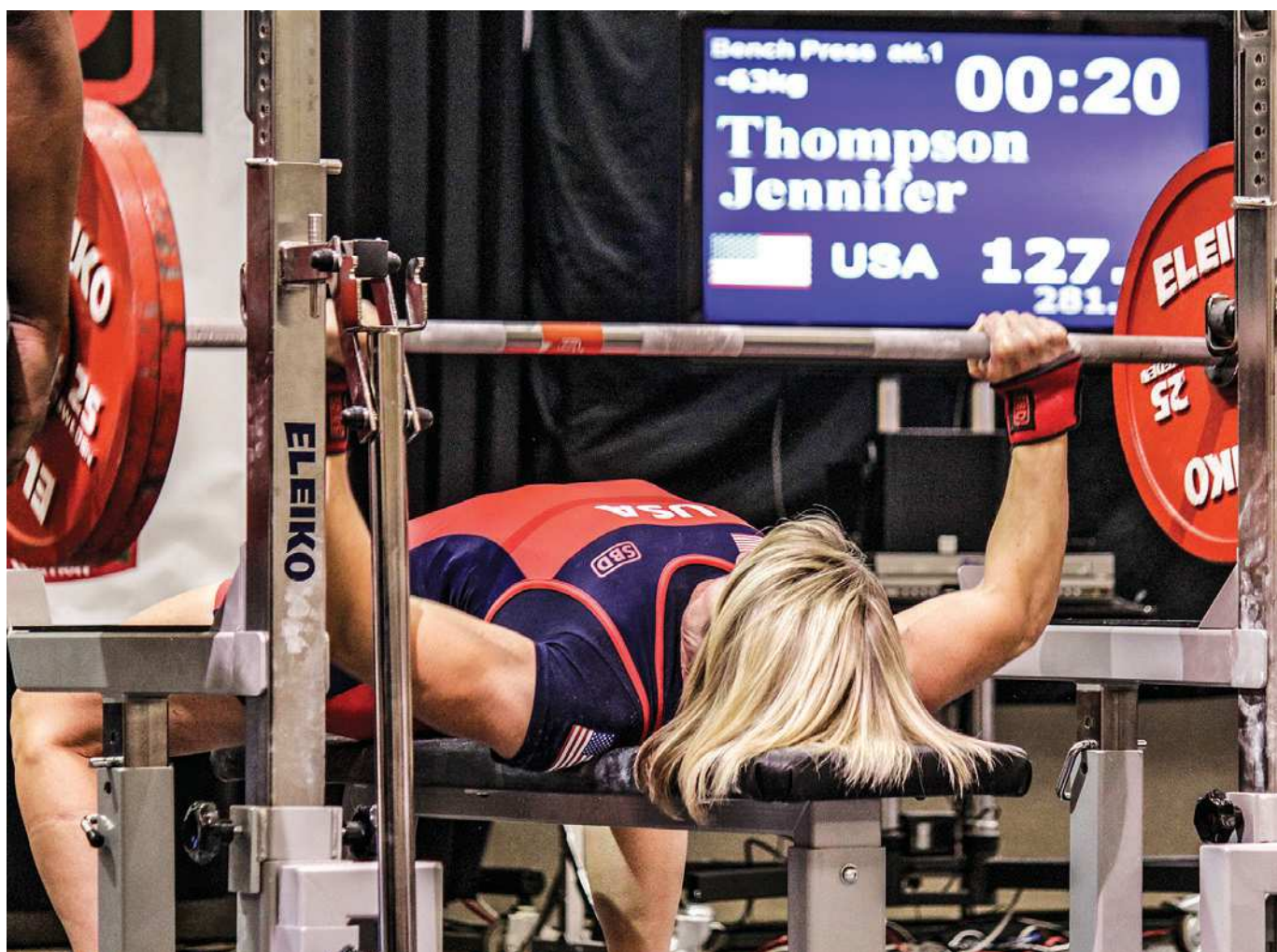
HANI: You started competing in 1999; that means you've been on the platform for over 17 years now! That's a spectacular amount of time to have spent in any sport, and it's even more impressive that you've spent such a large portion of it at the top. Do you find that you still get just as passionate when it comes time to step onto

the platform?

JENNIFER: I think I am probably even more passionate now. I have put so much time and effort into training. I am also involved in a lot of aspects of the sport. I am the North Carolina State Chair, a meet director, an IPF referee, a member of the Technical Committee for USA Powerlifting, and a member of the Youth Committee for the IPF. I believe these roles give me a feeling of ownership over our sport, and they make me want to perform my best. Also, being at the top is such a nice place that it makes you really want to work hard to stay there. Over the years, powerlifting has given me so much confidence that I am now able to go out on the platform and feed so much off of the crowd's energy that I feel as if I am going to explode.

HANI: Speaking of passion – it can be really difficult to stay motivated in training month after month and year after year. What is it that drives you to keep pushing so hard?

JENNIFER: Part of what drives me is that I don't want to let anyone down. When you are breaking records and performing well, people expect that out of you every time. The spectators want it, your sponsors want it, your coaches



want it, and you want it. Also, I have the best training partners in the world at Thompson's Gym. I never dread a workout. I go in there and we cut up, cheer each other on, and strategize. It is such a great atmosphere that it is hard not to be motivated to lift hard.

HANI: How does a high school math teacher get into powerlifting in the first place? Were you an athlete prior to starting lifting competitively?

JENNIFER: I started lifting in college. Originally, I was a long distance runner, my dad was a runner, and I liked the competition of the races but found the training boring. I met my husband and starting lifting with him and his friends in a basement gym. I was hooked after that. I loved the look and feel of being fit. Eventually, I was getting as strong as some of his friends. That's when we decided I could do something with this strength, and I found powerlifting. I actually started lifting before I became a teacher. Being both a teacher and a powerlifter is actually beneficial as my

students totally get excited for my training and competitions. Currently, they are helping me design a t-shirt for my sponsor, LVD Fitness. All of the proceeds from their design will go toward feeding hungry kids in America. I am super proud of them.

HANI: You recently said in a YouTube video that you turned 43 the Monday following the IPF Classic World Championships. At this point, you have so many accolades under your belt, but I firmly believe that we have yet seen you reach your best. What are your long-term aspirations on the platform?

JENNIFER: Ultimately, I want to stay at the top as long as I can. I believe there are some junior lifters coming up that will give me a run, and you never know who will show up. As powerlifting gets more mainstream, and especially if we can get an Olympic nod, I believe it will open it [powerlifting] up to a lot more lifters. I want to keep pushing the bar in the bench press. I don't believe I

have a ceiling as far as my strength goes in this discipline. I have been working really hard on my squat. My squat has always been a weakness for me compared to the bench and the deadlift. I believe if I can make significant gains here, I can continue to be at the top for a while.

HANI: Most recently, you cleaned house at USA Powerlifting Bench Press Nationals, and it looks like Raw Nationals is next on the map for you. Any projections for how things will go?

JENNIFER: 315 is going down in the bench press. I have hit it in the gym, but in competition, it is a whole different experience. I believe that total record will fall as well. I am having a great training cycle, and I am really excited to be lifting in the "prime time" session at Raw Nationals. I really feed off of the audience when I am lifting, so I think this will give me motivation to hit some huge numbers. I also enjoy lifting against Kimberly Walford for the Best Lifter award. We have a friendly competition and push

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each other to be our best.

HANI: Is there a particular moment that comes to mind as your favorite memory in your lifting career?

JENNIFER: It's hard to pick one, but I believe it was the first time I won the IPF World Bench Press Championships in 2001. I had missed winning two years in a row. I wanted it so badly, and there is no better feeling than hearing the National Anthem being played while you are on the podium in a foreign country. An interesting side note; I beat out the Japanese lifter on Pearl Harbor Day.

HANI: Conversely, what do you feel was your biggest disappointment?

JENNIFER: One of my biggest disappointments happened this year at IPF World Championships. After having the best training cycle and nutrition of my life, I was held short by a difference in opinion on attempt selection. I was ready to hit big numbers and do big things in this competition and prevented from doing so. It was extremely frustrating and hurtful. If there is one thing everyone knows about powerlifting, it is that we are all different. We train differently, we

have different body types, and we handle pressure differently. Particularly when you are dealing with a team of the top athletes in the world and three returning World Champions, we cannot all be expected to fit the same mold. It was a defeating, disappointing, and negative experience. It is something I still think about, but it also fires me up to go to Raw Nationals and show what I can do.

HANI: You have a husband and two young boys. I know that your husband, Donovan, has previously and still does compete in USA Powerlifting. Will you be pushing your boys to pursue an athletic career in powerlifting as well?

JENNIFER: I think that weight training is important for any sport that a person is in, whether it is baseball, basketball, etc. So, we do have a training routine that our boys go through. I think it is important to show them that time and dedication pay off; not just in powerlifting but in all aspects of life. My oldest son, Tucker, will be thirteen in November and is excited about entering his first powerlifting meet on November

5th here in NC. However, I don't really care what their career is as long as they work hard and do their best.

HANI: Do you have a coach that guides you through your programming and/or nutrition? How essential do you feel this is to your success and that of athletes considering having a coach of their own?

JENNIFER: My husband, Donovan, does our programming. But it is really a team effort. We are constantly changing it. We bounce ideas off of all those in our gym and talk with friends at other meets. We will incorporate a new exercise or rep amount. If it works, we keep it; if not, we go back to what we were doing or try something else. I think it is important to always be evolving your training methods.

I have just started paying attention to my nutrition. I started working with Paul Revelia of Pro Physique. I had been having a hard time keeping my weight down, and cutting my carbs was making me tired. I knew there was a better way, so I contacted Paul. He has taught me about "flexible dieting". We work on

adjusting my macronutrients throughout my training cycle up until a meet. I check in with him weekly. We talk about my training, my weight, and my goals and adjust the protein, carbs and fats from there. With so many competitions focused on Wilks score and winning the best lifter award, my bodyweight has become important.

HANI: If you can reveal some of these secrets, what does a typical week of training look like for you?

JENNIFER: There are no secrets; I have it all posted on my website. We bench Sunday, squat on Tuesday, triceps and shoulders on Thursday, and we deadlift on Friday. I end up working out for about two hours, but that is mostly because we are horsing around. It should probably take one and a half hours. On my off days, I will flip some tires, pull ropes and run a sled. I have added some squats to my bench and triceps day to try to improve it.

HANI: In your experience, does your training structure need to be different as a female?

JENNIFER: Not at all. I think I got so strong because I trained with a bunch

of dudes that made me lift what they lifted. I did add in some additional accessory work because women are not as naturally strong in the upper body as men. I incorporated shoulder exercises, plyo pushups (I have a video of these on my YouTube Channel), and heavy holds. The pushups and heavy holds work on increasing the strength of the stability muscles. Most people that just start out have a shaky bar path, and it's a little all over the place. These exercises help improve that.

HANI: If you could give one bench press training tip to everyone out there, what would it be?

JENNIFER: Leg drive! Very few people do it correctly. You have to have tight quads when you bring the bar down, and then you have to fire your legs toward your head (not butt up in the air) as you press the bar off of your chest. You should visually see your hips move toward your head as you press the bar up.


HANI: I think we all know that injuries are a big part of what we have to deal with on a semi regular basis in powerlifting. Have you dealt with any




[injuries] recently? What did you do to work through or around it?

JENNIFER: I have been pretty lucky with injuries due to lifting. I think most of it is because I really listen to my body. I deload exercises when I can't hit the reps I want. I make sure I get solid sleep, and I am an advocate for daily naps. But the biggest strategy for injury prevention is having good form. If I can't get a rep, I just miss it. I don't ever go for anything at all costs. This doesn't mean that I haven't had injuries and setbacks that I have had to work through. I took a bad wakeboarding fall and had to have a total knee reconstruction including a cadaver ACL. I have also ruptured a disk in my neck causing atrophy in my arm requiring surgery. Neither of these injuries were caused from powerlifting or lifting in general, but they certainly required rehab and reengineering of my workouts.

HANI: So what does a typical day of food look like for you?

JENNIFER: It depends on if it is a training day or an off day. Training days have more carbs, around 130 g with around 50 g of fat. I always get



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around 160 g of protein every day. One of the things that I found when I started tracking my macros was that I was eating way too much fat. I always thought that if I ate a lot of protein and smaller amounts of carbs, I was doing well with my diet. Turns out, you really need a good balance of all three. Since I have been watching my macros, I have more energy for my workouts and throughout the day. I am also able to eat more of a variety of food which is more satisfying. I can have a bagel sandwich or a steak with wine if I make sure that the foods I eat earlier in the day allow for it.

HANI: Do you take any supplements?

JENNIFER: I have been using SSP [Speed Strength Performance] Nutrition for several years. The founder, Dennis Cieri, is the male equivalent of me in the bench press. We have been friends for years, and I watched him investigate and work hard to hire the right people to make a superior product. It is the first time I have taken a supplement and

noticed a difference in my workouts, energy level, and recovery. They really have a great pre and post workout drink with no fillers, and it is free of WADA [World Anti-Doping Agency] banned substances. I feel very safe using their products.

HANI: What would your ideal Saturday look like?

JENNIFER: Sleeping in for me is about 8:00 am. So, [my ideal Saturday is] sleeping in, a warm cup of coffee, and sitting on our back deck of our mountain house. There is something about the quiet of the morning when no one else is up that is so appealing. In the Blue Ridge Mountains, you can hear the animals make noise, see the clouds wisp over the blue peaks, and just enjoy the beauty of it all. Then, about an hour later, the kids are up, we are making pancakes, and planning out our day.

HANI: What is your favorite food?

JENNIFER: I honestly can't say I have a favorite food. I love a glass of wine and a nice filet. I also really love fresh crab cakes.

HANI: What is something that nobody reading this would likely know about you?

JENNIFER: As lame as it sounds, I love jigsaw puzzles. I constantly have one on my table, and I get addicted to finishing them. I will sometimes stay up to the wee hours of the morning, trying to get those pieces in the right place. There is something so satisfying about it.

HANI: Where can we find you on social media?

JENNIFER: @jenthompson132 is my handle for Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and Pinterest. Facebook is 132 Pounds of Power and Thompson's Gym. YouTube is the same, 132 Pounds of Power and Thompson's Gym. I post my lifting videos on the 132 Pounds of Power and training with my partners and tutorials on Thompson's Gym. I also have a website 132poundsofpower.com

HANI: Thank you so much for the interview, Jen. Good luck in your upcoming competitions. I am hoping to see you competing in Belarus next year! **PM**