

INTERVIEW

Personal dialogue between
PL USA Magazine and the
Sport's Greatest Names.

"Let's go, let's go, come on, come on! Let's go Jeff, come on baby, come on! Get it Rodney, you can do it, harder, Harder! Here we go, Big Lift! Come on Scott, one more rep, here we go, come on!"

This incessant dialogue originates from the most diminutive individual in the weight room. His voice is mingled with the clanging of weights, and the moans of athletes struggling with squats, deadlifts, bench presses and other exercises. Although most are a head taller than their driving overseer, there is no question as to who is in charge. The voice comes from Dan Austin, 27, a national and world powerlifting champion in the 148 lb. class, and strength coach at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee. Notebook in hand, he prowls the large weight room, jotting down notes on the performances of each athlete, while encouraging, motivating, and demanding. Dan is intense and expects the same from the athletes. They respond with a determination that reflects their respect for their director and a deep pride developing within themselves. The strength, pride, and dedication developed here will carry over to the playing field and certainly contribute to increased individual and team achievement there as well.

What a contrast in this writer's mind as he recollects his college football coach in the late 1950s, castigating anyone using weights as potentially becoming "muscle bound" and being unable to perform well in athletics. Now, most colleges would not be competitive without a strong weight program.

Since Dan Austin has only been at Austin Peay State University since April 1, 1985, the full results of his efforts have not yet been realized. Most athletes were gone during the summer months and since they returned to football practice in the fall, little time has been spent under his tutelage. Now, it is different as he drives them through the winter months on an intense strength producing program. On first coming to Austin Peay, Dan found that only two people could squat with 500 lbs., only two could power clean 300, and only one could bench 400. He has already produced over 20 individuals that can squat with 500, 12 that can power clean 300, and five that can bench 400. This is sensational progress for such a short period, but should anyone be surprised? These fortunate young men are working with an enthusiastic powerlifter that "pound for pound" may be the strongest in the world.

Each exercise session for the athletes lasts 45 minutes and is split into three parts. As soon as one individual in the group completes a specific lift, another member of the group immediately repeats the same exercise. This group effort motivates the participants and also allows them to assist each other in the various exercises. The pace is intense with little or no talking among the athletes. The groans of extreme exertion, the clanking of plates, the sounds of heavy breathing, and Dan's rhetorical drumbeat, are unrelenting rhythms that permeate the room. At the end of the session, the athletes are near exhaustion, but proud of the exhilarating feeling that can come only from all out physical effort. As Dan explains the importance of intensity in his strength building program, I realize that he is actually describing himself, "Mr. Intensity". The dedication and effort he expects from his trainees are only a reflection of the resolution deep within his own being. The 100% effort demanded of his pupils is the same he innately demands of himself.

In a relatively short time, Dan has certainly become a force to be recognized in the world of powerlifting. In 1983, he won the Junior Nationals, and in 1984 he won the Senior Nationals, Drug Free Nationals, and World Championships. This year he

Dan Austin



MR. INTENSITY... Dan Austin is both a successful strength coach and an outstanding strength athlete.

plans to enter the Senior Nationals, the Drug Free Nationals, and hopefully qualify for the World Championships again. Dan emphatically states that he has never used drugs and does not intend to do so. He wishes to prove that great accomplishments can be achieved without resorting to the use of dangerous muscle building chemicals.

In the following interview, this dynamic champion reveals his aspirations, philosophy, and training techniques in the world of Powerlifting.

Yarbro: Do you enjoy your position at Austin Peay as strength coach?

Austin: I love my job here. I would do this job for free, because I love working with these guys.

Yarbro: Do you enjoy seeing these young men make progress?

Austin: Hey, when they lift a lot of weight and we get behind each other, yelling and screaming, you just don't find anything more enjoyable than that.

Yarbro: I notice these young men want to please you and do the best they can.

Austin: I try to get them to believe in themselves. We set goals for each other. This is what we want to do and we say, OK, how are we going to work toward that goal? Once we start progressing toward that goal, and I can make them believe that they can do it, and they see themselves making the weight, then they start believing in themselves and keep wanting to do more. Sometimes they have a lot more in them than they think they have.

Yarbro: What has been your best total?

Austin: The Senior Nationals of 1984 was my best total, 1609, which was 5 pounds off the world record in the 148 lb. class. I squatted 606, benched 369, and deadlifted 633.

Yarbro: Did you compete in 1985?

Austin: Yes, I competed in the Senior Nationals in Chicago. I finished third. I missed my last deadlift, which would have given me first place.

Yarbro: Do you anticipate breaking the world's record in the total this year?

Austin: Definitely. Right now in training, I have done 25 pounds over the world record. I'm hoping

to put all three lifts together and really break the record at the Senior Nationals. I really want to accomplish this 'drug free'.

Yarbro: What has been your greatest thrill in Powerlifting?

Austin: Winning the World Championships. I don't want to stop there, though. A lot of people become satisfied with what they've done. They say I accomplished this much and I don't need to go any further. My long term goal is to get as strong and lift as much weight as possible, to find out my true strength in the 148 lb. class.

Yarbro: What advice do you have for the young lifter.

Austin: Young lifters see guys lifting a lot of weight and they can't wait to do it themselves. I tell them to be patient, you've got to have good form and technique. Don't rush it. I talk about nutrition and how to gain weight and lose weight, and how much bodyfat they should have.

Yarbro: I notice that you have some women working out in your facility. Would you like to comment on their training?

Austin: I want to show the women that they can lift weights and not actually end up looking like a guy. I have to sit down and explain the differences in physiology, and get across to them how weight training can make them look better.

Yarbro: What about women's competition?

Austin: We have four or five women who are thinking about getting into a powerlifting contest. They see other girls lift and they get interested in it. When I explain it to them, they say "Oh, can I try that?" and then they try it, and all of the sudden they say "I love this, I love this!" It's really catching on.

Yarbro: You look like a bodybuilder, as well as a powerlifter.

Austin: Well, Richard, I competed in bodybuilding in 1983 and won MR. GREENVILLE in South Carolina. I've given it up and try to concentrate on powerlifting, but I think that anyone who lifts, powerlifter or bodybuilder or whatever, should dedicate themselves to having a great body and not carrying around excess fat. A good trim body is what lifting weights is all about.

Yarbro: Dan, is there anything else you would like to add before we end this interview?

Austin: Well, in the future, I'm thinking of opening up a gym. I'm not sure for the exact location, but I plan to stay in good condition and help others.

Yarbro: I don't picture you opening up a facility for businessmen to come in and lay around in the sauna.

Austin: I plan on having heavy duty weights. I welcome all, but I definitely would want an atmosphere of heavy duty lifting. If you've got motivation, you've got everything. I ask these guys in the weight room to jump, and they say "How High?" That's their whole key, right there, motivation.

Yarbro: Dan, who motivates you?

Austin: I motivate myself. I'm looking ahead and thinking, this is what I want to accomplish. I'm trying to make these guys realize that to go 10-1 or 11-0, they have to really work in here.

Yarbro: So you're saying their goals in here can also be their goals on the football field.

Austin: Exactly.

Yarbro: Dan, thanks so much for a very pleasant and informative interview.

Austin: Thank you, Richard.

(Interviewer Dr. Richard Yarbro is a widely published Professor of Education at Austin Peay State University, and a former Mr. Tennessee over 40.)