

INTERVIEW

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

PAULA KOVALCHIK

as interviewed for PL
USA by Bob Gaynor

BG: Give us some personal information.

PK: I was born and grew up in a small town called Edwadsville, PA. I still live in PA and am employed at Altec Industries in the Human Resources Department. I have a close-knit family that includes my mother, two brothers, and one sister. In addition, I have a great boyfriend/coach, Joe Masher, and a lot of supportive friends.

BG: How did you get started?

PK: As a child I was never very athletic, but when I reached my mid-20's, I began taking aerobic classes to maintain my weight. In 1988, I became acquainted with Joe Masher and mentioned to him that I wanted to start lifting weights. He advised that I should start on Nautilus equipment and offered to help me. After progressing to free weights, I saw someone deadlifting and was fascinated. Of course, I wanted to try to lift myself and I loved it. So, Joe began training me for powerlifting. I entered my first competition in 1989 and became hooked on the sport. Joe has been with me from "Day One" of my lifting career, and I owe my steady advancement to his coaching abilities.

BG: Do you follow any special diet?

PK: Yes, I do. In fact, I try to maintain a very strict diet. I'm sure you've heard the formula before - no fat, low sodium and low caffeine. I've cut out all cheese from my diet (which was a real sacrifice) and now when I order pizza it's "without cheese." I keep protein intake at a minimum and eat a large amount of carbohydrates and drink a lot of water. I'm certain that proper nutrition has contributed to increases in strength.

BG: Would you share with us your training routine?

PK: Joe and I have experimented and found that a 12 week cycle works best for me. During that cycle, I'll begin with work sets of 8 reps for the first four weeks; the middle four weeks, I'll do work sets of 5 reps; and the last four weeks, I'll do work sets for 3 reps. Occasionally I'll try a single so I get a better idea of what my



Paula at the WDFPF Worlds, where she won at 104

attempts will be at the meet. I train each lift once a week although at times I'll skip deadlift workout so that my back can fully recover. In addition, I work my lats, shoulders, triceps and biceps twice a week. Joe and I have incorporated pause squats and walk outs in my squat workouts; declines in my bench workouts; and when I begin a cycle, the deadlift is done off a rack rather than from the floor. After about three weeks, I begin deadlifting from a block and about five weeks from the meet, we start the lift from the floor.

BG: How long have you been training and competing?

PK: I've been training since 1988 and my first meet was in New York in August of 1989. I've enjoyed lifting in ADFPA meets since that time.

BG: What are your best competitive lifts?

PK: At the 104 lb. weight class in competition, my best lifts are a

297 squat, 170 bench, and 314 deadlift. The best total I had so far was achieved at AD-FPA Women's Nationals this past May - 766 lbs.

BG: What are your future goals?

PK: In September, I'll be competing at Worlds in Minnesota. Of course, I'd like to place first, but more importantly I would like to attain some goals I have personally set for myself. Eventually, I would like my total to be 800 lbs. In addition, I would like to hold all of the American Open records in the 104 weight class. It will take some hard work, but

with Joe coaching and my commitment, I'm confident I'll reach my goals.

BG: Share with us your views on steroid use.

PK: I don't understand how some athletes can feel proud of their achievements when using steroids. Part of the thrill of competition is knowing that you realized your goals by being committed and working hard. Using an artificial means is hardly rewarding. The side effects of taking steroids in itself should be a deterrent to any competitor. It makes no sense to me for someone to condition their body for ultimate performance and then strip it down with steroid use. I believe schools should increase programs on the disadvantage of using steroids.

BG: What do you feel about current drug testing?

PK: Although I realize that drug-testing is not error free, I believe it is essential to have a program

to promote drug free athletes in all sports. Without a policy attempting to control steroid use, I'm sure the number of users would increase.

BG: What advice would you have for beginners?

PK: Most importantly, when you're starting out, be sure to find someone who could show you proper form and training technique. Your lifts will improve with time if you practice consistency in training and diet. Finding a gym where you feel motivated is also important. I switched gyms last year and now work out at Danko's All-American Fitness. The people there are very supportive and helpful, and when you're going for a limit lift, it helps to have people backing you up.

BG: How do you feel about the present growth and future of women's powerlifting?

PK: In the five years that I've been involved with powerlifting I've seen a definite increase in the number of women competing. Powerlifting is a great confidence builder for women. We look better, feel better and are more focused as a result of competing.

BG: Are there any other comments you would like to make?

PK: I mainly want to express my thanks to all those who have helped me along the way - in particular, Joe Masher. Without his guidance, sacrifices, patience, none of my achievements would have been possible. I would never have enough space to thank all the people who have contributed to my workouts, diet and focus - everyone of them is a valued and treasured friend.

I do know that I owe a great deal to my parents; my father passed away a few years ago, but the values and determination he and my mother instilled give me the drive to strive for improvement. Powerlifting is a very rewarding sport; however, it is not without frustrations. Whenever I'm feeling discouraged, I always try to remember this quote to motivate myself again: "A second class effort never produces a first class result."