

INTERVIEW

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

At this year's Nordic Championships in Sweden, Danish SHW Niels Staerkjaer broke the 23 year old bench record of Swedish legend Lars Hedlund. Right after the meet I interviewed Niels for PL USA.

TK: Tell us what happened at this year's Nordic Championships.

NS: I opened with 315kg in the squat and chose 340 for my second, but got it turned down 2-1. Since the European Cup 5 weeks before, I had only done 2 squat sessions, so I decided to not take my third and focus on the bench. In the bench I opened with 277.5 and then went straight for a new European record with 285.5kg. It went up easy and the record was mine. I then lifted 290kg on my third and it still felt pretty easy. It came up a little uneven, and I had to slow down to correct it, but I felt strong. I decided to go for 300kg on a fourth attempt. It didn't feel very heavy, but I probably got a little too excited and I hit the bar too low on the chest and it stalled.

TK: Did you expect to break the ER?

NS: I have probably never been more sure than this time. As powerful as I felt at the Europeans 2 weeks prior, I was sure that the record would fall. I lost the gold there because 282.5kg came up too fast, so I was confident that 285.5 wouldn't be a problem. Trying to peak twice in two weeks is difficult, but I ate plenty and tried to stick to my usual preparations. I ended up being even stronger at the second meet.

TK: How do you feel as the new SHW record holder?

NS: It feels great. It was the oldest European bench record, and has been right in front of my eyes for a few years. After the disappointment at the Europeans, it was good to not only beat the record, but beat it by a big margin.

TK: Tell me something about your youth.

NS: I was born 25 July 1966 in Thisted, a small town in northwest Denmark. My parents are Jorgen and Vera. Both worked at the local hospital, which we lived right next to.

TK: What is your education?

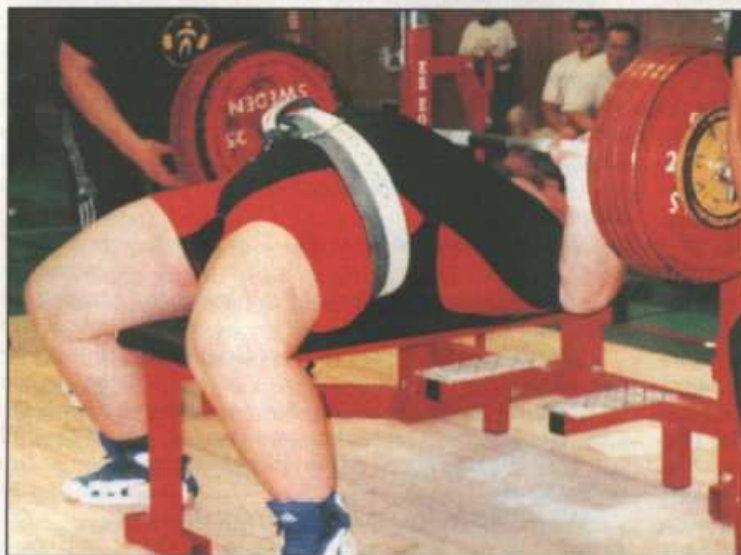
NS: I have a BA in Business Administration and a Masters Degree in Economics.

TK: What is your occupation?

NS: Until recently, I have been working as an advertising executive in a telecommunication company. Right now, I'm starting studies in Human Resource Management.

NIELS STAERKJAER

interviewed for PL USA by Thomas Klose



Niels Staerkjaer's new European Record bench of 629 lbs. Niels finished 4th at this year's IPF Bench Press Worlds with 633. (Niels)

TK: What were your early activities in sports?

NS: My main sport as a youth was Team Handball, which I was fairly successful with.

TK: What was your first contact with weights?

NS: Mandatory lifting with the Team Handball group at age 16. After one year, I quit the team and focused on lifting. Some lifters started a new gym and I followed them and became involved in what became one of the premier powerlifting clubs in Denmark - Thisted Vaegttraenings Forening.

TK: What kind of weights could you handle?

NS: I did 100kg in the bench press after lifting for 8 weeks (I was only 78kg back then). Nobody back then knew how to train for strength. It was high reps to failure all the time.

TK: When did you enter your first meet?

NS: I got a phone call that a position on the team for the 1988 Nordic Junior Championships was open. Not many competitors were expected, so I was sure to get a medal (turned out not to be the case). I had 2 weeks to prepare and buy/borrow some equipment. I think I did 600kg in the 110kg class.

TK: How did you progress over the years?

NS: After my first few meets I started at University and became involved in American Football. I continued

lifting in the basement of my dorm. I made a comeback in 1995, winning the Bench Nationals with 227.5kg in the 125kg class. I then started taking benching seriously and was looking at 255 by the 1997 Bench Worlds. I then injured my elbow boxing (it had actually been broken), bombed at the meet, and that slowed my progress for the next few years. I got 257.5kg at the Worlds next year, which gave me third place, and 260 the following year for a fifth place. In 2000 I decided to focus on playing American football (we were ranked #5 in Europe) and didn't do any international lifting. I finally got some improvement on my elbow problem and at the 2001 European Bench Press Championships I did 275kg for third place. I injured myself again at last year's Worlds, but I knew good things would come in 2002.

TK: What titles have you won?

NS: I placed third at the 1998 Bench Worlds. I finished second at this year's Europeans and placed third in 1997 & 2001, plus 4 golds at the Nordic Bench Press and 7 National bench titles.

TK: Any special memories in PL?

NS: The medal in 1997. Knowing that I could be on the podium with James Henderson convinced me that I had the talent to be really good.

TK: Please give us a training overview.

NS: I bench 4 times a week, and squat/deadlift once a week. OK - I'm

a specialist. I go by feel every time. My training consists mostly of: Bench press with bands - speed work. Bench press with chains - the cornerstone of my training. Reverse bands decline bench press - where I go heavy. Narrow grip bench press with both chains and bands - for triceps strength. Regular bench press, if I want to focus on the bottom. The only assistance work I do is high rep/light laterals and triceps extensions for recuperation purposes.

TK: What is your nutrition like?

NS: I try to limit carbs, to eat more meat, and watch my calories, so I don't get even heavier! I take protein shakes, Udo's Choice, and glucosamine as supplements.

TK: What is the situation of PL in Denmark?

NS: We still suffer under the bad reputation the steroid users gave us back in the Eighties. We are increasing in numbers, and trying to get more publicity for the sport, but have mostly been successful at the local level. Recently there have been reports from our Nationals on National TV and with the IPF Men's Open Worlds next year in Denmark we are hoping to finally get noticed.

TK: How is PL organized in your country?

NS: We are under the national sports federation, and get money from them based on the number of lifters. The powerlifting federation consists of clubs and you have to be a member of a club to lift in Denmark. All lifters in these clubs are subject to No-notice OMT by an independent anti-doping agency. The elite sports organization, Team Danmark, supports us too, paying part of the salary of our national coach, and those lifters that win medals at the World or European championships get money and additional support, like medical experts if you get injured.

TK: What are your goals for the future?

NS: Getting 300kg, scaring Midote at the Worlds, and making a big total at the next years IPF Men's Open on my home turf.

TK: Is there anything you would like to have changed or improved in PL?

NS: More Out of Meet testing, and severe penalties for those countries that don't take it seriously.

TK: Any special comments?

NS: I would like to give special thanks to all the guys I train with, my national coach Johan Westerberg, Pete from Titan and all the twisted lifters in the world.