

BARRY ANTONIOW

Competitor and Coach

BY KEN WHETHAM

Barry Antonow is one of the leading bench pressers in North America and was ranked ninth in the world in 2015. He is now the ten-time undefeated Canadian Bench Press Champion in both raw/classic and single-ply equipped. He has accumulated two world records (AWPC, IPL), four Commonwealth records, four North American records, more than 25 national records, and 30 provincial records. In addition to competing, Barry has coached over 2,000 athletes in his career, including many top lifters in Canada. Barry has also served on the Canadian Powerlifting Union Executive Board for the last eight years and was the head coach and director of the Para Powerlifting National Program.

What got you interested in the sport?

Growing up, I was just a gym rat and always wanted to incline press the 120 dumbbells. I worked my way up [to them] and then one day, a local body-builder suggested I get into powerlifting. I won my first competition in Toronto, and in my first year of competing, I did 14 competitions across North Eastern Canada and the USA. No one told me that was too much. I cut back to five [competitions] a year until a famous Canadian bencher by the name of Robert O. Smith ("Robo") did 26 meets in one year, all over the age of 50.



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After my first win, the iron bug bit me. Powerlifting is the first sport that I am a natural at. I played junior hockey, and a lot of kids had natural talent while I had to work my butt off. In powerlifting, it came naturally. The harder I worked, the better I became - even small gains keep me training hard.

After I won my third nationals, I got my first major sponsor, Fusion Supplements, and I have been with them ever since. In 2013, I became a proud full member of Team Titan Support Systems. I am honored to be with a very selective elite group of lifters.

You always compete raw or single-ply. What is the main difference in your training when you are preparing for a raw or single-ply meet?

I love single-ply, but with the popularity in raw lifting, I compete raw a couple of times a year in order to keep my strength up. To be honest, my equipped training and my raw [training] don't change much. I may put a couple more equipped days in closer to competition. However, my raw training only helps my equipped and vice versa. The one thing I did notice is that the more raw, heavy training I did, the more my shoulders started to get banged up.

What is your most memorable competition and why?

As a lifter, I won the North American Powerlifting Championship with a North American, Commonwealth, and National record bench press of 253kg in the 83kg

weight class. [This was all in addition to having] an IPF World Ranking of the ninth best bench. This was a special event in my heart, as I broke Wade Hooper's NAPF bench record.

Canadian bacon, beer and maple syrup are some of the best kept training secrets that Canadian lifters don't want anyone to find out about. What are some of your powerlifting secrets?

To be honest, having positive and dedicated training partners [is my best secret]. I have always had a crew to train with. Lifting heavy and getting cues, feedback, and support during training is priceless. Always be open to feedback - take that feedback and apply it in order to become a better lifter. Trust the training and stick to the plan. At competition, if you are not lifting, SIT!

Have you ever suffered any significant injuries during your powerlifting career?

I have had a couple of small injuries and strains, but nothing that has made me think twice about training. I think that my warm-up and therapeutic rehab background has made me very aware of my body and the condition I am in.

You trained with Canada's number one powerlifter, Al Mehan, for several years. What are some of the things that you learned while training with somebody like Al?

Training, intensity, work ethic, and

adversity were the biggest lessons [I learned from] training with Al. Al would wrap my knees so tightly that I could not feel my legs or feet. I would get set-up to squat, and then he would say, "Misload, go sit for a minute." When you compete in the IPF, there is no time to take the wraps off and on again. As I sat there in excruciating pain, he gave me his first speech about adversity and being prepared for the inevitable. He would even do this when I was in the last couple of weeks of peaking for a competition, and he would purposely misload the bench and make me refocus, regroup, and get psyched again. Adversity was a key word, but it also gave me an excuse when I accidentally misloaded the bar on him.

Where do you train and do you have a coach or training partners?

I train in Courtice, Ontario with my training partners Ken Whetham, Clint Harwood, and the rest of the crew at Outlaw Barbell. I also train with the team I coach which is Peak Powerlifting Club out of Platinum Fitness.

Do you have a particular training protocol that you follow like Westside, Cube, or 5/3/1?

This is a great question because I have tried almost every protocol, system, and template that is out there. When I first started [lifting], there were only a couple of powerlifters that shared their information includ-



ing Westside, Dave Tate (Elitefts), and Metal Militia. I got a copy of the Scheiko program as well as Wade Hooper's modified version. With all due respect, they all have their pros and cons. More recently, [I also tried] 5/3/1, Juggernaut, and RTS (Mike Tuschcher's program), but it wasn't until I hired Michael Souster of Peak Power Sport Development that I truly understood a periodization model, whether it is a classic linear, conjugate, undulating or any other variation. [Michael Souster helped me understand] the actual planning and scientific background of a true peaking program. The other programs also gave me some gains, but I soon plateaued. I made such positive gains and believed in the Peak Power model so much that I moved to Calgary and worked with Michael in order to bring my experience and knowledge to team up with his scientific and academic background. Not to say that we have a perfect program, but we have developed hundreds of top powerlifters in Canada, including IPF world record holders. I would go out on a limb and say that we have more provincial and national records than any other gym, coach, or trainer.

Do you utilize any accommodating resistance, like bands or chains in your training?

Throughout the training year, I will use heavy chains in order to help with

neuromuscular transition from the pecs to the triceps. This type of chain training helps with raw lockout, as well as rushing the sticky point for equipped lifters. In a bench shirt, your pecs and delts start the bench. I also use hanging chains for stability. I will put bands into training a couple of times a year to work on my CNS [Central Nervous System] overload, as well as my speed and lockout. I will place the bands at different angles that force me to control the bar more.

Do you follow any specific nutrition plan in order to keep strong for powerlifting?

After reading Dr. Mauro DiPasquale's book, many articles written by Anthony Ricciuto, and both of John Keifer's books (Carb Nite and Carb Backloading), I have come up with an off-season and a sixteen-week prep. It depends on whether I need to drop weight or if I'm preparing for a competition.

How do you mentally prepare for an attempt?

I try to eliminate as many small details that I may think about and focus on my attempts. I have competed so many times that I do not get too nervous at big competitions. I use my mental drive and determination to make me a "game day lifter" – I love to compete.

What are your best competition numbers?

Bench Press:

83kg – 253kg (557 lbs.) single-ply Titan Super Katana (IPF)
90kg – 255kg (562 lbs.) single-ply Titan Super Katanta (IPL)

Squat:

250kg (551 lbs.)

Deadlift:

245kg (540 lbs.)

Best gym numbers?

Bench Press:

88kg body weight – 280kg (617 lbs.) bench

Squat:

585 lbs.

Deadlift:

550 lbs.

What are some of the changes you've made to your lifting over the years?

The biggest change I have made would probably be going from benching in a straight line (Westside) to a Metal Militia Style with elbows tucked and flared – more of a "J" stroke.

I started out in powerlifting as strictly a bench specialist but have since taken on the three lifts. I am still more serious about the bench but have recently started to have a deadlift focus. So, like any powerlifter, I have read and researched everything I can get my hands on in order to learn more. I trained and worked in a facility, Peak Power Sport Development, which allowed me to see literally thousands of squats, deadlifts, and benches everyday. On a busy day, we would have twelve teams, fourteen people per team, 4 sets and 10 reps, which comes out to over 7620 quality squats from elite athletes.

I had the luxury of being able to coach with Henrik Grigoryan, a former head coach for the Armenian Olympic weightlifting team. I got to see firsthand how he analyzed bar path and bar speed in order to determine progress and strength. So, I really pay attention to my bar speed and pathway, regardless of the lift I am doing.

Who are some of the lifters you grew up admiring when you first started lifting?

Tiny Meeker (he started out as a single-ply guy), Bill Crawford, Jeremy Hoornsta, Ed Coan, Wade Hooper, and Shawn Frankl.

Do you have any advice for someone entering the powerlifting game?

I always have advice to offer, but for

new lifters, your first couple of competitions are about getting comfortable with the commands, the environment, and the refs. Don't think you are going to break world records at the first meet. Be humble -there is always someone stronger than you...always!

Do you still get excited and amped up when you go to compete at a meet?

I am very competitive, and I have been all of my life. I love the energy when I first walk into a warm-up room. Like a gladiator waiting to go into the stadium, my stadium is the platform. I do love a good hit of ammonia and a slap on the back to fire me up a little, but it is all internalized and controlled intensity.

What is your favorite lift and why?

The bench press - I excel far more in the bench than the other lifts. I squat, and I deadlift for fun, which helps to give me a bigger bench.

Which assistance exercises helped each of your lifts the most?

The JM Press and variations of the Kelso Shrug. The JM Press hits my triceps like no other exercise, and it

humbles me. The Kelso Shrug helped me stay tight in the squat and bench. Having the best position and technique makes the weight move easily and effortlessly. Having a strong upper back has made a significant impact. The BV Press has also helped with the explosiveness off of my chest. You put a band around your back, and you do a push-up off of the bar. The band slings you back down so that you can push all the way through the bench movement.

What do you do in your spare time when you're not competing or training?

I am a powerlifting coach and a meet director. So my spare time is spent helping new lifters. I also have a company called ZONE, which is competition to Nose Tork. It helps to sponsor the costs of my powerlifting addiction. I also spend my spare time travelling with my wife.

Now that you're at your current level of strength, do you get impatient trying to make specific gains?

The first time I hit a plateau, I almost quit powerlifting. I have since learned

to be patient and to take the small victories, even if it is a 2.5kg gain in a lift. I keep looking for the next hurdle. The first was 500 lbs., then 550 lbs., and now it is a 600 lbs. bench in competition.

If you had the choice of being any superhero, who would it be?

Wolverine: unmatched intensity and jacked!

Is there anyone you would like to thank?

I would like to thank my dad, John Antoniow, for buying my first set of weights. Jerry Steiert, my highschool Phys Ed teacher that always pushed me to be competitive and supported my training in the weight room. Of course, [I'd like to thank] my training partners starting with Art Chan, Jason Platts, Chris Yantha, Tony Tomra, and Allan Mehan.

I would like to thank Louie Simmons and Dave Tate for always sharing their training and coaching knowledge since I started lifting. [I'd also like to thank] POWER Mag for their contribution to the powerlifting community. **PM**

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