

# Steph Cohen



## The key to her 4x bodyweight deadlift

INTERVIEW BY MARIEL TAGG

**Height:** 5'

**Weight:** 123 lbs.

**MAXES:**

**Squat:** 180 kg/ 396 lbs

**Bench:** 92 kg/ 202 lbs

**Deadlift:** 240 kg/ 525 lbs

**Gym:** Hybrid Performance Method in Miami

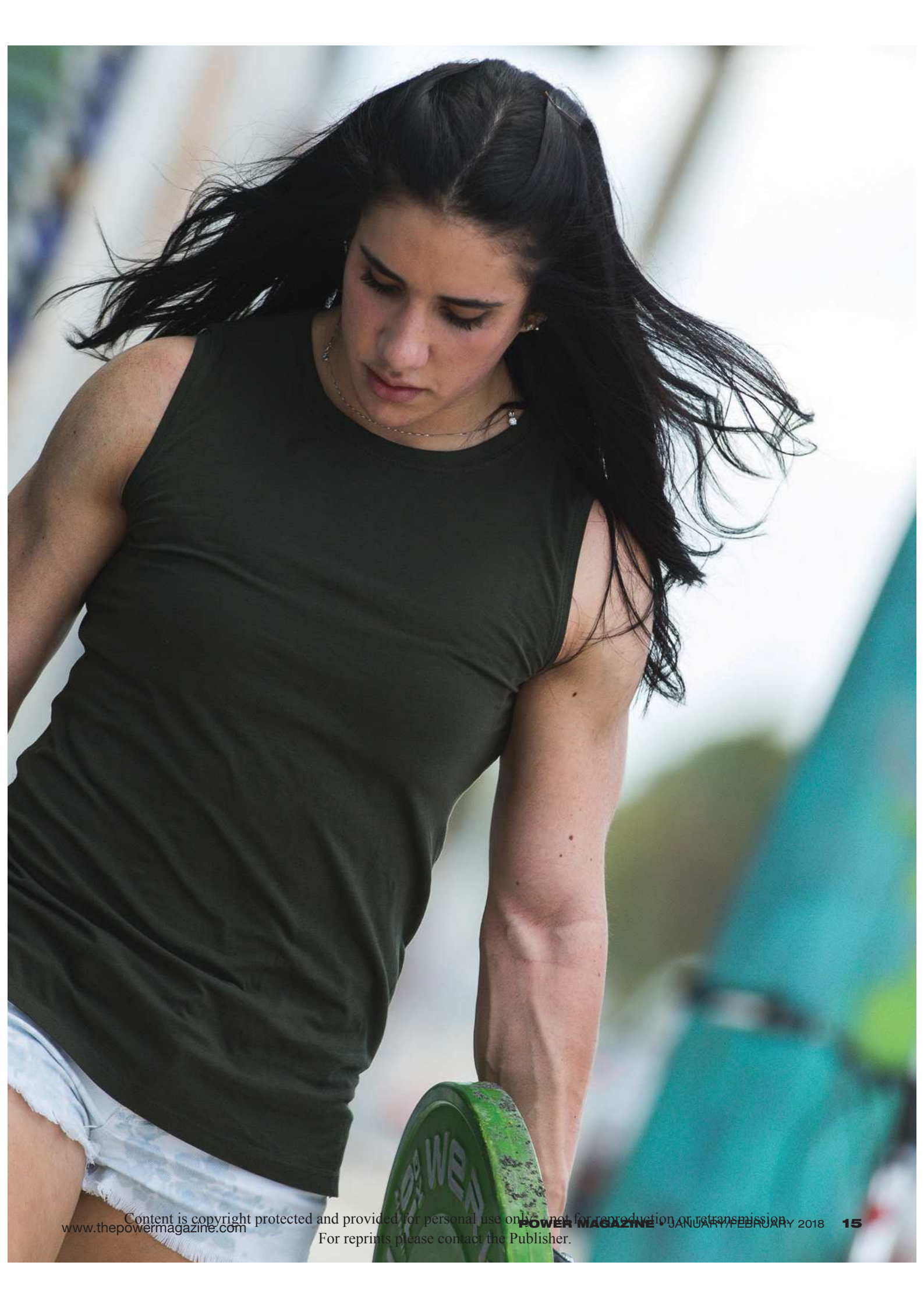
**Athletic background:** Soccer, Crossfit, running, Olympic weightlifting

**POWER:** Congratulations on your recent lifts! How does it feel to have gotten such significant numbers in your lifts as a woman?

**STEFI:** It feels really good to be able to break the stereotypes, especially in the powerlifting world where people think that you get bulky and big and manly if you lift heavy. It feels really good to shut those people up and kind of go against the norm.

**POWER:** Tell me about your powerlifting journey—how it got started and what got you here.

**STEFI:** It started in 2015, back when I was doing only Olympic weightlifting, and I met Hayden. He was a powerlifter so he was teaching me how to deadlift and bench and started pushing my squat a little bit more. I really liked it because it was right after the time when I started grad school, and Olympic weightlifting requires more focus and mental strength, so it felt good to have hard powerlifting sessions despite the fact that I had been sitting down in class for eight hours. I could grind out the power lifts, so that's what got me started.







Stefi Cohen throwing some weight around at Super Training Gym

**POWER:** Seeing as how you achieved the 4x bodyweight deadlift, how did your training change to take you from a 350 lb. deadlift to your new current record?

**STEFI:** The main thing I changed was that I used to be very focused on whatever was written on the program. So, we write out the Hybrid Method programs with the same template, and that's exactly what I would follow. And I refused to deviate ever from what was written. I would do the exact amount of sets and exact amount of reps, and the exact weight that the sheet said—regardless of what I ate or how I felt or emotional stress I might have been under. I just felt like if I weren't doing that then I

**“THE GENERAL CONSENSUS BASED ON THE LITERATURE IS THAT FEMALES ARE ABLE TO TOLERATE A LITTLE BIT MORE VOLUME THAN MEN. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IT'S ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS”**

wouldn't improve. And I started realizing, after getting injured in January, that you need to be able to auto regulate. I describe autoregulation as your ability to take responsibility for your own training and be connected with how you are feeling during a particular training session and be able to make the necessary adjustments day by day. So it's not necessarily RPE (rate of perceived exertion) Autoregulation is even changing the compete day. So let's say my back is smoked from a heavy deadlift session from a few days ago and I'm supposed to squat heavy. Maybe I decide not to do it that day, but to swap it for an upper body day that's later on that week, or I'll focus on other types of accessories



or focus on cardio. That really made a difference in my training because I was able to push myself really really hard when I was feeling good, and let my body rest when I was not. So that way I was able to get past my injury and heal and get stronger.

**POWER:** What's something that you've discovered about your own body in training that might be different from somebody else's?

**STEFI:** I don't know what somebody else is doing but pretty much just about understanding what your body's limits are on a day to day basis. It's based on things like your range of motion, that's something that I look at when I'm warming up. I find out if I can touch my toes.

**"THE MAIN THING IS TO BE PATIENT, BECAUSE AS ATHLETES WE TEND TO FORGET TO HAVE FUN IN OUR TRAINING SESSIONS EVERY DAY AND FOCUS ON DOING YOUR BEST EVERY DAY"**

That's a reflection of your central nervous system—whether you are flexible enough. You tense up when your CNS is tired so that is something I always check. Is my lower back stiff? So I apply some physical therapy principles into the autoregulation principles.

**POWER:** As a female, do you take any specific considerations in your programming that would be different if you were programming for a male athlete?

**STEFI:** No. The general consensus based on the literature is that females are able to tolerate a little bit more volume than men. But at the same time, it's on a case-by-case basis. Some males might be able to tolerate more volume.





So it's more individualized. For example, I can squat more times a week than Hayden. But I don't know if it's because I'm a woman or it's because I'm Stefi Cohen and he's Hayden.

**POWER:** What advice would you give to aspiring powerlifters?

**STEFI:** The main thing is to be patient, because as athletes we tend to forget to have fun in our training sessions every day and focus on doing your best every day. We get so fixated on a particular number or meet or whatever that might be for someone that we forget that the most important thing is today—not what's going to happen tomorrow or next week or whatever. Patience is #1.

**POWER:** I know you've said cardio has really helped your lifting. How? And how do you incorporate it?

**STEFI:** Cardio is one of those things

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that depends on what type of exercise we're talking about. For me, cardio means circuit training. So, for example, let's say I'm doing an upper body day. Maybe I'll add in a few heavy farmers carries or sled drags or sled pushes or some kettlebell swings or kettlebell lunges or something like that without rest. I pick 2-3 exercises and do them in a circuit without rest to jack up my heart rate and get a sweat on.

**POWER:** Your deadlift and squat are both very impressive, so when you're training for one, how is your training for the other impacted?

**STEFI:** I don't particularly focus on one more than the other. Sometimes squat just goes better than deadlift. I don't know why but I definitely notice that when my squat is going really well and I'm able to push it really hard, it



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Stefi Cohen pulls 525 lbs. to beat the world record in 2017

kind of takes a toll on my deadlift. My back gets a little bit tired and I can't push myself as hard in deadlift and vice versa. But it just comes and goes in waves.

**POWER:** So what's your theory on recovery and what methods do you implement for yourself?

**STEFI:** I'm not the best to ask that question to because I've been really busy with grad school, an internship, and clinical rotations so right now I work 8 hours a day. I think it's the same for a lot of people—most people have a lot of job stuff outside of the gym. But I think the most important thing for recovery is sleep and nutrition. If you think of it as a pyramid, food and nutrition are at the top and all the other things are extra. They are not necessarily a necessity but can help. How much? I don't know. But things like soft tissue work, seeing a massage therapist, would be something to definitely consider.

**POWER:** Now that you've blown the record out of the water, what are your





goals now and what's next for you?

**STEFFI:** My biggest goal with powerlifting is a 600 lb. deadlift. That's my ultimate deadlift. So I'm going to retire if one of two things happen—either I deadlift 600 lbs. or I literally physically can't lift anymore.

**POWER:** Well you're well on your way. Thank you for your time, and from everyone at POWER Magazine, we look forward to seeing you continue to succeed. **PM**



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