





BIG

AL DAVIS

BY JEFF IRION
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MHP

Al Davis' nickname is Big Al, and deservedly so — he's 6-foot-3 and 300 lbs., with massive arms and no gut to speak of. A former national-level bodybuilder, Davis is now one of the top raw bench pressers of all time. Here's what he had to say about gettin' yoked and benchin' a load!

POWER: When did you start competing in bodybuilding? What are some of your top finishes? Do you still compete in bodybuilding, or are you a full time powerlifter now?

BIG AL: I believe my first competition was in 2002. It was what is now the Europa, sponsored by Ed and Betty Pariso. I won first place and then went on to do about a show per year up to my last show, the 2009 Jr. Nationals, where I got a top-five finish.

Now that I'm powerlifting, I've put bodybuilding on hold because it was very hard bouncing back and forth. But I would like to go back and try to get my pro card one day. That's one chapter in my life that I feel is not complete yet.

POWER: How did you get started in powerlifting? When was your first powerlifting meet and what did you bench?

BIG AL: Well, it really all started one year as I was literally walking off the stage at the Ronnie Coleman Classic. I bumped into Ken Anderson and he was trying to convince me to start competing. I fought him on it even when he told me about the raw meets. He then told me about a meet that would be held at the Europa in Dallas and that it was paying \$1,500. That quickly changed my mind! I thought, "Hey, I can come do my regular Saturday morning workout and win money!" That was the Clash of the Titans in 2007. I benched 605, then did 18 reps with 405 in the bench-for-reps contest.

POWER: What is your ultimate bench press goal? *Editor's note: For reference, Scot Mendelson holds both the all-time raw bench record (715) and the all-time 308 raw bench record (701). Aside from Mendelson, the only other person to raw bench 700-plus in a meet is James Henderson at SHW.)*

BIG AL: My goal, naturally, is to break the world record of 715. I am a competitor. I love to compete and I like striving to be the best at what I do.

POWER: You once described yourself as a former skinny guy, and said you played soccer and were on the swim team. How did you transform into a 300-lb. behemoth? What tips do you have for our readers who are looking to make similar transformations?

BIG AL: You know, that is a fight that I still struggle with. I am not a big eater like some of these guys, so I can't pile the food up and just gorge. So I have to eat often, and if I can't eat it I have to drink it. When I was in college I would do stupid things like go drink a six-pack, come home and get on the bench. Today my struggle is that I work in a cold data center all day where no food or drinks are allowed. I have to force myself to stop and go eat, and if worse comes to worse go grab some aminos or a shake or something, just to get some food in me.

POWER: To make those of us who raw bench a little (or a lot) less than 670 feel better about ourselves, tell us about the first time you ever bench pressed. Also, how fast did your bench progress?

BIG AL: I didn't start until ninth grade. Until then my mom didn't want me to lift because she said it could stunt my growth. When I got to high school I was behind a lot of the guys in my class because they had already been lifting for a couple of years, so I was totally embarrassed because I was struggling with 90 lbs. But I went to a high school that was a football powerhouse: Dallas Carter. I'm sure you've heard of them, the good and the bad. Anyway, when I started training I was able to add about 90 lbs. to my bench each year until I got into the 600s.

POWER: When it comes to bench press technique, you do everything "wrong:" you don't tuck your elbows, you don't arch and you don't use leg drive. And to top it all off, you have long arms. However, you're one of the top raw benchers in the world. It doesn't make sense! How are you so good at benching?

BIG AL: Hell, I don't know! When I started benching it was all about the aesthetics and bodybuilding, so at the time things like arch, tuck and leg drive didn't matter. I'd even do things like bench with my feet up in the air. Until I got with my coach, Josh Bryant, I'd never had a coach except my buddies in the gym. The only thing I knew was that I needed to get the bar from point A to point B, so I needed to build the strength to do that. Who knew I would be a powerlifter in the future? Now that I'm with Josh, I'm starting to learn a lot of the technical aspects of benching, but bad habits are hard to break. He has me work on trying to get a little more arch in the back and bringing in the leg drive, but he does not want to change my elbows. As for my bench press success, I guess it's totally based on the desire to win.

POWER: In August 2007 you benched 605 lbs. in competition. Four years later, you hit a 670 bench in competition. Everyone thinks that benching raw (especially with a wide grip like yours) will beat you up, wreck your shoulders and eat away at your soul. Yet you have managed to stay injury free while making steady progress. What's your secret?

BIG AL: I listen to my body. I know that sounds like a BS answer, but it's true. Your body tells you everything you need to know. For example, there have been days when I didn't feel my best and I did nothing but cardio or sometimes turned around and walked right back out the door. What I'm saying is, I put in what work I can and leave it at that. On the other hand, there are those days when everything is working right. Those are the days that I go all out and really push myself to the limit. Also, I believe that if it hurts, leave it alone and give it rest.

POWER: Let's talk about bench press grip. In January 2010 you hit a 633 bench using a full grip (thumbs around the

bar). At some point in that year you switched to a false grip, which is what you used for your 670 bench. Why did you make the switch? What do you feel are the advantages of using a false grip?

BIG AL: I've been using false grip for a while, but until I got really comfortable with it I wouldn't do it with the really heavy weight. I prefer it because it protects my wrists. When using a full grip, you have a better chance of the bar rolling back in your

hands, bending your wrists back and injuring them. With the false grip, the bar sits right against the palms of your hands, perpendicular to your forearm, which takes the wrists totally out of the game.

POWER: What about placing less stress on the pecs and shoulders? Is that a factor in why you choose to use a false grip?

BIG AL: No, not at all. I've been lucky to not have any issues with my shoulders or pecs. Maybe it's because of my bodybuilding background, but I tend to specifically train those muscles so that they are ready for the heavy weight. For example, I do really heavy front raises and heavy flies.

POWER: And now the question everyone wants to know: How do you train the bench press?

BIG AL: I have always trained bench twice a week, one heavy day and one not-so-heavy day with more volume. You know, so many in the bodybuilding world believe in training a muscle group once a week, but I

would lose strength doing that. I'm a true believer that I need to keep an adequate amount of blood in those muscles at all times.

Before Josh I was self-taught, and my workouts were all about volume. Heavy volume, but still volume. What Josh introduced me to is what I call classic powerlifting training: bands, boards, chains and a host of other specialized training methods, including speed training.

POWER: Do you train the squat or deadlift?

BIG AL: I still train my lower body like a bodybuilder. I do a lot of partial deadlifts, and for my legs I normally do my full workout and put squats at the end so that I don't have to go as heavy. My knees are not very good.

POWER: Give us your top three tips for making consistent progress in the bench press.

BIG AL: 1. You need to get in tune with your body. You need to know what you can and can't do each workout.

2. Every time you get ready to bench you have to have the right mindset: "I will not let this weight defeat me!"

3. No matter whose workout method you follow, you must be consistent. Make sure you get in the gym, do your work, leave and go eat.

POWER: "Leave and go eat." I'm awesome at that! What are



your favorite exercises for building your bench press?

BIG AL: I actually love the bands, and also the hammer strength close grip press. What do I hate the most? Heavy front raises.

POWER: Rapid fire! Give me your first thoughts on the following items as far as raw benching goes.

POWER: Triceps.

BIG AL: Must be stronger.

POWER: Pecs.

BIG AL: Pumped and full of blood.

POWER: Shoulders.

BIG AL: Must protect and keep them healthy.

POWER: Upper back.

BIG AL: Cannot neglect it.

POWER: Lats.

BIG AL: Wednesday night.

POWER: Speed bench.

BIG AL: Has helped me improve tremendously.

POWER: Bands.

BIG AL: Love them!

POWER: Chains.

BIG AL: Not so much...

POWER: Board presses.

BIG AL: New to me, but I must say they help me get past my sticking point.

POWER: Floor presses.

BIG AL: Cool, but I feel like there are other exercises that benefit me more.

POWER: The Sling Shot.

BIG AL: Genius! Although I use mine differently than most people.

POWER: How do you use the Sling Shot differently from how others use it?

BIG AL: For example, Josh wanted me to rest my pecs for an upcoming workout, so I used the Sling Shot on dips and close grip presses to not work the pecs as much and to give them rest.

POWER: Bodybuilders are known for short-stroking bench press reps in training, and you are no exception. Don't try to lie, I have video evidence! But I must say that your competition lifts are always clean and locked out, with a nice pause to boot. So what's the deal: Is there a reason for not locking out each rep in training, or are you just a big fat cheater?

BIG AL: It's a very bad habit that I developed over the years which I try to focus on not doing anymore. If you notice, when I miss a lift it's usually at the last few inches of my bench, and I directly attribute it to that. So that is why I have to do so many board presses and triceps exercises to make up for the bad training over the years. **PM**



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