

SUZANNE “SIOUX-Z” HARTWIG

SPEAKS OUT ON LIFTING
AND BUILDING A LEGACY

BY JOHN GREAVES III

For a quarter century, Suzanne “Sioux-Z” Hartwig-Gary has made her presence known in the 114 lbs. class. That’s longer than Jesse Norris and Pete Rubish have been alive! At the 2016 Arnold Classic, she posted another raw open squat record to climb to the number one spot in both open and masters. This was in a class with tough competitors like Marisa Inda, Shana Ratcliff, Ginger Burton, Jen Rotsinger, and Kim Tran. Sioux-z is an IPF International Referee, a member of the IPF Women’s Committee and has been named Open Raw National Team Head Coach for the period from 2016-2018. I visited Supreme Sports Performance & Training, the facility she owns and operates with her husband/coach Matt Gary.

JOHN: Suzanne, thanks for taking the time to talk to me. I know you’re not feeling well so we’ll keep this as short as possible. Let’s begin with your nickname, “Sioux-z”, because it’s a little different.

SUZANNE: It’ll try to sum it up in a short version. When I was about twenty-two years old, I was telling a friend how frustrated I was that people were always spelling my name wrong. I would get special awards, cards from friends, and my name was often spelled incorrectly. I used to spell it Suzie. I know there are a lot of ways to spell it, but I figured if someone was giving me a special award or was a long-time friend, they would be sure to spell it correctly. I was about to move from South Dakota to Maryland. That’s where the Sioux River, Sioux Falls, and Sioux Indians are, and I decided to take a little of South Dakota with me. I now spell it “Sioux hyphen z”. This way, if someone spells it wrong then it’s my fault. Once they see it, they’d probably get it right.





JOHN: You've had a long, successful career in powerlifting. What are some accomplishments that stand out above the rest? I know you were in the USAPL Hall of Fame in 2011.

SUZANNE: It was a great honor to be inducted to the USAPL Hall of Fame. My biggest goal was just to make it on the platform drug free at the IPF Worlds. So in 2003, when I won the Open World Championships, it was definitely an unexpected highlight - a pinnacle of what I worked for. Getting my first Master World Record was pretty awesome, as well as squatting 400 lbs. and now having the Open world record in the squat. Those are the accomplishments that I'm most proud of because

I'm forty-seven, and I don't know how much longer I can fend off the young ones.

JOHN: You're an icon in the sport. I know you were coached by Kirk Karwoski, but who did you look up to?

SUZANNE: [I looked up to] Bettina Altizer when I first started. She was a female lifter from Virginia. She was really friendly, and she was supportive of me. Carrie Boudreaux was another person that I looked up to as she was strong and really friendly. It's funny that there isn't any one specific person [that I look up to] because I have met so many great people in powerlifting, and I've become friends with many of them.

I am most amazed by Wei-Ling Chen.

JOHN: Speaking of Captain Kirk... he's got a reputation as an intense lifter. How was he as a coach?

SUZANNE: I wouldn't say he was super intense or anything. He was fired up for me, but he knew the kind of person that I am and that I don't like to be screamed at or crazily fired up. He was excited for me, but he didn't try to get me really, really hyped.

JOHN: Let's talk about your training. What are your best lifts?

**SUZANNE: COMPETITION LIFTS
EQUIPPED/RAW**

Squat 402 lbs./334 lbs.(Raw Open and Master World Record in IPF)

Bench 226 lbs./181 lbs.
 Deadlift 374 lbs./347lbs.
 TOTAL 975 lbs.(Master WR)/846 lbs

GYM LIFTS RAW

Squat 333 lbs.
 Bench 192.5 lbs. (before neck injury)
 Deadlift 325 lbs.

JOHN: You and I have both done the Smolov program. It's a lot harder than it appears on paper. What's the minimum training age you would say someone should be at before you would recommend they do a program like Sheiko or Smolov?

SUZANNE: I did it and had good results, but I don't think the results are sustainable. Every single person I know who has done it has gotten injured. They lost ground - they may have hit a big number, but then they really dropped backwards. So at least five years [of training/lifting experience]. You could do it your first year, and you might be fine because you have no idea what your real numbers are, but you could also get hurt and lose

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ground when you should be riding the wave of a new lifter.

JOHN: Have you had to overcome any injuries over the course of your career?

SUZANNE: I had a bulging disc in my neck in 2003. I did a lot of rehab and didn't compete for a year. I had to take some exercises out of rotation and continue to do strengthening exercises for my upper back. Other than that, I've just had a few nicks here and there.


JOHN: What about stalled lifts? What lift has given you the most trouble over the years?

SUZANNE: When I first started lifting, I weighed 105 lbs. I competed for ten years in that weight class, and as I put on muscle I had to diet more and more. As a result of that, my bench in competition didn't go up for seven years. Then I went up a weight class, and weighing only 112 lbs., my equipped bench (in the old shirts that didn't give much) went from 170 lbs. to 214 lbs.! Other than that, my deadlift gave me trouble after my bulging disc in 2003 since I had to cut out a bunch



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of movements. It stalled for years, but I stayed patient and worked hard at what I could do until it started moving again.

JOHN: What are your favorite assistance movements for the squat, bench and deadlift?

SUZANNE: Variations of the bench, including long pauses, medium grip, and I always do pull-ups after benching for some posterior chain. For deadlifts, I just do variations of deadlifts. If you're a sumo lifter, you could do conventional sometimes. You could also pull off of blocks, do rack pulls, or Romanian deadlifts. For squat, we just squat. Sometimes [we do] pause squats. In the past, [we did] box squats, as well as a front squat every now and then, but I'm not really flexible.

JOHN: What other non-powerlifting movements do you like for your training plan?

SUZANNE: Prowler. I also do some kettlebell work. Other than assistant work, I just do the big three in season. I'm not in season as much now as when I was doing equipped and raw. I was

pretty much in season almost the whole year then.

JOHN: That's right. Didn't you used to use your raw lifting as training for the equipped part of the season?

SUZANNE: Even when I was preparing for an equipped competition, I always had a day where I did the big three lifts raw. When they started having Raw Nationals and then Raw Worlds in 2011, I began competing in both. In 2012, I didn't do the Arnold as I had five other competitions. I had Equipped Nationals in May followed by Raw Worlds four weeks later. Then I had Raw Nationals about five weeks after that and then Equipped Master Worlds a month later, followed finally by Equipped Open Worlds. Basically, I was training fairly heavy equipped and raw most of the year!

JOHN: I've heard from two different sources that using equipped lifting could be a good way to supplement for a raw lifter. For example, in the case of an injury. What's your take on it?

SUZANNE: I'm not sure. If people are not already equipped lifters it can take a while to learn the equipment. Also, it's a different movement pattern lifting equipped from lifting raw. Due to that fact, I wouldn't really recommend it. That being said, long ago, I had a minor hamstring problem, and I just put on my really loose suit bottoms earlier than I normally would have in order to help protect the hamstring. I'd always lift equipped once a week when I was doing it, and once week I was lifting raw, so my body was used to it. I knew it almost as two different exercises. If you have new people, and they're still learning how to master the technique of squatting and then you throw a piece of equipment on them, it could really throw off their movement patterns. So if someone was going to use equipped lifting to help them to train through an injury with their raw lifting, maybe they could put on something that wasn't so supportive. Besides, you could just be overloading it and making it worse. Unfortunately, a lot of people think, "Oh! I have equipment...I should



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go heavier". Well, if you're trying to let something heal, putting something on tight and adding more weight isn't necessarily the best way to do it.

JOHN: I didn't see a lot of machines in your facility. Do you think that machines play a role in a powerlifter's development?

SUZANNE: We have a FreeMotion machine with a bunch of different attachments that let you do pulldowns and curls etc. If we had more room, we'd probably have a leg press [machine], especially for people who are rehabbing things. Most people, even if they're rehabbing things, can use free weights and do different exercises such

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as step-ups. We also have bands [they could use] - they'll hook it to something and use those.

JOHN: I was going to ask you about specialty bars and bands and how you guys implement them in your training. How do you program them in?

SUZANNE: I haven't found that using bands helped me much. I'm so short, so chains on the deadlift don't really do much either. Some people use them, but I don't implement them anymore, and I think that new people think they seem so cool. I really don't recommend them for people unless they've been training for a while. Again, it's the movement pattern, and you're changing it drastically when you add bands. I use bands when I wrap it around a pole and I'm stretching. I also use bands for

good mornings - not with any weight on my back but just as a loosening up exercise. When we program them in, it doesn't replace the big three - they are in addition to [the three lifts].

JOHN: What do you do for recovery?

SUZANNE: I get massages. I see a chiropractor. I also like to use a hot tub.

JOHN: Do you still do those contrast baths like you did when you ran Smolov?

SUZANNE: Smolov was only four

weeks of my life. I'll do them when it's summer again. I don't do much of that when it's winter!

JOHN: I don't blame you! Do you have to deload after meets, or can you just jump right back into the gym?

SUZANNE: I'm back in the gym maybe two days later, but I'll go lighter maybe for a week or so.

JOHN: You're sick right now as we're doing this interview. What allowances

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do you have to make when you're sick, or do you just take time off?

SUZANNE: I don't typically get sick but my balance was off today. So today I just decided that I was not going to pout and not train. Normally, I'll just go in and do what my body will let me do. Often, I'll find that I can do what's prescribed but just a little less or with more rest between sets. So maybe I'm supposed to do sets of five, but I'm feeling a little under the weather so I do sets of three. I just tell people, "If you're feeling off, and your form and your technique isn't hurting because of it, then you can come in and do some-

thing and it might actually make you feel better".

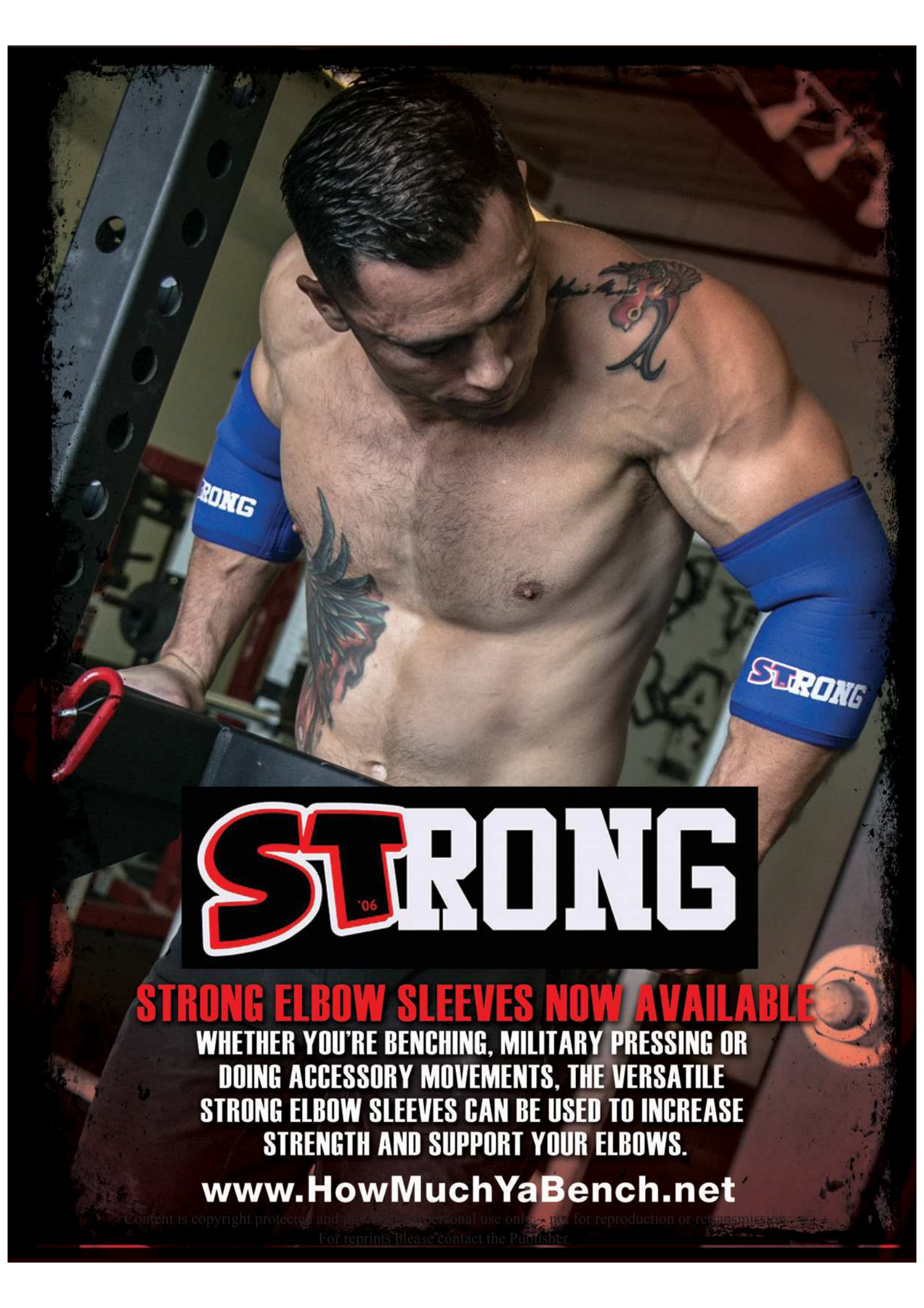
JOHN: Due to endorphin release?

SUZANNE: Exactly! But if you go in and everything is off because you're feeling so bad that your form isn't good, then you're just going to hurt yourself - or you're going to reinforce bad habits.

JOHN: You are coached by your husband Matt. You're a coach, a corrective exercise specialist, a gym owner, and an athlete. Plus, [you do] bookkeeping and manage your friend's foundations. Is it hard to turn all of that off and just relax?

SUZANNE: Not for me! I can just

flip a switch and be someplace else. Once when I was dating Kirk, and his mother was at a competition, she came in the back and we were chatting. Then I heard that I was in the hole. I said, "Excuse me", I turned around, closed my eyes, went out and nailed my lift, came back, and picked up the conversation. Chat, chat, chat, chat, chat. I heard my name, I was three out, I said, "Excuse me", and went into my zone. Later, Kirk told me he was going to yell at his mom and make her leave because she was distracting me but he said, "You went ten for ten, and you were relaxed". At that time, if it was a



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support other lifters, especially the up and coming lifters". I recently interviewed Paul Kelso, the former Powerlifting USA correspondent and author of *Powerlifting Basics: The Adventures of Lope Delk...*

SUZANNE: Yep, I know who he is.

JOHN: He said that one of the things about today's lifters, as opposed to when he was coming up, is a lack of willingness to pass on knowledge. Is the way that you see it a natural outgrowth of the way you came into the sport, having a coach like Kirk Karwoski so early on?

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SUZANNE: No, I think the following is the difference. I think there are a lot of people out there that want expert advice but don't even know the people [to ask], and that's where you get a lot of that. I have people who don't train here, and don't work out with me but they have me set up their training program, or I don't see them very often but they hire me to go to a meet and handle them. Before I handle them, I spend time with them, going over what they've been doing, reviewing their videos, and coming up with a game plan. Handling them on "Game Day" so the only thing they do at a meet is lift what's on the bar. We did that for free for years, but now we have a gym and it's part of our business. Now that being said, in the gym, I'm giving free advice and correcting people that are here when I'm here. At powerlifting meets, I'm always hearing from people, "Wow

record, you could take fourth attempts if you wanted to. I could never do that! I can't flip the switch. I said, "I can't be focused the whole time, thinking about just my lifts the entire time. I need to be listening to music, or I need to be somewhere else or I'll be overanalyzing".

JOHN: When Matt pushes you too hard in the gym, do you threaten him? Like, "You're going to be cleaning out the gutters when we get home?"

SUZANNE: I have no idea what his least favorite chore is, but that's not

how we roll. I'm thankful that he sets things up. I might go, "Really? You want me to do that many?" And he'll be like, "Yeah you can do it," and I always can. Honestly, he couldn't make me work hard in the gym - I have to do it myself. He can give me hard work to do, but I love it. We coach each other in the gym and at meets. I push him and he pushes me - it works great.

JOHN: You said, that you'd like to be remembered for "... your love of the sport and willingness to help

that tip that you gave me at the last meet has helped me so much". When I'm lifting and I see people doing something, I'll say, "When we're done lifting, come and see me - I have some ideas that'll help your squat or your deadlift. I'd like to tell you how you could warm up and it'll be easier for you". I still do that at meets all of the time. Free! Matt does the same thing. So, we still give back, and we still help people. I think it's still out there a lot.

JOHN: Any sponsors you'd like to thank?

SUZANNE: SBD is my raw sponsor - they've been wonderful working with me. I just started working with them, and Titan Support Systems has been my equipped sponsor for over twenty years.

JOHN: I assume that you're getting ready for Worlds, but beyond that, do you have any concrete plans for competitions in 2017-2018? I know you have a coaching commitment for Team USA. Do you plan to compete as well as coach?

SUZANNE: After IPF Raw Worlds in Killeen, TX this year I will be prepping

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for USA Powerlifting Raw Nationals in Atlanta, GA in October. Moving forward in 2017, I hope it will be a repeat of this year- starting with the Arnold Sports Festival, then the IPF Raw Worlds, and followed by USA Powerlifting Nation-

als in order to qualify me for the next year's world championships. I will coach lifters from the local to international level also. I plan to compete and coach as long as it is in God's plan. Hopefully, [I will compete] for many years to come.

JOHN: Is there anybody you'd like to recognize or thank before we close?

SUZANNE: My husband because he's always supportive [of me]. He's my biggest fan although maybe my dad would argue and say he is. I have a lot of friends and family that have helped me along the way. Of course, [I'd like to thank] God - without Him, I wouldn't be able to do anything.

JOHN: Where can people follow your training and learn more about you?

SUZANNE: I don't post a whole lot about my training, but if they go to www.SupremeSportsPT.com they can learn about the gym. My email is there if they need to contact me. I'm Siouzz Hartwig-Gary on Facebook and @siouzz52kg on Instagram. **PM**

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