

BRANDON SMITLEY

ONE OF THE STRONGEST LIGHTWEIGHTS EVER!

BY KEN WHETHAM

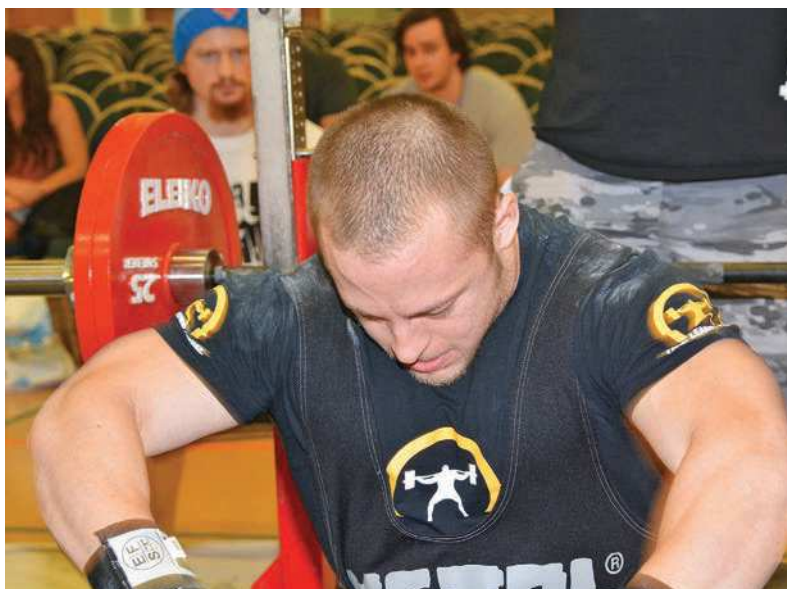
You can never judge a book by its cover. With a small and powerful stature, Brandon Smitley is perhaps the best pound for pound powerlifter currently competing in the raw division. He has totaled over ten times his bodyweight and holds the All Time World Record in the squat with 565 lbs., which is over 4 times his bodyweight. Competing in the 132 lbs. division, this small package of Nitro Glycerin is just getting started in the powerlifting game. We can certainly expect some big numbers and accomplishments from Brandon in the near future.

Where are you located, how old are you and what do you do for a living?

I currently live in Terre Haute, Indiana and I'm 27 years old. Currently, I work in town as a personal trainer at Indiana State University and I also own a small business, Smitley Performance Systems, where I design training and nutritional programs (for powerlifting, general fitness, and those looking to take their training to the next level) and I also offer coaching services, if desired.

What is your educational background?

I have earned my Bachelor's degree from Purdue University in Health and Fitness, and my Master's Degree from Indiana State University in Physical Education and Coaching, with an emphasis in strength and conditioning. I also hold my CSCS [Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist], USAW [USA Weightlifting], and CPT [Certified Personal Trainer] certifications.



What are your current rankings and records?

I am currently ranked #1 raw (with wraps) in the world at 132 pounds. Currently, my squat is also #1, bench press #4, and deadlift #8.

My personal records are:

Squat – 565 (the all-time world record)
Bench Press – 325
Deadlift – 510
Total – 1360

How long have you been powerlifting?

I have been competitively powerlifting for 3 years.

What got you interested in the sport?

I initially got interested in the sport after a few years of competing in bodybuilding and seeing where my numbers lined up. I wanted to compete for almost two years, but I never found a meet that was close enough to me to "jump in". Eventually, when one came to my local area, I went for it and have never looked back.

Have you always competed raw and have you ever considered lifting

in gear?

I have actually competed in one multi-ply bench-only meet at 148. I bench pressed 450 at 143 pounds with less than 10 sessions in my Metal Jack shirt. Other than that, the rest of my meets have been raw. I do plan to eventually compete in multi-ply powerlifting. I will never give up my raw lifting or competing, but I do want to be a well-rounded powerlifter.

What is your most memorable competition and why?

By far, it's the 2015 XPC [Xtreme Powerlifting Coalition] Finals. At this meet, I hit my all-time world record squat, a bench press PR [Personal Record], a deadlift PR, a total PR, and I also won the overall lightweight division. It was a perfect alignment, so to speak. I never thought I'd hold an all-time world record. I knew I was knocking on the doors, but it's still surreal to this day.

However, my most memorable powerlifting moment is the day that I joined Team Elitefts. I can never thank Dave and Traci Tate enough.

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

Oooh, this is a good one. My meet "secret" is puppy chow. A whole gallon. I never get through it, but when we're talking about caloric density, I'm not sure there is a food with more of it than puppy chow.

Have you ever suffered any significant injuries during your powerlifting



ing career?

Luckily, I have not. I did tear my MCL [Medial Collateral Ligament] during my wrestling tenure though.

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

I train out of my garage that is fully equipped with Elitefts equipment. I do not have a coach, as I write my own programs. I've had a few [coaches] and have learned tremendously in that time, but I've found a very good system and a solid understanding of my body to know how to train instinctively. I treat myself like my own client. However, I do consult with Dave Tate, Matt Smith, Vincent Dizenzo, and JL Holdsworth from time to time. They've been invaluable in regards to giving me ideas and they've been honest about certain aspects of my training. I do have two training partners that I have picked up, and I'm very thankful for what they do to help make me a better lifter.

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

Most people would say that I run Westside. But really, it's a true concurrent model. I still have two max effort

days and two dynamic effort days. I also have two "mini sessions" per week, which are designed to increase blood flow and just promote recovery. They are very "bodybuilding-like" and never over 30% [effort]. For most people, you'd rarely even break a sweat.

I do things pretty differently though compared to the typical "Westside" set up. Here is how each day breaks down in detail:

Max Effort Lower

- Always start with a squat variation without a box. This is where things can get creative. Specialty bars, chains, bands, etc. I always work up to a heavy set of 3. I don't say a 3-rep max because I like to leave a rep in the tank. After that, I do 2-3 back down sets between 80-95% of the triple that was hit.

- Then, I usually hit a supplemental movement that will build the main movement for the day. This is usually another squatting movement. Here we work up to a heavy set of 8-10, depending on the day.

- Accessory work then follows for the glutes, hamstrings, low back, and abs. I hit my accessory [work] with moderate

volume on this day. Sets and reps vary from 2-6 sets with 10-40 reps. Yes, 40.

Max Effort Upper

- For this day, it's usually a full range of motion press (but not always). Again, I get creative with my exercise selection. The work sets are the same as the max effort lower (heavy triple with back downs).

- The supplemental movement is another pressing movement, again, usually in the 6-10 range for a top set. This is where more partial movements tend to fall (but again, not always).

- Accessory work tends to be more triceps heavy. Usually 2-4 exercises with 2-4 sets each. There will also be rear delts work and abs. The volume is higher for the triceps work (as I'll explain further in a minute).

Dynamic Effort Lower

- I perform this pretty similarly to Westside. Sometimes I'll use a box and other times I won't. Right now, I am using a box to bring up my hamstrings more. Squats are usually 8-12 sets of 2 reps between 40-50% against bands or chains. Speed deadlifts are done with



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4-8 singles with 50-60% with bands or chains.

- Every other week (sometimes every third week), I will deadlift maximally. So, after my speed work, I will pick a variation that I need to address and work up to a heavy triple (like on max effort day). However, there will be no back down sets performed.

- For the supplemental movement, this will vary, but things that work well here are good mornings, front squats, SSB [Safety Squat Bar] squats, RDL's [Romanian Deadlifts], etc. It should be a compound movement that you know you suck at and really need to bring up. This should be hit hard for a minimum of 6 weeks. I usually rotate on trying to hit certain rep PR's from week to week (undulation).

- Then, accessory work is done. Here, I always have a single leg variation for hip health. Then, I usually do hamstrings, glutes, low back and abs. Volume on this day is high, especially when I don't pull maximally.

Dynamic Effort Upper

- Again, this is pretty typical of West-side - usually about 40-50% on speed benching vs. chains/bands for 8-12

triples.

- This is followed by a supplemental movement. Similar to the dynamic effort lower days, this needs to be a movement that you suck at and needs to be worked on. Close grip bench, overhead press, floor press, etc. all work well. Again, it should be ran hard, undulated, for 6 weeks or so.

- Usually a DB bench press variation of some sort is next. 2-4 sets of 10-15 reps.

- Then, for accessory, I hit about 3-5 back exercises for 3-4 sets of 10-20 reps. This is where volume is high on the back and rear delts. This is why triceps volume is high on max effort upper days. Again, I do more abs work at the end.

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

Yes, especially on dynamic effort days. They do get used on max effort days from time to time.

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

I used to fall into the carb backloading camp. However, now I just eat

more like a bodybuilder. My carbs are cycled based upon the training day (lower days are high carb, upper days are moderate carb, non-training days are low carb). The majority of my carbs fall around the workout window. When carbs are higher, I drop fat to pretty low levels, and vice versa. I'm a pretty "clean" eater for the most part. But I do have my ice cream and cereal like normal people.

How do you prepare mentally for an attempt?

I tell myself, "Strong ____ ". So, for a squat I tell myself "Strong back, strong legs", for example. I believe in positive reinforcement. I also read a psychology or mental training book before every meet. I believe that this is the most overlooked part of powerlifting. Some Nose Tork helps every now and then, as well [laughter].

What are your best competition numbers?

Squat - 565 (all-time WR)
Bench Press - 325
Deadlift - 510
Total - 1360

Best gym numbers?

Oh man, this is tough. Umm...
Squat - 540

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Bench Press – 330
Deadlift – 525

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

I've really focused more on volume. I still train heavy, but I don't go balls out from week to week. While I do work up to heavy triples on max effort day, 9 out of 10 days, I always have something left. There is just no reason to kill myself when a meet isn't in sight. I've also used a lot of my bodybuilding experience to really fill out my weight class and stay healthy. If anything has changed though, it's the minor adjustments to the Westside programming that I've made for myself. That's the key thing that is so important about that system. It has to be adapted for the individual. It's also why I like it more than any other system.

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

My number one go-to guy is Brian Schwab. The dude is a walking legend in powerlifting, and in my opinion, he is the most underrated powerlifter. But of course, people like Ed Coan and Steve Goggins are also on that list (even though they were done when I started getting interested...so, thanks YouTube). Al Caslow is another stud I really admired watching.

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

Learn the proper technique, find a mentor, and take your time.

First, take the time to learn the lifts properly from the get-go. Once you do this, everything else will come much easier. You don't want to be years deep into the game and have to make major overhauls to your technique. You'll get stronger so much faster and you'll be safer and healthier for it.

Find someone that can mentor you and help you along the way. Whether that is hiring a coach, nagging that old guy in your gym, or just finding someone that is stupid strong and has been lifting for 15 plus years. Just find someone that can tell you when to stop doing stupid sh*t, show you how to do stuff right, and answer questions when you have them.

And lastly, take your time. There is no reason to be in any rush to become

“TAKE THE TIME TO LEARN THE LIFTS PROPERLY FROM THE GET-GO. ONCE YOU DO THIS, EVERYTHING ELSE WILL COME MUCH EASIER. YOU DON'T WANT TO BE YEARS DEEP INTO THE GAME AND HAVE TO MAKE MAJOR OVERHAULS TO YOUR TECHNIQUE. YOU'LL GET STRONGER SO MUCH FASTER AND YOU'LL BE SAFER AND HEALTHIER FOR IT”

strong. It will come with time. The majority of the people that are super strong have 10 plus years training under them. Just try to become a little bit better than yesterday for years straight. It'll take you a long way.

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

Absolutely. Even if I don't PR, it's always a fun time. The day that competing doesn't become exciting and fun, I know it'll be time for me to step away. As of right now, I plan for that to be quite a ways from now.

What is your favorite lift and why?

The squat, hands down. There is just something about putting heavy weight on your back and having to stand back up with it - that is a thrill, both mentally and physically. It's also a sign that the longest part of the meet is almost over [laughter].

What assistance exercises helped each of your lifts the most?

Squat – SSB squats and front squats
Bench Press – Close Grip Bench Press, Close Grip 2 Board, Arnold Presses
Deadlift – Good Morning variations, pulling from 2-3" mats/blocks, GHR [Glute Ham Raises]

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

I spend a lot of time reading, writing and contributing to Elitefts. But when I'm not doing that, I'm usually reading or writing - just trying to learn more about training, the body, or business.

But when I want to get away from all of that, I really enjoy keeping up with my sports teams. Purdue basketball and

football, Philadelphia Eagles, Phillies, and 76ers.

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

Not at all. Quite frankly, the quest of trying to figure out how to get those gains on each lift is what I love about powerlifting. There is no right or wrong way to train or make progress. There are so many variables at play, and trying to figure out how to manipulate them in order to make progress is why I love coaching and programming for others. No one is ever the same, so it's just like a giant puzzle with no real end.

What drives you?

Numbers are certainly enticing and I'd be lying if I said that I don't go after certain numbers, but they are not at the forefront. If they happen, they happen. I'm driven by just pure will to see what my body can do. I've always been picked on for being short and I've always been told that I can't play sports because of my stature. Powerlifting has given me an outlet to show that my body is capable of so much more than what people told me it could do. It's for this reason that I've become fascinated with what the body can do and I've gone on to study that field and make the most of it physically, as well.

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

Is Mighty Mouse a superhero?!

Hahaha.

Is there anyone you would like to thank?

I would like to thank my parents and sister for their relentless support. They've really come to appreciate my passion for powerlifting and I'm truly thankful for that. I would also like to thank Dave and Traci Tate from Elitefts. They have done so much to help me improve me as a person and a lifter over the past few years. I've learned so much about things other than powerlifting from them, as well. A huge thank you to Mark Glazier from NutraBio for giving me a shot years ago to represent a brand of supplements that is untouched in terms of quality and integrity. And my final thank you is to my academic advisors, mentors, training partners, and close friends. They've really helped mold me into the person that I am today. **PM**