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BLAINE SUMNER

BY JEFF "ROBOT" IRION

POWER: All right, Mr. Sumner, we've got a lot of numbers to discuss. Let's start with the basics: age, weight and height.

BLAINE SUMNER: I'm 27 years old, 6 feet, 2 inches and 370 lbs.

POWER: What are your best raw competition lifts?

SUMNER: An 882 squat, 529 bench, 738 deadlift and 2,150 total.

POWER: Best single-ply competition lifts?

SUMNER: A 1,009 squat, 810 bench, 760 deadlift and 2,463 total. But that total was done with a token deadlift. I haven't put together a good single-ply meet yet.

POWER: What titles have you won, and what world records have you set?

SUMNER: I was the 2012 IPF [International Powerlifting Federation] Raw world champion, two-time USAPL Arnold powerlifting champion and six-time USAPL national champion. I set the IPF raw squat WR [World Record] with 882 (not current), IPF raw total WR with 2,066 (not current) and IPF equipped squat WR with 986 (not current).

POWER: You are enormous. Have you always been enormous?

SUMNER: Not at all. As a high school freshman, I was 6 feet and 145 lbs. By the time I graduated high school, I was 260 lbs. I got up to 335 playing college football, and I have gotten up to 370 since I have been powerlifting.

POWER: When did you start lifting?

SUMNER: I began lifting as a freshman at Conifer High School, just for football.

POWER: Where did you go to college? And what positions did you play in football?

SUMNER: I went to Colorado School of Mines. I played nose tackle, situational full-back and short snapper.

POWER: How good were you at football? You went to the NFL Combine and even set some records there. Why didn't you play in the NFL?

SUMNER: I was first-team all conference and on some All-American teams. At my pro day I benched 225 for 55 reps but three were deducted. It was still more than anyone else has tested. My vertical was 32.5 inches and my broad jump was 9 feet, 6 inches. My Kirwan Explosive Index [a number derived by adding the vertical jump, broad jump and bench reps together] is still the highest of any pro day/combine athlete. I came out the year of the lockout and had deals fall through with the Eagles and Redskins. I didn't want to go the back route through the CFL or AFL, so I started my career and powerlifting.

POWER: What do you do for work?

SUMNER: I work as a petroleum engineer. Most of what I do is designing frac jobs, installing artificial lift applications (things like pumps), and trying to optimize how much oil and gas we get out of the ground.

POWER: Does that mean that, in addition to being super strong, you're also super smart?

SUMNER: Most people who graduated from Mines, and are engineers, are smart. I just made up for the smart thing by working hard.

POWER: While you no longer play football, you're still very athletic, especially for a guy your size. For example, we hear you have a 33-inch vertical and a 50-inch box jump. What do you do to maintain this athleticism? Do you feel that it helps you



with powerlifting?

SUMNER: I've always felt that plyos and quick explosive movements are great for squats, especially raw. Box jumps, bounds and 10-yard starts from various positions are staples in my training.

POWER: When did you start training for powerlifting?

SUMNER: I did a few meets in college, but they were just in the summer when we had less football going on. I wouldn't prepare for them or anything, just do my summer lifting during the week, hit a meet over a weekend, then back to football. I began focusing my efforts 100 percent on powerlifting in 2011, although I always squatted and benched heavy for football.

POWER: When was your first meet and how did you do?

SUMNER: My first full powerlifting meet was a local NASA [Natural Athlete Strength Association] meet held at a church somewhere in Colorado sometime in 2007, so I must have been about

20. It was raw with wraps. My numbers were around 650/375/600 as a SHW, weighing about 300 lbs.

POWER: What does your training program look like? Who has influenced your training the most?

SUMNER: I do all of my own programming now. I lift heavy four days per week. And every movement I do is very specific to the competition lifts. Every day consists of a squat, bench and deadlift. Some days I may substitute a bench in for a squat or deadlift depending on how I am feeling. For my equipped work, I do only singles. For my raw work, I do linear periodization. Lots of volume in everything, and even more volume in the bench. The furthest I'll get away from the competition movements would be good mornings, pin presses, block pulls, etc.

The first person who influenced my training was Dan Gaudreau. I built the base for my strength and athleticism based on the principles Dan taught me. Mike Tuchscherer has also been a very

big influence — mostly in his cerebral approach to training and helping me realize you can squat, bench and deadlift at a much higher frequency than once a week.

POWER: You said that you only do singles for your equipped work. What's your response to the old adage that singles test strength, they don't build it? And why do you use reps on your raw lifts but not your equipped ones?

SUMNER: I actually am a believer that strength shouldn't be built in the gym by doing singles. The reason for the singles in the gear is that I think 75 percent of equipped lifting is technique, tuning the gear and maximizing leverages. I want my gear dialed in perfectly so that I can't do reps. If you want to be the best in the world at gear, you have to walk a fine line between having your gear jacked enough so that you can hit big numbers, but still be able to hit depth on the squat, touch your chest on the bench, etc. When I am in

the gear doing singles, I'm not thinking about building strength, just absolutely perfecting my technique in the gear and dialing it in so I know exactly what I need to do with a certain poundage. Raw lifting is like monster truck driving; take that thing out of the shed and romp in it. Equipped lifting is like driving a racecar; every time it is used, it needs to be taken to the shop, tweaked, changed, dialed-in. If a monster truck gets a flat tire, it can still run over some cars, but if a racecar gets a flat, you're in the pit while someone else is having the champagne dance. I believe the reps build strength, and that's why I do them raw. If I increase my raw strength, when I put the gear on, I know my equipped numbers will be up.

POWER: You've done some crazy stuff in training! For example, you squatted 1,000-plus in training every week for 10 weeks leading up to the 2014 Arnold powerlifting meet. How do you go so heavy week in and week out without overtraining or getting injured?

SUMNER: Leading up to the 2014 Arnold and 2014 Nationals, I think I ended up squatting more than 1,000 over 20 weeks in a row. If you take away the poundage and look at a percentage, I think what I'm doing looks more realistic. A thousand pounds sounds like a lot of weight – and it is, but it's about 90 percent of my max. And I just do it for a single. I think if you were to take someone and have them perform one rep at 90 percent of their max, week in and week out, most people would be fine. And about doing it every single week, I think the body adapts to far, far more stressors than most people think. The body will adapt to most things you put it through, with a plan. The thing about going above 1,000 lbs. is that for equipped meets, my opener is over 1,025 lbs. And the mechanics of the weight on the bar changes significantly once you get into the high 900s and above 1,000. Getting set up properly is one of the hardest parts about the equipped squat. And if I want to chase higher than 1,100 lbs., practicing with mid 900s feels drastically easier than going above 1,000. The way the bar starts horizontally whipping and shaking the body is something I need to adapt to. And squatting more than 1,000 by your-

self is a huge adrenaline rush compared to 999, so why not!

POWER: You've also done some lifts in training that are well over the current IPF world records, including a 1,113 squat and a 905 bench (albeit to a one-board). Why go so heavy in training? Why not save those lifts for a meet?

SUMNER: Both of those lifts are more than a year old, and I've matured in my training since then. I don't regret giving 1,113 lbs. a ride, but I wouldn't do

it anymore. In my gear, I try to never go above what my opening weight will be. On days where everything is perfect, I'll work up to around a second attempt. I wouldn't recommend trying to max out huge lifts in training. But it's all a learning process. If I want to have longevity in this sport, playing it safe and staying around opening weight is much smarter than gunning for fake WRs in training. I've learned the hard way that those don't count.

POWER: One last question about

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Sumner was a collegiate football player and scouted by NFL teams after graduation.

your training before we start talking about meets. How has your training evolved over the years?

SUMNER: All through high school and college I just did what the strength coach had the team doing. In college, the NCAA mandates one day off per week, and I would use that day to

travel to Rocky Mountain Lifting Club an hour away to squat heavy. Football training varied from circuit training to Westside to linear periodization. When I was done with football, I lifted straight linear periodization for a bit – squatting, benching and deadlifting once per week. When I got extremely frustrated

with my bench press stalling for years, I trained with Mike Tuchscherer running my programming for a while doing his RTS [Reactive Training Systems] method. The biggest change was a daily undulating rep scheme, higher frequency and implementing RPEs [Rate of Perceived Exertion]. Now I have my own style, which is a conglomeration of things that have worked for me over the years. Singles in the gear like the conjugate system, linear periodization to build my raw strength, and higher frequency from RTS to teach my body to practice strength as a skill.

POWER: At the 2014 Arnold Classic, you competed three days in a row. You didn't list that as a world record, but it must be one! How did you fare in those meets?

SUMNER: That was a crazy weekend for me, and very fun! On Friday, I competed in the raw three-lift meet. I squatted 849, bench pressed 501, deadlifted 717 and set a WR total of 2,067 (which Ray Williams broke at Raw Worlds this year). Saturday was the single-ply three-lift meet. I squat-

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ted 1,009 and smoked 1,053, but was turned down on depth 2-1, which would have been a world record. I bench pressed 783 and deadlifted a token 683 since I already had the best lifter award wrapped up to win the money. Sunday was the single-ply bench-only meet. I opened at 817, which would have been a WR, and dumped it. I did the smart thing and jumped to 827. I actually pressed the weight smoothly, which surprised me, but was turned down 2-1 for lifting my head; this too would have been the WR. I went for 832 or so on my third attempt and didn't have any gas left and I bombed. The weekend was a great experience and I may do it again next year.

POWER: A little over a month ago you competed again at USAPL Nationals (single-ply). How did that go?

SUMNER: Equipped Nationals went very roughly. I had by far the best training cycle of my life and was feeling very healthy. I was on pace to smash my PRs in all three lifts. I opened with 1,025 lbs. on the squat and crushed it like a

warm-up three times, but all three attempts were turned down 2-1 for depth. This was the biggest disappointment of my lifting career, but I decided to bench and deadlift just to get more meet experience. I bench pressed 805 and deadlifted 783, missing 827 on both the bench and deadlift.

POWER: To recap, in your last few single-ply meets you've been turned down two to one on a 1,053 squat (which would have been a WR), an 827 bench (which also would have been a WR), and three times with a 1,025 opening squat. Do you feel like you've been robbed on any of these attempts? Why do you still choose to compete in the USAPL/IPF?

SUMNER: I was also turned down 3-0 at 2013 equipped nationals with a 1,009-lb. squat three times. It's hard to say if any of them were robbed. I do know that the judges scrutinize record lifts much more closely, so if it is borderline, you will get reds. And all attempts that have been turned down were record lifts (world or American). I

also think once you establish a reputation amongst the federation as a consistent lifter who routinely performs to the standard of the rulebook, you have some more leeway. I haven't established myself as squatting consistently deep in the gear yet, although I've never bombed from an international meet, only national. Judging squat depth is very hard and open to interpretation, especially on SHW lifters, and I also think my style of leaning gives the impression that I am higher than I am among USAPL/IPF judges since most lifters squat very upright. I like competing in the USAPL/IPF because chasing IPF world championships and IPF world records is what drives me and lights my fire. I believe that the IPF is the only place true world championships and true world records exist that were set under nearly identical standards, even though it means dealing with a lot of crap sometimes. I am also drug-free, which is just a personal choice.

POWER: Having bombed with a 1,025 squat at Equipped Nationals,

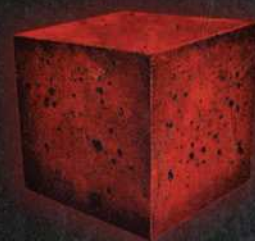
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you did what any frustrated powerlifter in your shoes would have done: jumped into USAPL Raw Nationals last minute with minimal preparation. How did that work out for you?

SUMNER: It turned out great! I train raw year-round, though not necessarily heavy, but haven't found my raw squat mojo since I tore my hip labrum at IPF World's in 2012 and only had three weeks of raw training to prepare. I can only do raw competition squats once a month or so, and it always feels off. But I'm a big adrenaline junkie and had the toughest powerlifting battle of my life at raw nationals. The adrenaline pushed me though, hitting a squat I shouldn't have been capable of (882). I also hit an easy PR bench of 529 and PR deadlift of 738. My total was about 2,150 and I took home the best lifter award (highest Wilks) in a field of over 450 lifters and some serious freaks. I went 9/9 for the first time ever and the meet was extra fun because it wasn't just about trying to hit big numbers and records, it was about winning to secure a spot on the IPF World Team. It came down to strategic attempts since I was battling Ray, and one mistake on an attempt could

likely cost me first place.

POWER: Congratulations on an epic performance. We checked the IPF World Records, and they list the SHW total record as 2,143 by Ray Williams. I know that IPF World Records can only be set at certain meets, but technicalities aside, is your 2,150 the highest ever raw total in an IPF or IPF affiliate meet?

SUMNER: Even though my 2,150 was an unofficial world record, you are right – it does not count unless it is an international meet with international judges. However, Ray did hit a 2,170 or so total at a local meet in Mississippi.

POWER: You said, "I train raw year-round, though not necessarily heavy." What does "not necessarily heavy" mean for Blaine Sumner?

SUMNER: It varies depending on my goals at the time, but a good example would be my prep for Equipped Nationals when I wasn't worrying about a raw meet. I did 700 x 5 raw squats, 650 x 5 raw deadlifts, 450 x 5 raw bench. If I'm not preparing for a meet, I aim to leave two or three reps left in the tank. That allows me to practice my form and get enough stimulus, but stay below the

high injury risk threshold.

POWER: What are your future goals and competition plans?

SUMNER: My main goal is to win an Equipped IPF World Championship. I would also like to win the World Games, which are held every four years and it's sort of an Olympic test event for sports not in the games. Those are the two main things on my list that I want to check off.

POWER: Where can readers learn more about you?

SUMNER: They can find me on YouTube, Instagram or Facebook. I'm part of Juggernaut Training Systems, where I keep a blog and update on my training. I also provide online coaching and programming.

POWER: Is there anyone you'd like to thank?

SUMNER: First and foremost, my parents for being the most supportive parents possible and going to nearly every meet. My "powerlifting parents" Dan and Jen Gaudreau for getting me into the sport and teaching me sound fundamentals from the start. And my awesome sponsors: Promera Sports, Con-Cret, Titan Support Systems and Juggernaut Training Systems. **PM**