

BLAINE

'The Vanilla Gorilla'

SUMNER

BY HANI JAZAYRLI

Weight Class 120 kg+ | 264 lb+
Current Open Superheavy (120Kg+) IPF World Champion
Current IPF Open World Record in Squat – 505 Kg | 1,113 lb
Current IPF Open World Record in Bench Press – 410 kg | 904 lb
Current IPF Open World Record in Total – 1272.5 kg | 2,805lb
Highest Wilks in IPF History with 692 points

HANI: What a resume, Blaine. In addition to your current records you have set 14 different world records and 28 American records and in 2016 you were deemed USA Powerlifting's Champion of Champions. I don't think you need an introduction beyond that! I know you're a busy guy due to the nature of your work so thank you for taking the time to talk with me for POWER.

BLAINE: Thanks Hani, it's a pleasure to be talking to you and being part of POWER magazine again.

HANI: When did it all begin for you? Powerlifting seems to be something that probably came naturally you after playing football but I don't think it's possible to imagine the amount of work it has taken for you to get to the level you're at.

BLAINE: All through 2011, football was my main physical pursuit. I knew what powerlifting was, and squatted and bench pressed heavy for football, but football was always the goal. In the off season I was always addicted to lifting weights though and did a local meet here and there with no prep.





HANI: By the looks of it you have a pretty illustrious athletic history. You previously set school records in in four sports! Is it safe to assume that football was the favorite for you since you continued it into your college years?

BLAINE: Football was my favorite, but wrestling was the toughest. Wrestling through the end of high school had more of an impact on who I am today than football.

HANI: You were both a nose guard and a short yardage fullback; can you still get moving like back in your college days?

BLAINE: Hahaha man – I would have to say no. For a good bit after I was done playing football I maintained my athleticism and did speed and agility work regularly. But over time, it became less and less and is nearly non-existent now.

HANI: Speaking of your college days; your performance at the NFL combine was very impressive in my opinion. Considering the changes you have made to your training since then; if you were to do that same testing series now how do you think you'd do?

BLAINE: Honestly not nearly as good. My bench reps would be up a bit if I trained for it. But training for a max single is much different than training for 50-60 reps. My speed and jumping abilities would be down even though I'm stronger – just because I don't do them anymore.

HANI: Do you think shifting your focus away from your speed and agility work had a direct carryover into your competition lifts?

BLAINE: That's tough to say. I think if I was still dedicated to speed and

agility drills, that it wouldn't have an impact on my strength. But since that part of my life is behind me, no reason to spend time on it!

HANI: What would you consider to be your proudest athletic moments both in and out of powerlifting?

BLAINE: I can easily answer this question with a simple answer – 2016. I had by far the greatest year of my life in 2016. I started off the year by blowing away every record I could have dreamed about at the Arnold by squatting 1,102 lbs., bench pressing 885 lbs., deadlifting 817 lbs. for a total of 2,803 lbs. and a Wilks of 692. The squat, bench press, total, and Wilks were the biggest in IPF history. In August, I went to St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands for the North American Powerlifting Championships to qualify for the World Games. I won that meet in the most beautiful setting



I have ever been to, and followed it up by proposing to my wife on a private fishing charter in the Caribbean a few days later. In November, I became the IPF Open Superheavyweight World Champion, which had been my lifelong dream as long as I had been involved in the sport. I was also the first American male in 8 years to win an Open World Championship. I got to stand on top of the podium holding the American flag and hear the national anthem with my family and friends watching. In December, I graduated with my Masters in Engineering and Technology Management from the Colorado School of Mines while working full time as a Petroleum Engineer and lifting. I also married my wife just before Christmas and she is more perfect of a woman than I imagined in my wildest dreams. 2016 was an absolute whirlwind and looking back I don't know how I got it all done, but I can't wait to see what 2017 brings!

HANI: It is a little-known fact that you are a petroleum engineer. What does your day to day life look like in terms of work?

BLAINE: I'm not going to lie. It's a big grind. I'm on the operations side of

hydraulic fracturing jobs which occur 24/7/365 so my phone will ring all hours of the day/night/weekend/holiday. I get up at 5:30 AM, leave work at 5:00 PM, head to the gym, train for 3.5 – 4 hours. Get home, get my meals and clothes for the next day, FaceTime my wife, and go to sleep.

HANI: What was it like managing your education while simultaneously pursuing an athletic career?

BLAINE: On the outside it looks much more challenging. Being a full time NCAA athlete while pursuing a tough engineering degree at a very challenging school, but I did better because I was playing football. It forced me to become excellent at time management.

HANI: I guess it's safe to say you're the king of not making excuses based on the hours you work while still making time for a wife, training, fishing, and an avid twerking habit.

BLAINE: Hahaha! Of all those things you mentioned, twerking is for sure the most time consuming.

HANI: Aside from your work as a petroleum engineer I know you have been putting some time into getting a coaching business off the ground.

Your work with Juggernaut Training Systems and BlaineSumner.com seems to be gaining momentum. Is this something you want or see yourself eventually doing full time?

BLAINE: I doubt I will do this full time. In this world, my reputation is based on the athlete I am. The minute that disappears, so does a large portion of the business. That is just the nature of the beast these days with social media. My career gives me some stability and something to always have.

HANI: What does your training look like on a weekly basis? As far as I can tell you do a large majority of your equipped training alone which is a feat in and of itself.

BLAINE: Yes I do almost all my training alone. I have some very dependent guys to come wrap my knees and give me lift offs on the bench, but everything else is solo. My training has changed through time, but right now I squat heavy on Mondays, bench heavy on Wednesdays and Sundays, and pull heavy on Fridays.

HANI: What was the thought process behind choosing your frequency for your lifts? I've listened to some



stuff you've put out and I know you have trained on several different levels of frequency from once per week all the way up to four times on all the lifts.

BLAINE: For all of my athletic years, and the early part of my powerlifting dedicated life, I trained a typical "Western Periodization" style where I only squatted and deadlifted once per week, and bench pressed once or twice. I had success with this for a long time. And had in my head that this was the only proper way to train because it was impossible to recover from squatting or deadlifting more than once per week! After my bench had stagnated for quite some time, I wanted to do more of a high frequency program. I looked at all kinds of methods and eventually settled on being coached by Mike Tuchscherer. This was one of the greatest learning periods of my life. I was now squatting and deadlifting 3 times per week, and benching 4 times. I saw great success

with this, especially on meet day. I felt like I could chew through steel and had no fatigue. After my time with Mike ran out, I kept myself training high frequency and during a period even went up to doing all three competition lifts 5 times per week! Over the past year, I've backed down to squatting and deadlifting once per week because the wear and tear on my elbows and shoulders from squatting made benching impossible and the risk of injury on these joints was not worth the reward. At some point in the future I am sure I will return to another period of high frequency.

HANI: I know that you originally were in love with training and competing raw. How would your training now differ if you were aiming to perform at your best in a raw competition? Would you keep the equipped lifts in rotation?

BLAINE: If I was wanting to focus purely on raw lifting, I would remove the gear from my training altogether.

Maybe some squat briefs when my hips really needed a break. The whole stigma of equipment allowing you to feel supra-max weights making the raw lifts feel lighter I have not found to be true. The equipment also changes the technique enough so that when you go back to raw, your technique feels off. The more and more I have focused on equipped lifting, the more my raw technique feels unnatural and unrefined when I return to training raw. My training would not differ very much except my training sessions would be much shorter. Training for single ply and training for raw are extremely similar. The only difference would be when I am selecting assistance exercises, they would be slightly different because I would be trying to strengthen my raw strength curve instead of my equipped strength curve. The sets, reps, intensities, and periodization would all be nearly unchanged.

HANI: Speaking of raw and



Check out the **NEW**
Sling Shot® product and apparel line

Available exclusively at
howmuchyabench.net





equipped training; how do you feel about the growth of raw and equipped lifting domestically and internationally? Do you see equipped lifting getting a return-to-popularity surge in the USA in the next few years?

BLAINE: The insane growth of raw lifting has been great for the sport both on the raw and equipped sides. We have more people competing, watching, and following powerlifting than we ever have in history. This brings bigger names and sponsors to the sport; it is good for us all. Equipped lifting is still the style of choice in Eastern European countries and their best lifters are still mostly interested in just gear. In North America and Western Europe, raw is far more popular. When raw first started getting popular, I figured most of the good raw lifters would eventually switch to gear to take their lifting to the

next level, help keep competing through injuries, and want to lift more weight, but I was wrong. From what I have seen the past two years, I don't see equipped lifting getting a popularity surge. I think it is a cultural thing, the barriers of entry to equipped lifting are much higher. You need people around who know and can teach you the gear, and you usually need a crew of spotters and helpers. The training sessions are much more difficult and longer. It takes many many years to become a great equipped lifter even with world class strength. People aren't interested in that. For someone who is a top lifter in the raw division, it would take a special person, a very rare breed, to take the jump and try equipped lifting and to accept not being at the top for a few more years. I think many of the new lifters will also not be in the sport very long. I think we

will see a large majority of lifters be a revolving door of 2 year careers and be done, and new blood will come in for a short period of time. Due to these reasons, I don't believe we will see a spike in popularity of equipped lifting. But I have been wrong before and hope that I am wrong again!

HANI: How do you feel about training variations of the lifts or the use of specialized bars? What about accommodating resistance like bands, chains, etc.?

BLAINE: I love training variations of the lift. 90% of my work is spent doing the competition specific movements or variations. Appropriately chosen variations are the best thing you can do for improving your lifts. Correctly identifying a weak point, and selecting an appropriate exercise and executing it properly is the true bread and butter of getting stronger. Over the years, I have used accommodating resistance and program it into a lot of my athletes' training. I don't use it much anymore, but have really considered bringing it back, especially for my bench press. I think bands and chains are often misused. When I coach my athletes on how I would like them to set up bands, I tell them to not calculate tension or % because it usually just leads to delusions about how much they think they are doing. Just set up a band (reverse or to the floor) with an empty bar (for bands to the floor) or with 135-225 (for reverse bands) and go through the movement. You should feel a very noticeable change in force throughout the movement. So, change the band width, or how it is set up until you feel a very drastic change in force through the whole lift. There should be band tension present at the beginning and end of the lift - so no 100% free weight at any point.

HANI: If you could give one piece of training advice to us all, what would it be?

BLAINE: Find a program you believe in, put your trust in it, and follow it through to completion. Don't get distracted by what others are doing or question the work you are putting in or the path you are on.

HANI: Injuries are always an interesting topic with seasoned veterans of the sport. I know you are constantly dealing with a few but I'm not quite

sure on the specifics of what they all are. Can you tell us what you struggle with and what you've done to train through or around it?

BLAINE: The two most major ones I have are a ruptured L5-S1 disc and two torn hip labrums. I could write a book on the things I do to work around them. And there is a lot of literature on the internet about these things too. Just need to stay positive. Something that isn't talked so much about these days is the lifting equipment. Even light, loose, single ply gear can do a tremendous amount in making aches and pains go away.

HANI: They say hindsight is 20/20. If you could go back and alter anything about your previous training to help you avoid some of these injuries; what would you do differently?

BLAINE: The root of almost all my injuries seems to be never getting out of a massive anterior pelvic tilt. It's allowed me to have a lot of power, but learning about proper bracing and a neutral pelvis could have probably saved me a lot of grief.

HANI: Nutrition has got to be an interesting subject for you. What does it

take to maintain your bodyweight and performance level? Is this something you struggle with?

BLAINE: I don't struggle with nutrition at all anymore. Obviously it takes a massive quantity of calories to maintain this svelte 375 lb. figure so the sheer act of consuming them while being non-stop busy all day is a challenge. That is where my shake diet comes from. 80% of my calories are consumed via blended chicken, egg whites, avocado, spinach, milk, sweet potatoes, and peanut butter.

HANI: Seriously, though, what's the story with the chicken shakes?

BLAINE: It all just comes down to time management. I surprisingly don't have a very big appetite for someone my size. So if I had to sit there and choke down chewing this much food, that is all I would do all day. Fortunately I developed this awesome skill of chugging and can hammer it all home that way.

HANI: What is your favorite food?

BLAINE: Quite a big fan of BBQ. I love chopped brisket.

HANI: What would a perfect Saturday night look like for you?

BLAINE: Fishing on the lake all morning and afternoon. Training for 4 hours in the evening with my wife. Creep on her while she's doing her cardio. Go home, eat some BBQ, and chill.

HANI: Tell us something about you that nobody would know

BLAINE: I like to eat small children and large animals.

HANI: Where can we find you on social media?

BLAINE: I do most of my posting on Instagram as 'TheVanillaGorilla92' and I also have a website: BlaineSumner.com.

HANI: Do you have any sponsors you'd like to thank?

BLAINE: I am fortunate to be taken care of immensely by Con-Cret/Promera Sports and Titan Support Systems. Thanks to them I've been able to travel the world competing in meets and not pay a dime.

HANI: Thanks for taking the time to do this interview, Blaine! Also, thank you for passing along the sweet photos from Robert Crawford and 9for9 Media. I'm looking forward to seeing you kill it again in Columbus this year! PM

FORZA STRENGTH SYSTEMS

BENCH OF CHAMPIONS

F200 Super Bench

Price \$1195/ S&H \$295

Durable Powder Coat Finish

Competition Gripper Pad

Spotter's Platform

Adjustable Bar Catchers

4X2" & 3X3" Steel Tubing

Easy 4 Bolt Assembly

Pad Only with Forza

Innovative Gripper Cover

\$295/ S&H: \$55



Safety Arms Option
\$475/Pair



Bar & weights not included.

Check out our Full Line of Used Equipment

ORDER TODAY! - 1.800.769.9259



Made in the USA

FORZASTRENGTH.COM