

MATT VINCENT IS COOLER THAN YOU

BY MARK BELL

PHOTOS BY ROBERT PERRY, WWW.ROBERTPERRY.CO.UK

Matt Vincent is the self proclaimed biggest, strongest hipster on the planet. I checked the inter webs and it turns out that he's right! Who knew? Matt is covered in ink from nearly head to toe, including one terrifying looking tattoo of Leather Face on his arm. Matt is a 2 time Highland Games Champion who is into reading, movies, eating and maybe even a little boozing. Matt is proficient at all lifts including, squat, bench, deadlift, clean and jerk, snatch - you name it and Matt can perform it. So for a big guy, Matt is pretty athletic. But in my mind, what has always separated Matt Vincent from any athlete I have seen or dealt with is his ability to always have a good time no matter what is going on. Let's take a look further into Matt's life and see what we can find out.

MB: To say Matt Vincent is unassuming as a world championship athlete is like saying Kim Kardashian only kinda has a big ass. I mean, don't get me wrong - you're a big-framed guy at about 6'1 and over 260 pounds but you are no Stan Efferding, that's for damn sure. What has been your secret to looking so average?

MV: I'm standing at a towering 6' so that keeps people at bay because it's so intimidating. At my massive size, I could be the next Thor Björnsson. Look him up - he plays The Mountain in Game Of Thrones. It's bizzare how identical we look! I will give all the credit to looking super average to some decent genetics and 25 years of shit diet, mixed with 18 years of completely functional training. Most guys like yourself spent a considerable amount of their training career trying to look pretty in underwear on stage or in your case, wrestling with oily dudes. I bet the first 15 years of my training, nothing got done over a set of 5. Also, since everything I was doing was designed to make me stronger and move faster as a thrower or athlete, hypertrophy wasn't a concern. At some point, especially with throwing, you need to be able to move. Being too big and muscle bound can get in your way. All those things sound like a reasonable truth, but the main issue is I love beer, bourbon, cheeseburgers and beer. I can drive those dirty bastards two at a time into my gut. Being a guy who at one time was pumped to stop by McDonald's to purchase a couple rounds of McGangbangs (Double cheese burger with a chicken sandwich jammed in the middle), I didn't have much concern for physique.

I am now paying for those sins as I get older and have been busting ass to not be so damn fat. Seems to be working, but slow and steady. Just like I got fat, this is going to take time.

MB: Ok so you're trying to be less fat. How fat were you? How much did you lose and how did you lose it?

MATT VINCENT: I was pretty fat. Not like circus fat. Just doughy. I kept waiting for the baby fat to fall off or have a sweet growth spurt, but it never happened.





So I took matters into my own hands and decided to try eating the right things consistently for a long time. It was time for the life style change. Start treating myself like an athlete if I want to perform like one. All in all, I am down about 30lbs. I did it working with Jesse Burdick and basically following a keto approach to my diet. Eventually when the season really fired back up and I needed performance to start being my priority again, we started adding carbs in PWO. This has been awesome for me. I feel much better. I sleep better, look better, recover better, and I am a lot more motivated to keep kicking ass.

Diet has been the very weak link in my chain for a long time, and it still is. I didn't really learn anything in the last year of dieting since I am just doing what I am told. Not like I want to try to coach anyone who is looking for real progress in their diet or trying to get ready for the stage. I can help some fat people be less fat. That was my goal. Performance still has to be the main objective but there are times

during the season where the focus can drift slightly.

I have always done cardio as well. I think conditioning as an athlete is imperative to success. I'm not trying to go run a marathon or anything, but I just think as a human trying to be in my peak physical years, I should be able to run some sled pushes, take part in a fun CF WOD [CrossFit Workout of the Day], or sprints without dying.

MB: I'll never forget the first time I met you. I was thinking, "Who is this frumpy fat owl looking guy? Is he serious does he compete in something?" Haha good god I am judgemental, huh? Maybe I should get that checked out...Anyway, do you have some kind of athletic background that gives you an advantage over guys that are bigger and look like they were born to kick a lot of ass?

MV: Yeah! I have always been pretty athletic. I can't think of much that I tried that I wasn't at least decent at. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't great at anything. Football in HS - I had offers to play for some smaller local schools,

but luckily for me, I was a better shot-putter than a short slow guard. This got me to LSU [Louisiana State University] on the track team where I was an invited walk on and eventually earned a Skolly. Those were a fun four years. I didn't take it as seriously as I should have. I was having more fun hanging out with my friend's band, meeting girls, smashing head bouncing, and living a semi sketchy lifestyle.

You're right on with the guys who look born to kick ass. Even though Highland Games is not the most well known strength sport, we have some insanely strong talented guys competing. I am the shortest of the group by 2-3" and right now I am giving up about 40lbs. So I have to make up for it with explosive power and technique. The years of throwing in college are a huge feather in my hat coming into the sport. Since the sport relies so much more on technique than just strength I can get away with it. The field is really even - you have to figure out a good balance between Strength, Speed, and Technique.

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MB: LSU Track? Isn't LSU track legendary? Isn't that one of the best track schools in the world? How did you earn a scholarship amongst such stiff competition?

MV: At the time the throws group was rebuilding. LSU is awesome at track and we hung, like 6 national championships while I was there between Men and Women. None of this success was due to my performances. I was able to post points at conference consistently and earned a spot. They are kicking ass now in the throws. I think I would have a tough time making the travel team. Good thing I am out of there and that I found a great sport to compete in that allows all of my talents to work together. If you keep looking and digging for something more and more obscure, eventually you can find something you're awesome at.

MB: So tell us what Highland Games even is?

MV: Highland Games are the tradi-

tional heavy athletics event pre-dating the Olympics. Clans in Scotland would gather and bring their strongest men out and have them compete in different tests of strength. There are 8 traditional events that are contested internationally. We throw two stones like the shot put. One is 16 lbs thrown with full approach like Shot put. The other is 22lbs or heavier called a Braemar and is thrown standing with no approach. We throw two weights for distance - a 56lbs heavy weight and a 28lbs light

weight. These look like a block of steel at the end of a short chain with a ring handle. They were traditionally used in weighing grain at markets. They are thrown by spinning two times while holding on with one hand. Two hammers, as well. As you can guess, there is a light one and a heavy one that are 16 and 22 lbs. These are thrown for distance by winding it around your head three times and releasing it. We throw a 56lb weight over a bar for height. And last and most well known



is the caber. This is one everyone knows. We are the fat guys in kilts throwing telephone poles. You have to pick it off the ground vertically, balance it, run with it, stop and turn it end over end. Occasionally, we throw a 20lbs bag with a pitchfork for height, this is called sheaf.

MB: Now that sounds like a game to me. Sounds kinda fun. Throwing stuff like telephone poles, rocks and heaving stuff with a pitch fork. Sounds like a blast! How do you train for these odd events?

MV: Just like you train for the events you compete in. Tons of reps to get good at them. You have to acquire the implements and find a field to throw them in. I really love training for it. It is nice to be out in my field and throw for an hour or so with some music by myself. One of my favorite things about the games is being outside for training occasionally. That is just for the throwing side of it. I train in the gym 3-4 days a week depending on the time of

season and what current goals are.

I follow my program Strength LAB in the gym. I do simple strength and power programming, focusing on big lifts and using Olympic lifts to develop power. The sport is great for me since it really is about finding a balance between strength, speed, and technique. If you focus too long on any of them alone, the others will suffer and you will not throw as far.

MB: Is it true that drinking beer is very common during the game itself?

MV: Yeah, I wouldn't say it is an every game thing, but there is nothing wrong with having a beer during a long day outside. Hell! I had a couple beers between my Snatch and Clean and Jerk at my last weightlifting meet. The camaraderie side of the Highland Games is excellent. The top guys usually spend anywhere from 10-20 weekends together from April until the end of September. It's a long season and we all enjoy a good time and a giant amount of ball busting. Most of the games for

me are spent laughing a ton. In fact, that is when I am at my best. Relaxed and telling jokes. If I am loose on the field, laughing a lot then watch out. There is very little of the typical drama or dick measuring in the other sports. I always hated that posturing bullshit. I think we all have an idea in reality of how ridiculous it is that we realize how fortunate we are to get to travel the world throwing rocks for fun and profit. So we get to enjoy ourselves, put on a show, throw far, and have a drink.

MB: Profit? You are considered a Pro but you don't get paid for it, do you?

MV: Yeah we sure do. It is pretty great and it is a nice addition to my regular income for sure. I think the amount the guys make varies quite a bit in the top ten, leaning heavy on the top. But, if you can make it to the Pro level, you for sure will no longer be paying to play. It really is a great opportunity and experience. The games really take care of us. They fly us out

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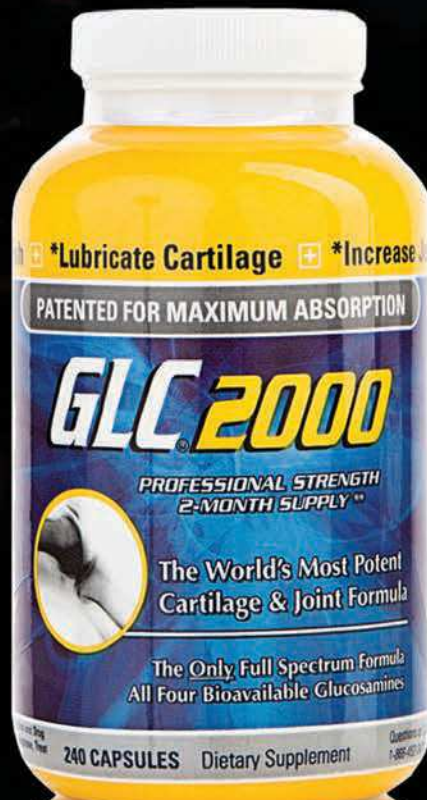


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MB: What can athletes, powerlifters, weightlifters and CrossFitters take from the Highland Games?

MV: For me, throwing has always been the combination of all of those types of strengths. I need some of the max strength of a powerlifter to make things feel light. I need the timing, balance, and speed like a weightlifter. I compete in 9 events over the course of about 7 hours, all outside in the sun. So some level of conditioning is going to help a ton. I love the CrossFit workouts that are in my program. I think these help me learn to recover faster so that I can give my next attempt all that I have. Also, better conditioning means faster recovery in training, which means you can train more often than the next guy if he's not up on at least some conditioning. As an athlete, I am spinning, pushing, and creating leverages so that I can apply the max strength and power that I built in the gym.

For people looking to be part of something, I think it is a great sport.

There is a high end that is obtainable by semi regular people. I mean, we make it look easy and that is from seriously the 10,000+ good reps that we have put into training. There is a lot happening in 1.5 seconds of each throw. I need everything to happen, as fast as possible and it needs to land in the right order. This is not different than any athlete needing their body to perform when they want it to.

For me the last big thing is learning to compete. Get out and compete in something. I don't give a shit what it is. Find a passion, work hard at it, and then put those skills to the test against yourself and others. It is amazing how much this carries over to my real life. Being able to have the confidence to know that you can perform at your best under pressure is the biggest lesson any athlete can learn. That ability to rely in yourself is huge.

OUTSIDE THE GAMES

MB: I have known you for a few years now and at a young age it seems like you lived several lives. Tell us about your music days working with bands and stuff.

MV: Those years were a lot of fun. Like a lot of kids, I didn't have really any focus. I was bent on having a good time. I have never been musically talented. I can't play well enough to do a sound check on a triangle. So I was a "hanger on" trying to live vicariously through my friends who are kicking more ass than me. So, not much different than now. But seriously, it was a great time. I figured out my place and took to it. I figured out my skill was working hard and showing up on time. Being accountable and reliable in the music industry was a rare commodity, so I found myself working with the band as a tour manager. This sounds like a big deal but it means that I drive a van, sell merch, babysit, and make sure that dick bar owners paid up. The last one is where things got fun and tricky. Being a big guy and seeming to be someone that a bar manager would rather not have as a problem, made some of those transactions easier. We got kicked out of a couple places and had some rumbles. It was a great experience, but eventually responsibility started rearing its ugly face.

That has really always been my



driving force. I want to experience as much as I can in the few years that I get to explore this planet. Trying to find that balance of kicking ass in a career and being a vagabond has been a challenging one. I don't want to live that life again, but I wouldn't trade it. I think those experiences got me to where I am now. I can slag T-shirts and merch like you wouldn't believe. I was paid a percentage of what I sold at the merch booth, and many nights I did better than the band. It was a ton of fun. Seeing the country with your 7 or 8 best friends in a van is something lots of people never get to do. You have a couple small windows in your life to throw caution to the wind and ride something out. That was a good one.

MB: What's the deal with all the tats man? And the hipster thing? Being into fashion isn't exactly the most manly thing. Wearing skinny jeans when you're whatever the exact opposite of skinny is, is unbecoming. What's with the hipster thing?

MV: Just to be clear on the hipster thing. I personally find it funny that I am described that way. Style of dress, for sure, in some ways. But it seems

that label comes from the strength crowd since I choose to have style in anyway at all. I think not choosing to wear elastic pants all the time makes people think I am a hipster. But I get it. The tattoos have been an on going and likely never ending collecting process. It started by just wanting to do it. Then it turned into trying to collect art from the various artist in the field I like. I am attracted to people who operate with passion. If you are going to do something, be fucking good at it. Why wouldn't you want to be the best? I don't get that attitude. I am not trying to skate through life.

As far as fashion goes, I don't really know. It is more of the same stuff. If I can choose to look great or be a fucking slob, I'll choose nice every time. I am sure that part of it is my absolute disdain for any tough guy bullshit. The posturing, style of dress (Affliction, jeans with colored stitching, always sleeveless shirts, always listening to metal, talk about pussy all the time, scumbag types) and attitude I find exhausting. So this is my way of running away from anything that would lump me in with those douche bags. I

just want to laugh a lot and have fun. I don't need/want anyone to think I'm a badass. I can handle myself when the time comes. I compete well and show up when the time counts. I keep my word and I follow through on the shit I say I am going to do. I want to be a guy you can count on. Sorry that is a little off base from the question.

The hipster crowd is making awesome food, art, music, and cleaning up shitty neighborhoods. I am on board for that. I just hate the elitist thing. Since I am 31, with an awesome job and a nice house I find that part funny. I can walk both lines happily. Good coffee, bourbon, cigars, food (tacos), craft beer, and nice clothes I am in, what's not to love.

MB: You're huge into books and movies to the point where you know the writers, directors and actors. What are your favorite books and movies?

MV: Movies seem to have consistently been my favorite form of art. I like reading but rarely sit still long enough outside of the shitter to read anything. I'd rather watch a movie. Less investment of my time. I really like

Danny Boyle (28 Days Later, The Beach, Trainspotting), Wes Anderson (Rushmore, The Life Aquatic), Quentin Tarantino (Reservoir Dogs, Inglorious Bastards, Django Unchained, DeathProof) are some favorite movies and directors. I just really appreciate the attention to detail those guys give. 28 Days Later may be a perfect movie for me. Character is someone they manage to have you route for the entire time. This is tough in horror cause typically they make really obvious shit decisions. As soon as that happens I am out and I am routing for the bad guys. An example of that would be like Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Those dick kids come into their house and then get dead. If those kids don't make shit decisions like, pick up hitch hikers, and ignore their gut they would live.

Books go a very different route. Cormac McCarthy (Blood Meridian, No Country for Old Men, The Road) is amazingly talented and his character development is awesome. Some serious feels in that shit. I like old horror novels like Marry Shelley's Frankenstein, Edgar Allan Poe, and Chuck Palahniuk are always awesome. Also auto biographies have been jumping more into my hands lately. Mike Tyson's is awesome.

MB: You wrote a few books, have your own website, travel often, do your own marketing and you're married. On top of that, you found time to become the two - time world champ, all while having a real job that pays well. How do you manage it all?

MV: Oh yeah and don't forget I started my own web series called Drifta Lifta - check it on my YouTube channel. Part of it is being motivated to do it. Starting something is where people fall short. Whether it is the standard "I'll do it tomorrow" or whatever, I don't stand for that. If there is something I am thinking about and want to do, I just get started right then. No more procrastinating. No more excuses for myself. No more tolerating my own ingrained lazy bullshit. I don't want to be that guy who thinks, "Well I could have or should have". Fuck that. I did it. Pass or Fail - I did it. I gave it a go and will learn from the experience. I never feel comfortable that tomorrow is guaranteed. Not in a morbid way,

but that today I have control over and the time is now. Writing my first book Training LAB for the Highland Games was a really great experience. That thing only exists cause I made it happen. The training is what I still do that got me where I am. Throwing LAB and Strength LAB were necessary follow ups for me to voice more of my ideas. People want to train like Athletes. They want to be strong, explosive, athletic, and fit. That is what Strength LAB and the philosophy behind it is about. Really proud of all of them and my Mobility programs.

I figured out how to be really efficient with my time. I multi-task pretty well, and don't relax or sleep much anymore. I have certain anxieties about not doing enough or working hard enough. I want to do a lot of awesome stuff and I am learning that all that awesome shit is expensive. I was really broke for about a three years longer than I wanted to be after college. I refuse to let that ever happen again. I am not driven by the number in a bank account, but I ma driven by the freedom and options that making a good living provides for me and my family. I do also tend to be a bit of a shut in when I am home. I have a gym in my garage, full of awesome Sorinex equipment (look at the subtle plug), office at home, and no kids (Just a couple dick head dogs). If it isn't for work, I rarely leave my house. I don't go to bars anymore. I did that and did it right for a number of years. Got to the point that you realize it is the same people telling the same tired ass stories and not doing anything new. This isn't what I wanted so I got out of that routine.

I am really goal oriented. I can give myself a carrot (or multiple ones in reality) to chase and focus really well to do what needs to be done to accomplish those goals.

MB: Last question friendo, why is your brother the embodiment of what a great NFL player should look like and you look like a fat owl? Seriously, was it hard growing up with such a mutant? I believe Andy is 6'5, 320 and not fat. He played some pro ball for a while as well correct? Did that drive you to do great things on your own?

MV: That dude for sure has some

tools I can't bring to the table. Lucky for me, I got that realization early. Finishing playing high school football, it had never registered to me that there was a chance that I wouldn't be playing more football at the collegiate level. Since he was my only brother, it just seemed like the natural progression of life. Then when it wrapped up, I didn't really want to do that. Which is good because no one was really interested in recruiting a 6' fat lineman. But I found a home with track that worked out great.

Andy has undoubtedly had the biggest influence on me. He is my best friend and there are not a lot of days that we don't talk at least once. We now work for the same company and get to push each other in our careers as well as sport. I wouldn't say it was ever a competitive thing. It was always more that we just wanted the best for the other. I never grew up believing that one person's success had any dictation on the amount of success that I could have. He was a great influence. He was a great student and a much easier kid to deal with than me. I am a bit of a lunatic as you can see by now, but it has all seemed to workout.

I always want to kickass at anything I am doing. I want to be the best at it. That is in me. But having that same thing in a brother who was ahead of me, definitely set the bar of not settling for anything. I learned that if I wanted something, it was my job to figure out how to get it and what direction I needed to go to get there. That route is different for everyone. The key is to figure out what works for you and understand your strengths and weaknesses. Always play to your strengths and work on mastering a couple of things.

The other thing I learned growing up with him is don't let other people drag you down. If someone, even a friend, becomes a problem and hassle, fuck 'em, they have to go. I want to surround myself with other driven and motivated people. This makes me better always. Getting to know you, Andee, Jesse, Wendler, Krissy, Drew, and countless others, have made me want to do more and be a better person.

Mark thanks and keep spreading the HVIII!!! **PM**