

# INTERVIEW

## AL CASLOW

interviewed for PL USA by Michele Cogger



Al Caslow overcame his difficulties at the 2006 APF Sr. Nationals

With a no-limits mindset and a rich athletic background, Al Caslow has climbed to the top level of powerlifting in a very short time. Currently leading the 165-pound weight class in the squat, it appears to be only a short time before the all-time total record falls as well. Al is not only a world-champion, multi-ply powerlifter, but also a husband, new father, gym owner, and a career-oriented individual. Balancing all of these roles successfully is not easy, but Al makes it look that way.

Using a combination of training styles, he shows that it doesn't take a rigid program to gain strength—it is more important to know your own strengths and weaknesses and not be afraid to ask for help.

Read on to learn more about Al's background, training styles, and strong opinions. You will see how his competitive nature and extreme determination to be the best took him from being a newcomer in the sport to a world champion in only three years.

**Michele Cogger:** It's no surprise that you have been involved in sports your entire life. Can you give me a little background on the sports you played before you began powerlifting? I heard a rumor that you used to play professional football.

**Al Caslow:** I played tons of sports, actually. As a kid I was involved in tumbling, karate, boxing, baseball, football, basketball and track. Later, in high school, it was cut down to baseball, football, and track. In college, it again got cut down to track and field and football. Post college, I continued on with football, performing for some arena football teams, semi-pro teams, and later spending seven weeks with the Philadelphia Eagles. I had a small stint with them. My agent Joe Womack acquired a free agent contract for me and had me perform punt and kick-off returns for them. I did well and was kept. I was with them during mini camp, conditioning camp, and off-season where I was finally let go. At that level everyone is about the same; small differences separate each athlete. For me, I was about the second fastest guy on the team but I was a miniature version of a football player at 5'6" and only weighing 160 pounds or so. I loved playing football. I had so much fun during this time, but I don't miss it. It was also chaotic, stressful, and I was traveling like crazy. Honestly, I moved on soon after my release. I didn't look back.

**MC:** So how did you go from being a football player to a powerlifter?

nally, Aleksandr Kutcher was my driving force. I was in awe of him, but I also wanted to kick his ass on the platform.

**MC:** What do you remember about your first meet?

**AC:** It was awesome, first of all. I prepared going into it for about two months. I was so anxious throughout, and the day of the meet I was terrified. I didn't cut weight. I just walked in thinking you weighed yourself at whatever weight you were at. I didn't even know there were classes, so I ended up weighing 163 pounds and that's when the 165-pound class became my home. I didn't have goals going into the meet except: whatever any other 165-pound guy there was lifting, I had to lift more. I didn't even know what I was capable of, really. And I had never worn gear except for the week before to test it out.

**MC:** Let's talk about your training. I know that you are associated with two gyms—SOS in Kansas City and BIG in Omaha. How did you first meet Rick Hussey and the guys from Big Iron Gym?

**AC:** Rick was a jerk at our first meeting. I met him at the APF Senior Nationals in 2006. I was warming up on the same mono-lift that Nick Hatch was, and Rick was there with him. I didn't know who he was at all; I thought maybe he was Nick's dad or something. At that time I honestly didn't even know that coaches existed in powerlifting.

I first began to pay attention to Rick after I dumped a weight in the warm-up room and pissed him off. I was going right before Nick and when I dumped the weight, Rick got mad. They had to take Nick's knee wraps off to allow time to get the bar unloaded and back up on the uprights. All I remember is hearing him yell "G—D— amateurs!" I embarrassed to me, and after that I wanted to know who he was.

As for the BIG guys, I met them a little by little. I met Shaun Frank first that same year at Seniors, but only briefly as he gave me some help verbally. I later saw him at the first Pro/Am in 2007 and that was when he invited me to train at Big Iron. After that I just made it a habit to get in there often. By that point I really found Rick to be extremely helpful. Now I see Rick as my own coach. Sometimes at meets I find myself looking for him to know what to do next.

(continued on page 74)



Ryan Kennelly - Team MHP Member  
World Record Bench  
1075 lbs.

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(Continued from page 6)  
MC: Since you live so far away from Big Iron, how often do you go up to train?  
AC: I have a funny story about that actually. I have been traveling to Omaha for work for quite some time now, and almost every month for about six months I would consider going to BIG to train, but I didn't know a single guy there yet. One day I decided to pack my Rage X and just show up. I walked into the gym on a Monday evening. About 30 people were in shirts, it was loud, and Rick was yelling instructions. I remember just starting for a while, then Becca came up from behind me and asked me if I needed help. I simply shook my head "no" and walked out. But now I go there for one week, once a month, Omaha is part of my territory for work, which makes it convenient to come by and get Rick to work with me and help me. You know, you depend on someone like Rick. He does so much for you when you don't expect it. It's hard to not want to be there when he's there.

MC: Tell me about your gym, Society of Strength.  
AC: S.O.S. started with just me and the guy who originally introduced me to the sport, Brad Johnson. We simply wanted to have our own identity. We were not creating a gym or a team, but as we did meet in Kansas City, people asked to join and we grew from that. We have 12 members now; it's great. It's a great supportive group and we are all very tight and helpful towards each other.

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He's no slouch at the Bench (photos courtesy Michele Cogger)

time highest squat at 165 pounds, with my 887-pound squat, which was done at the APF Spring Open in March of 2009.  
MC: It just came out that the squats at that meet were all actually 5 kilos higher than anyone thought, due to an error in loading chart software. How does it feel to know you thought you broke a record by 5 lbs only to learn that you actually blew it out of the water?  
AC: To be honest with you, it's of- fender the fact, so it really doesn't do much psychologically or emotionally for me. I haven't even thought about the confusion issue, really. I squatted 887 instead of 876, and really the first thing and only thing that I thought of was how close I am to being to the first 165-pound lifter to squat 900.

MC: Now that you have the squat record that you were chasing, what are your goals from this point forward?  
AC: I don't necessarily have "goals" per se, but there are certain things I need to do and want to do for myself. For one, I need to get out of the 165-pound class. In my eyes, legends are made by knocking down doors, and I've been knocking on the 165-pound door for three years now. I don't want to be that guy who has to drop weight, stay "small" and/or live in one class because that's the only way I'll be competitive. I'm coming to the 181's here soon in 2010 and hopefully will start knocking and banging with 196-pound guys here soon, too. I'll work my butt off to get there and be there. That's really my goal—to work as hard as I can and walk down bigger guys, and rise to the heavier classes and do what I do.

MC: You did seven meets last year with no down time at all. What motivated you to keep training for meet after meet?  
AC: It's really just to get out there and compete. I love the thoughts and feelings behind competitions. It's awesome. If I could, I would easily compete monthly...but that's not likely at all. I'm also motivated by not being number one. Who doesn't want to be at the top, right? If I'm not there, then I'm huffing and puffing to be number one; I'm just very competitive by nature. But if I am there, then I've got to stay there—sort of like the circle of trust: you have to keep honest to remain.

MC: Since you are on the platform so often, do you still get nervous at meets?  
AC: Yes, I always get very nervous, but right before a lift I have a lot of energy that comes across me. It's a great feeling. I have no superstitions except for cereal. I like to eat cereal post-weight-in. If I don't, I always feel it throw my eating pattern off. Other than that, right before a lift I'm really just all ears. Usually I am listening to Rick and Shaun. They always have some things for me to think about and DO. And trust me, they are never short of words.

MC: There are a lot of interesting things about you that many people may not know, for example, your nickname, Al Fachino.  
AC: Good ol' Rick and his nicknames. He said I had movie star looks like "Al Fachino." He meant Al Pacino, but he has a speech impediment and cannot pronounce Pacino correctly! Haha!  
MC: Are there any powerlifting moments that stand out to you? Favorite moments?  
AC: My favorite moments are always watching my teammates get lifts they are chasing. I like that a lot. I loved it when Mick Mor-

look awkward, but get strong fast. At S.O.S., we have two guys over 400 right now who get strong quickly. It's amazing to watch them continually improve at the rates they do.  
MC: At the top level of the sport, do you feel there is more camaraderie or competition among the lifters?  
AC: Some people will actually not like this answer, but at the top I think there are some great individuals who love to compete and are very professional and humble about it. But there is also a lot of separation. Some guys sometimes just expect a lot for themselves and also think too much of themselves. I think too much of these guys.  
MC: What are your thoughts on the current state of powerlifting?  
It's definitely alive, but certainly not ideal. There is not enough loyalty to the sport.

AC: It has now become a convenience sport for most. Athletes basically compete when it is convenient for them and when it benefits them only—but the sport has allowed them to do it like this. There is minimal requirement now to advance and compete on the "big" stage. What I mean is, we don't have an annual system, and it has come to be in multiply lifting that national-level competitions are just "out-of-town meets" now; too inconvenient and too expensive for people to care. The world competition was here in the United States, and the amount of support from the top level of competitors was minimal. At first I saw this as a shame for people to not care to represent their country at an event like this, but it's not entirely their fault.

It has become hard to support someone or a federation who has stabbed the athletes in the back. It has made it very hard to see a lot of these competitions as genuine events instead of simple profit-generating shows for certain individuals. People don't forget to represent what they feel is legitimate. And right now, because of the separation, it's hard to realize what is legitimate and what is not. And I won't even go into the judging aspects of this sport—because judges are not solely to blame. Lifters need to have pride and integrity for what they do. I think it's hilarious to see what some guys are content with.  
MC: Do you have any advice for people who want to get started in powerlifting?

I've personally seen guys who

AC: Absolutely. Before getting involved, know that as you start you will need help, and therefore take it serious and ACQUIRE the help. And, please, return the favor.  
MC: Is there anyone you would like to thank?  
AC: Without overdoing this, my wife and God are my first thank-you's for everything they do, have done, and will do. I have to thank my S.O.S. team for their support, friendship, and contribution. And thank you to Rick Hussey, who helped me achieve my numbers and gave me the hope and confidence to do what I have done; and to my friends at BIG, especially Shaun Frankl, for his support, friendship and guidance. I also want to thank John Inzer for his amazing support both as a sponsor and friend, and Alan Thomas for his continued friendship and contributions.

MC: This interview wouldn't be complete without a few words from two people who know Al very well. First I spoke with Shawn Frankl and asked him to tell me a little bit about how he and Al became friends.  
Shaun Frankl: The first time I met Al was at Senior Nationals in 2006. He was warming up when I saw him dump a weight in the warm-up room and I just thought to myself, "I would hate to be that guy right now." He seemed really serious about the sport and I was seeing people fail, so I went and gave him some pointers, and he listened and did exactly those things. The next thing I knew I was him celebrating as he walked off the platform. I thought to myself, "Wow this kid must have broken a record or something." Then I found out he got his opener! I like to call him Al Capone when we meet, but that was hilarious!

MC: Coach Rick Hussey had a few words to add as well.  
Rick Hussey: I guess that by embarrassing him back at Seniors, that little bit of insult went a long way. It turned him into one of the best squatters out there. Another funny thing I remember about Al was one of his first bench workouts at Big Iron. On a bad set, the bar was headed toward his face and Al cried out like a woman! And we don't do that at Big Iron...since then he hasn't cried out again, but we still don't let him forget it. A lot of Big Iron guys hate it when Al comes to train with us because he is so good-looking. He's a good athlete and an all-around good guy. He is very determined. I like to call him Al Capone when we meet, but that was hilarious!

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Ever since then, I have gotten the privilege to get to know Al and now I consider him to be one of my best and closest friends. Al is a man of integrity. If he tells you he's going to do something, he will do it. He doesn't ask for any freebies or anything in return. He has his priorities in the right place and he really cares for people and how he can help make a difference in everything he does, and gives 100 percent to be the best at whatever he is doing. I like training with Al because he is a motivating guy who brings intensity to the table, and has a positive attitude that drives you to bring out the best in yourself. Plus, I really like giving him crap. He's a feisty, husky little guy! Al hasn't come close to doing the things he is capable of doing in this sport and, to be honest, I think I am as anxious as he is to see what's yet to come deal on and off the platform!

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Al Caslow with his source of 'inspiration,' Rick Hussey (c. Cogger)