

# INTERVIEW

Personal dialogue between  
PL USA Magazine and the  
Sport's Greatest Names.

## Dennis Cieri interviewed by LARRY MILLER

**Larry:** Dennis, why don't you give us some background information about yourself.

**Dennis:** I am 31 years old, married to my wife Marija for 2 years, and I work as a real estate developer and health club owner.

**Larry:** When and how did you get involved in the sport of powerlifting?

**Dennis:** I started weight training when I was 14 years old and I was always fairly strong in the bench press. When I was 18, I found a drug free bench press contest in Wilkes Barre and I won and enjoyed it especially since it was with the ADFPA and a drug tested meet.

**Larry:** How about the gym business?

**Dennis:** I was working out at a gym for the last 5 years and I really enjoyed it. It was mis-managed and it came up for sale. I put in

an offer to buy it and they accepted. I took things over and we're in the process of turning things around. Actually, I am hoping to open up a second gym

late thirties and early to mid forties. So I am inspired by that and feel that I have a long way to go. I don't like to limit myself to anything. I want to keep things open. I would like to break the triple body weight barrier at 181 lbs. I would also like to break the non-drug free record to prove that you can do just about anything without the use of steroids.

**Larry:** What type of training program are you on?

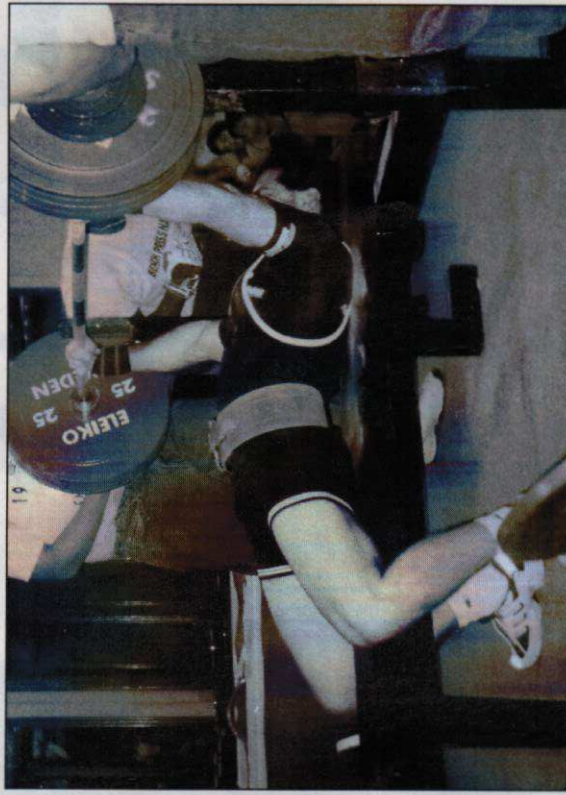
**Dennis:** Currently, I have a mixture of my old routine and I am trying to incorporate some new things. I also believe that a training program need to evolve and change over time. You have to be open minded and consider new techniques. In the past I have done bench press, incline bench press, flat dumbbell bench press and negatives. In my new routine I will eliminate incline benches and do decline bench presses which is more similar to the competition bench press. I do my chest routine in one training session and I do shoulders and triceps together. I do about 6 sets for each body part and I increase the weight as I get closer to competition. On another day of the week, I will do back mid biceps with moderate weight. I may do legs once every other week or so. I am incorporating a lot of stretching into my routine including the chest and back especially to help me with my arch.

**Larry:** You have had a friendly bench rivalry with Joe McAuliffe over the years. How has that evolved?

**Dennis:** Joe is a great guy and it is great to have a friendly rivalry. We have pushed each other over the years. He is a phenomenal athlete and I am glad to know that he is still competing and trying to break my 198 lbs. record. If he does break my record then, of course, I will have to try and take it back. I would love to lift side by side Joe in the Nationals and hopefully the worlds.

**Larry:** Speaking of the Worlds, what was that experience like for you?

**Dennis:** I was very thankful just to get there and it was quite a



Dennis benching his way to a World Team Slot at the USAPL Bench Nationals

**Dennis:** I am 5'9" and off season I weigh 185 lbs., but I compete in the 181s. I tried the 198 lbs. class for a few years, but I just felt too heavy there although I lifted successfully. I didn't feel as healthy with the extra weight. Pounded for pound, I am stronger in the 181 lbs. class.

**Larry:** What records do you hold?

**Dennis:** I have the 198 lbs. American record with a lift of 545 lbs. In the 181 lbs. class I have the American record of 507 lbs. I also have the National record in this weight class with a 501 lbs. bench.

**Larry:** What goals do you have left?

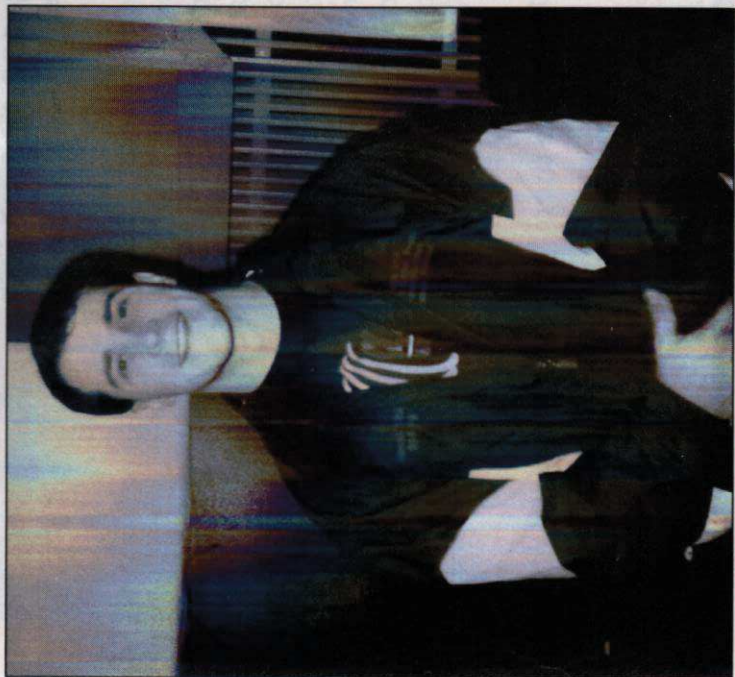
**Dennis:** My goals keep on evolving and changing. When I first started competing, my goal was to bench press 400 lbs. which I did at age 19. Then I wanted a 450 bench which I did at 22. Then I wanted a 500 lb. bench which I accomplished around age 25. My next goal is to get the 181 lbs. world record and get a world title. As long as my bench continues to go up, that's good enough for me.

**Larry:** What do you feel you are capable of at 181?

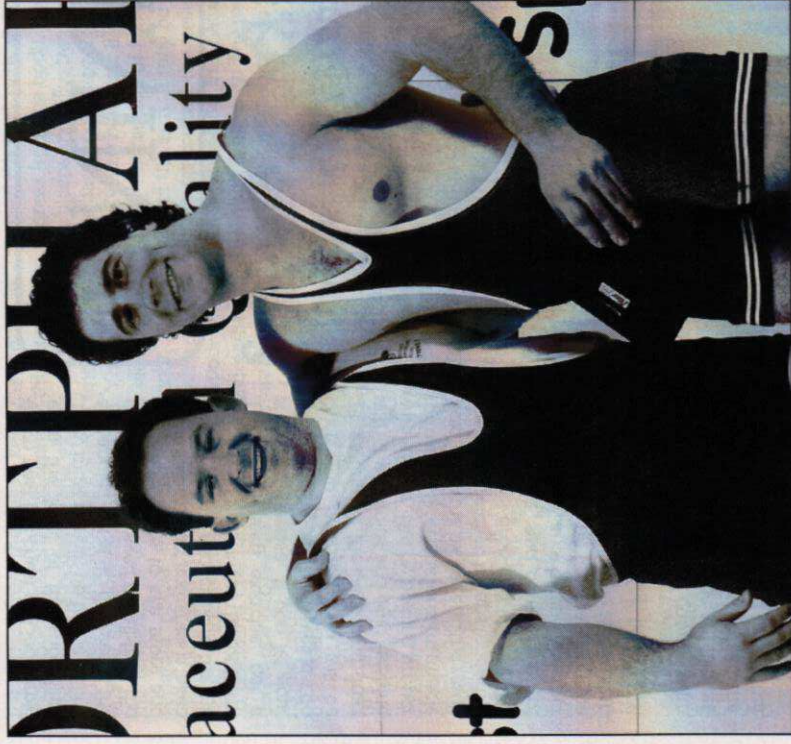
**Dennis:** Well, I recently realized that you don't reach your prime in this sport (which you are an example of) until you reach your

in the future, it's run by my wife, my dad and myself.

**Larry:** What is your height and weight. You appear to be on the tall side for a top bench.



Dennis at the IPF Bench Worlds in Finland (photos courtesy Dennis)



Friendly New Jersey Rivals ... Joe McAuliffe (left) and Dennis Cieri (right)

learning experience. I didn't do my best but I learned a lot and I will prepare better in the future. It is great to have lifters from all over the world get together and compete on one platform. It was amazing to see so many countries represented. The team experience was great. I had never experienced anything like that. Powerlifting has always been an individual sport. It was an enjoyable atmosphere and it was a privilege to be a part of it. I also learned that there are a lot of other strong people out there. I was rarely challenged in the U.S. and I wasn't expecting my competition to be nearly as strong as they were. I took that for granted in the past, but it won't happen again. Having been beaten will make me better next time. I am taking this as a valuable lesson. I didn't go with a cocky attitude expecting to win, but I didn't expect the level of competition to be what it was. Winning will be more meaningful because of the level of competition one faces.

**Larry:** What type of equipment do you use?

**Dennis:** I use the Inzer extra heavy duty blast shirt, a good pair of wrist wraps and a suede lever belt. I try not to use anything supportive prior to a contest. I want to make sure I'm getting stronger because of me and not my workout gear.

**Larry:** What are your views on steroids and drug testing?

**Dennis:** If you take a step back and talk to the typical person on the street, he would assume that a sporting event is for healthy individuals regardless of the sport. Any sport involving drugs is contradictory to what the sport stands for. It is unimaginable to me to call yourself an athlete and then to take strength inducing drugs which are harmful, in order to perform better. It is hard for me to understand why anyone would consider taking drugs. Although I don't know these athletes personally, I have no respect for an athlete who takes drugs. I also don't have any respect for an organization which encourages the use of drugs by turning the cheek. It is a shame because it takes away from the sport.

**Larry:** Any stories over the years that come to mind?

**Dennis:** It has just been a wonderful experience to compete over the years. It has been a way for my family to come together and meet over the years. My family is spread out and they use

my bench press meets as a place to congregate. I have always found that the athletes in USA PL are very supportive of each other and a pleasure to lift with and against. There is a great sense of camaraderie. I remember times where I would give lifters, who forgot their equipment, mine to borrow and vice versa.

**Larry:** Who are some of the lifters over the years who have impressed you or impacted your lifting?

**Dennis:** When I was a teenager the man on top was Jim Stone. I was amazed that, at age 37 or so, he was breaking National and American records in the 181 lbs. class. He was an inspiration to me. One of the people that continue to inspire me is you. Joe McAuliffe also has given me a nice push and now that I have competed internationally, there is the Japanese lifter who won with a bench of 523 who has inspired me.

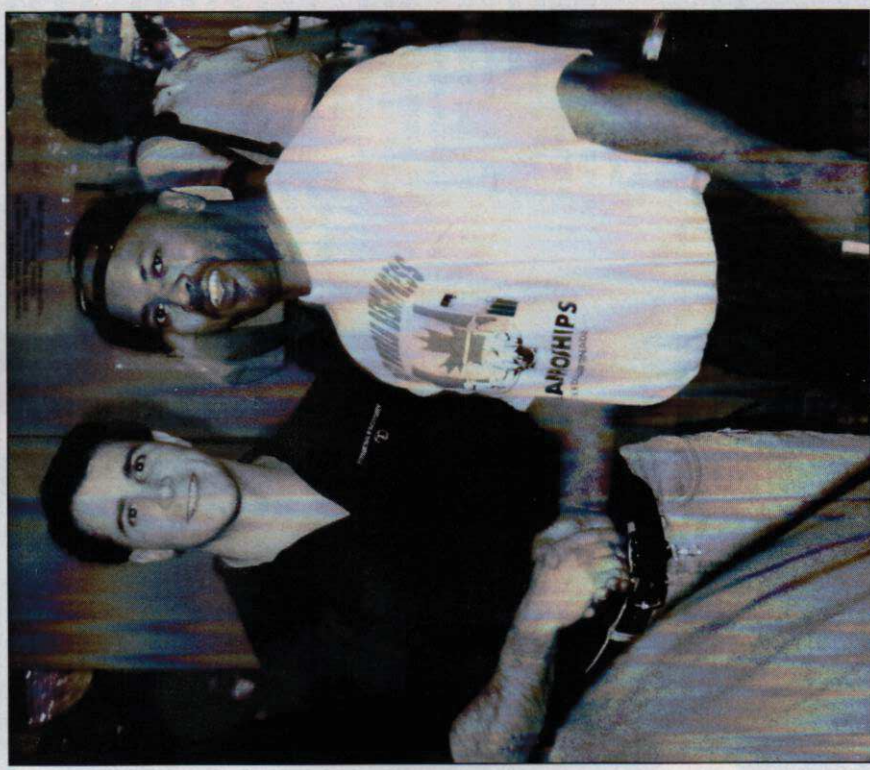
**Larry:** Speaking of the Worlds, you went for the win on your last attempt.

**Dennis:** I made a mistake. I didn't

realize that I could have went for a place and then done a 4th attempt world record. Had I known that at the time I would of done that. It cost me a medal and the team points and I apologize to my team for that. I won't make that mistake again.

**Larry:** Any final comments you'd like to make?

**Dennis:** I need to thank my family for supporting me over the years and my wife that has put up with my traveling and training at night. That is probably why I bought a gym, so that I could tell my wife that 'I am working'. My dad has been with me at all my competitions. I would also like to thank the people that run USA PL. They do this not for the money, but because they love the sport. Those are the heroes of our sport. I'd love to see the sport unite with some common ground rules and move towards the Olympics. We can put man on the moon and split the atom, but we can't get a few powerlifting organizations together. Where there is a will there should be a way to bring us all together. If anyone wants to contact me they can reach me at: The Fitness Factory Gym, 15 Grand Ave., Third Floor, Palisades Park, NJ 07650 and they should leave a phone number so that I can call them back.



Dennis shakes with World Team veteran Leonard McCormick in Chicago.