

Jamie Harris is an enigma ... an anomaly in every sense. He has been portrayed as powerlifting's demonic bad boy ... an individual who is fierce, barbarous and savage. To the people who know him, Jamie Harris is the complete opposite. In fact, his friends use words like gentle, kind hearted, gracious, intelligent, and gifted to describe him. Even his 'professional' life reflects this odd irony. There have been times when three nights out of the week he entered the squared circle of professional wrestling, where he was transformed into a crazed Hulk scaring the wits out of the men, women and children in attendance. Then, on Saturday nights, he might go through an extraordinary metamorphosis from an ominous fiend into an Elvis impersonator, mesmerizing beautiful young ladies and women who are old enough to be his mother. Without question, he is powerful, and even outrageous at times, he often projects the quintessential image of ... say ... a member of the Hell's Angels. Yet, it is also clear that he is a dedicated athlete, a prosperous entrepreneur, a clean living family man, and a down-to-earth, animated human being who is caring and loving. He maintains that paradoxical image effortlessly, perhaps because it is not an image ... it is simply Jamie Harris.

It is hard not calling Harris one of the greatest bench pressers who ever walked the face of the earth. His phenomenal career has been one long highlight film ... ten world bench press records, numerous national bench press records, and countless state records. He is not just a bench presser either; he has put up big numbers in both the squat and deadlift. Statistician Michael Soong calls Harris one of the most complete power athletes in the history of the sport, and Magnus Ver Magnusson, arguably the world's greatest strength athlete, strongly agrees. Magnus says, "There are few people in the world who have the raw strength and ability to compete in all the power movements that are required in the World's Strongest Man competition. Jamie Harris is one of those rare individuals." Still, it is Harris's confounding personality that makes him perhaps the most talked about bench presser in the world. We began our conversation with a topic much on the minds of the Iron world.

DR. JUDD: Jamie, let's cut right to the chase. Descriptions of you have ranged from a monarch of hell to a patron saint. Which is it - seraph or serpent? Will the real Jamie Harris please stand up?

Dr. JUDD

JAMIE HARRIS - a candid conversation with the former "Bad Boy of Bench" on the Plight of Powerlifting, Arcidi, Clark, Elvis, professional wrestling, and his guarantee for future greatness in business and sports. Part I by Judd Biasiotto Ph.D.



Jamie Harris ... was he really the "Bad Boy of Bench" as he appeared on the cover of the Oct. '95 edition of PL USA in a Bert Wagner photo

HARRIS: I don't want to sound trite or contemptuous, but I am probably one of the most misunderstood individuals in sports history. Being in the limelight has been somewhat difficult for me. I think when you are doing good there is a tendency for some people to want to see you fail. It's as if they rejoice at finding fault and weakness in people who are a little successful. When I started getting good, no one wanted to see me around. I began hearing talk that I was on steroids and human growth hormone ... that I

uncertain terms. I think that is where that 'bad boy' me comes in.

DR. JUDD: I guess you are telling me you are not the tough guy everyone portrays you as.

HARRIS: First of all, this bad boy image I have is more hype than it is substance. I am a 'situation' type of person. If someone treats me good, I will treat them great, but if someone treats me bad, I can get real nasty if I have too. Of course, age has mellowed me out to some extent. I'm not the intense psyche king that I was a few years ago, nor am I as driven. When you strive to be the best, everything in your life takes a back seat including common sense. I never really got to enjoy the ride because I was always to busy trying to stay on top. Still, I am sure my change in attitude has hurt my lifting a little.

DR. JUDD: Why do you say that?

HARRIS: I'm not as aggressive in my lifting as I once was. In a lot of ways I was driven by hate. When I had someone to hate or I got into a situation that was threatening, that is when I would really excel. I always lifted better when the odds were against me. It is not the same now. I just can't conjure up that inner hatred anymore. I have nothing else to prove in powerlifting. I feel very content on that point.

DR. JUDD: No regrets?

HARRIS: Of course, I have regrets. There are a lot of things I would do different if I had the chance, but I can't change the past, so I am not going to worry about it. One thing I will say is that I am not above being wrong! When I am wrong, I will admit it and move on. I think that is a big character flaw with a lot of guys in powerlifting. They don't want to take responsibility for their own behavior. If you want my opinion, the real low-life bad boys in powerlifting are the fake bastards who come at you with smiles and then try to pick your pocket or talk bad about you on the sly.

DR. JUDD: It is fairly common knowledge that Anthony Clark and you have developed a close friendship over the years. However, I heard through the grapevine that there was a little friction between you two recently. Is there any truth to that unconfirmed report?

HARRIS: My relationship with Anthony is rather complex. When I was a teenager, Anthony was my biggest hero. While other kids would idolize Michael Jordan or Joe Montana, I revered Anthony. I was fascinated by his extraordinary power. At the time, when it

came to bench pressing, he was light years ahead of everyone else. Of course, I loved the bench press, so naturally he was my idol. I would read everything I could get my hands on with regard to Anthony. In fact, I got this photo, out of Muscle & Fitness, of him incline benching 600 lbs. and I put it on my wall. Today it is still there. Without question I was in awe of the guy. I remember the first time I saw him was at the 1992 APF seniors in Pittsburgh. I was amazed how big he was. He looked like an apartment complex. I thought "Man! No wonder no one can beat this guy." To be honest, at the time I was sure no one would ever beat him. He was just that big and powerful. In retrospect, it is kind of interesting that I thought that way, because three years later I benched 740 lbs. to break his world record.

DR. JUDD: How did that make you feel, beating someone you thought was unbeatable and, even more, engaging someone you idealized?

HARRIS: Naturally, I felt great, but it was an odd feeling ... surpassing the guy I've idolized since I was a teenager. Of course, it also set the stage for us being arch-rivals. I don't care how much you like someone if you are competing against them athletically, you want to beat them. That is probably where some of the bad blood materialized. Maybe, I shouldn't say bad blood because it was more a competitive thing. We are both very competitive athletes, and even though we are good friends, we both want to win.

DR. JUDD: How competitive was it?

HARRIS: Pretty competitive. It was kind of like the Steve Young - Joe Montana rivalry. They were both friends, but Young wanted Montana's job, and Montana didn't want to give it to him. That is kind of how it was with Anthony and me. I wanted what he had, and he wasn't going to let me have it. A lot of people look at Anthony as this easy going, lovable guy, but believe me he can be real competitive, and so can I. You put two guys in a ring like that, and you can expect a war.

DR. JUDD: When was the first time you guys went head-to-head in competition?

HARRIS: It was about five months after I broke his world record that we competed against each other at the Greatest Bench in America Championships. I really wasn't ready physically or mentally for that meet. I didn't even come close to performing up

to my potential, but it was a great learning experience for me. It was actually the first time that I had competed in a big meet. I just didn't have the experience to handle it. Worse yet, I really wasn't prepared going into the meet. When you don't prepare to win, you are definitely ready to lose. Since that time, I have never gone into a competition that I wasn't totally prepared for.

DR. JUDD: If I recall correctly, you did redeem yourself at the 1996 IPA Senior Nationals in Washington, DC?

HARRIS: Kind of, sort of ... I got my opener, and Anthony bombed out. I don't like winning like that. I would rather take someone's very best and give him my best and see what happens when the dust clears. Actually it wasn't long after that we both started working for the same supplement company. That is when we became really good friends.

DR. JUDD: So all of this talk about you two having problems is just gossip?

HARRIS: Like I said, we were both extremely competitive. Many times that brings out the best in people, and sometimes it can bring out the worst. I say that because I probably pushed myself harder than I would have if he

weren't around. Call it what you will, competitive jealousy, ego, whatever ... I did want to beat him and, in fact, from a competitive standpoint I wanted to crush him.

DR. JUDD: Did Anthony feel the same way?

HARRIS: I am sure deep down he did, but he wasn't quite as overt about it as I was. I remember about the 2001 Mountaineer Open. I "smoked" 771.5. After I made the lift, Anthony came over to me and convinced me to attempt 800. If he hadn't talked me into trying it, I probably wouldn't have attempted it. I missed that lift by a hair, but I honestly believe he was pulling for me all the way. That is the kind of guy he is. I guess I could sum up everything like this. I'd like to think that the two of us paved the way for the 800 pound bench presses to come. Remember, we were benching over 750 pounds in 1995. It took 5 years for another bench, Bill Crawford, to bench over 750. We have had differences in the past, but Anthony brought the best out of me as a competitor. Outside of the competitive arena, I can not think of too many people who are as funny and kindhearted as Anthony. I really mean that. I have more respect for him than you will ever know.

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