

# INTERVIEW

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

## JAMIE HARRIS

as interviewed for Powerlifting USA by Chris Lydon

**Jamie Harris:** Age - 24, Competition Best - 740 pound Bench Press, March 25, 1995; Upper Arm Girth - 23 1/2", Chest Girth - 65".

**CL:** Jamie, give me some background information. Where are you from? What kind of work do you do?

**JH:** I'm from Pittsburgh, from a suburb called Charleoi, but I live in Elisabeth now. I work with juvenile delinquents at the Allegheny County Youth Authority.

**CL:** Tell me about your job.

**JH:** I work with murderers and rapists.

**CL:** Juvenile murderers and rapists?

**JH:** Yeah, gang members mostly. It's physically demanding. I always have to restrain kids. That's part of the reason they hired me - my size.

**CL:** What's that like?

**JH:** When you work with youth it's not like working with adults. I talk to kids 13 or 14 years old who have committed murder, and it's a very different situation. Adults, you tell them what to do. Kids, you want to explain to them why things are happening the way they are. You try to help them out. You want to think there's still hope for them. It took me a couple years just to get used to the idea of working with kids that had committed such serious offenses.

**Jamie Harris in Pennsylvania (all photographs taken by Bert Wagner)**



**CL:** So, where did powerlifting fit into the picture?

**JH:** I started powerlifting when I was about 13. I was in 6th grade.

**CL:** It seems like the kind of job that would tend to burn you out pretty quick!

**JH:** It's not bad if you're making big money, but I wasn't.

**CL:** You weren't wrestling with the WNF?

**JH:** No, I wrestled with a local federation. I was an independent contractor. I arranged the jobs myself and spent a lot of time traveling from location to location. There was always work, but not many benefits. If you got hurt, you worked hurt. It was tough, really tough.

**CL:** It doesn't strike me as the type of sport where the athletes can expect longevity in their career.

**JH:** No, it isn't.

**CL:** How did you get interested in that field?

**JH:** I have a degree in psychology from California University. It's a small local college. Actually, I didn't really know for sure what I wanted to do when I first got out of school.

**CL:** You went straight from high school to college and then straight through college?

**JH:** No, I actually dropped out during my junior year of college to become a professional wrestler.

**CL:** I didn't really like it too much. When I came back and got off the road a couple friends of mine who worked at the Youth Authority got me interested in my current job, and I've been here ever since.

**CL:** How long did you do the pro-wrestling?

**JH:** A couple years.

**CL:** What was your stage name?

**JH:** Big Boy Hanson. I did local

gains. It's only since then that I've been competing. I've put about 400 pounds on my bench in the last five years.

**CL:** 400 pounds in five years is tremendous! So, when did you go back and finish our degree?

**JH:** Since it's work-related, the Youth Authority paid for me to complete my psychology degree. I worked at night, and spent all day in class.

**CL:** That sounds like a tough schedule.

**JH:** It definitely affected my lifting, but I'm glad I did it. You can never be sure what the future holds, and I feel more secure knowing I've got the degree. I finished school last spring, and it's great to be able to devote more energy to my lifting.

**CL:** Do you plan to make a career as a professional athlete or do you want to pursue psychology?

**JH:** It's hard to say what I want to do right now. I'm sort of at a crossroad: I have to decide if I want to make a living as a professional powerlifter, and then I need to start concentrating and focusing on that goal. I know that there are no guarantees. My fiancée and I are planning to get married soon. I'm hesitant to risk everything and give up a job where I'm making good money, and I have great benefits.

**CL:** So, you're engaged?

**JH:** I'm engaged.

**CL:** Tell me about your fiancée.

**JH:** Her name is Michelle Lees. It will probably be Michelle Harris by the time you print this.

**CL:** When's the big day?

**JH:** We're planning to get married some time next month. We want to have a big wedding next spring, but we're going to have a small ceremony and actually tie the knot next month.

**CL:** I hope I'm the first to print the news! So, what does she do?

**JH:** She works in the billing department of a local hospital.

**CL:** What does she think of powerlifting? Does she come to your meets and cheer you on?

**JH:** Yeah, she's really supportive. When we first met, I had just started at the youth authority, and I hadn't finished college yet. I wasn't making the money I am now, and no one was sponsoring me with equipment. Michelle really helped me out financially.



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**CL:** Tell me about your training routine on and off season.

**JH:** Well, during the off-season, I throw in different types of exercises that I generally don't do during the season. Instead of two exercises per body part, which I would do during the season, I might do four. I generally do between eight and nine sets per week.

**CL:** Do you ever train with her?

**JH:** Well, not really. She likes aerobics and stuff like that.

**CL:** How long is your season?

**JH:** That depends on what meet I'm planning to compete in. I'd say about four and six months. There have been times that I've taken a year between competitions. I don't do that now because it makes it hard to get back in shape. You let yourself go for 8 or 10 months and your muscles tend to forget. I might go to 2-3 different meets during that cycle when I'm in season getting ready, but I won't take more than two 10 week on-season cycles out of the year.

**CL:** What kinds of exercises do you do?

**JH:** During the season I bench, I do inclines and I do close-grip tricep extensions. That's my big bench day. I work out one day a week. Monday. For the remainder of the week I'm resting, eating well, and getting ready for the next Monday. My workout is pretty basic, but very intense.

**CL:** Is your workout completely bench-oriented or do you hit other body parts?

**JH:** I'll do some shoulders and back during the off-season, but during the season I'm benching 650, 700 pounds every week. If I had on Monday and tried to do back and

Now, she rubs me down, and watches my food intake. She also gets involved with the social aspects of the sport. She goes to the meets and mingles, and we'll all usually go out afterwards. She's always been totally supportive. I give her a lot of the credit for my success.

**CL:** Do you have a training partner?

**JH:** Not currently. When I have a training partner, it's very important for me that they be someone I can depend on. Right now, there is no one single person. When I set the world record I was training with a couple of guys who were really consistent, but now the guys I train with tend to change every week. It's hard because everyone has a different work schedule.

**CL:** Do you think that hinders your progress?

**JH:** Yeah, it does to some extent. Like I said, it's hard to get people there consistently. You really can't blame anyone; everyone has things they have to do. It definitely makes a big difference though, especially if you're the only one training for a meet. Then it's almost impossible to get people to be consistent, but I'm lucky enough to have three or four big guys right now who are helping me out.

**CL:** Do you have a set routine or do you vary your workouts?

**JH:** I have a set routine with my training partners. They take care of my needs in terms of loading my bar and helping with my equipment.

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