

INTERVIEW

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

MIKE HUMMEL: CAN YOU LEND ME A HAND? as told to Powerlifting USA by JD Gaynor

How many times have you asked someone if they could lend you a hand? This took on a new meaning for me about 3 years ago, but allow me to preface this interview with a little history. I've been around powerlifting my entire life. There probably isn't another 30 year old who has experienced as much in PL as I have. Some of the more vivid memories: Jim Williams benching 700 lbs. on a narrow bench in my father's (Bob Gaynor) basement gym without a bench shirt and with a pause (I was an infant, but my Dad tells me I was watching) and at my father's numerous national ADFPA meets: John Kuc deadlifting 800 lbs. plus, Mark Henry deadlifting 903 lbs at SHW, Ray Benemerito totaling 1906 lbs at 181 BW, to my personal competitions over the years. I am also a Physical Therapist. I know the types of forces powerlifting places on the body. I say this to give context to what I witnessed when I walked into World Gym in Delray Beach, FL in 2002. It was my first day at this gym. I was heading back to do my deadlift routine, making my way past two guys benching. 500 lbs. was on the bar. Unless you train in a powerlifting gym, it's rare to see someone doing this kind of weight. Without being too obvious, I looked to see who was doing the lifting. I noticed that one guy was a mid-forearm amputee. I assumed he wasn't the guy lifting and began stretching for my workout. This 'one arm guy' began putting on a prosthetic (a device designed to take the place of a missing limb). It took him 2-3 minutes to don the prosthesis with the help of his training partner. I figured he was getting ready to give his training partner a lift-off or spot one side of the bar. What I saw next is something I'll never forget: the first time I saw Mike Hummel bench. Definitely add this to my list above of most memorable lifts. I was in mid-stretch while Mike assumed his position on the bench and his training partner attached the end of the prosthesis to the bar and gave him a lift-off. My mouth was hanging open and a few rapid thoughts were running through my head: "This guy is crazy", "someone get ready to call an ambulance", "no one can bench without a hand", and most importantly "Damn! I wish I could bench that much". My thoughts were quickly stifled when Mike blew up 4 reps as easily as I could do 135 lbs. ... with perfect form!

After recovering from my disbelief, and closing my gaping mouth, I thought about things I take for granted. Like having two hands. Think about it... what it would be like to have only one. Try playing a video game with one hand. How'd that go? Next, try putting on a tie. Any easier? Tie your shoes, zip your pants, or button a shirt. Now, here's the tough part: make a fist and put a 1/4 inch gel pad on the flat part of your fist, take your normal bench position with the bar resting on top of your fist (you're allowed to use your other hand normally). For extra support, you can even duct tape the bar on top of your fist. Now try and push 135 lbs off the upright. How does that weight feel? Now, imagine 600 lbs. resting there. On second thought, don't try this at home... or anywhere else. You won't be able to do it, and you'll probably break your hand. As a Physical Therapist who has worked with

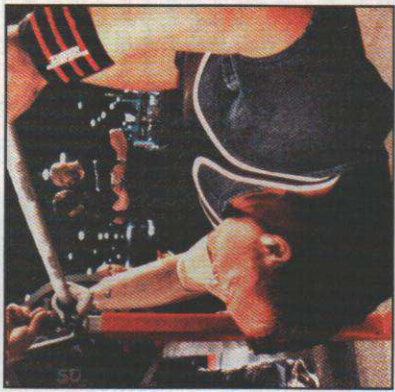
Mike: I had a broken leg; my face was lacerated badly. I had so much wrong with me that it took a few days to realize that I had pain in my foot. Shortly thereafter I found out I had broken that as well.

JD: What was involved with the surgery?

Mike: They had a team of experts who specialize in amputation at Broward Medical Center in Florida. The doctors did everything possible, but they couldn't save it.

JD: How long did it take to rehabilitate after your accident?

Mike: They told me it would be 6 weeks in the hospital. I was out in 17 days. The hardest part initially was bending the arm because scar tissue had built up. I had two choices, have another surgery to un-freeze my arm, or stretch it myself every night and break up the scar tissue. I needed to bite down on a wet towel just to keep from screaming and biting my tongue off. I used a wheelchair to get around because I had a long cast on my leg. My wife was bed-bound initially, then she weren't able to help each other at first because we both were injured, so we had nurses come to our home. We also received a great deal of support from family and friends. Then the doctors told me I would need psychological consultation. (Laughing) I said to get all the doctors together and that I would sell them some marble for their homes! That was my idea of psychological help. It was time to move on with my life and not look back. I didn't need any help in that regard. 5 weeks after the accident, I had my nurses drive me to the gym and began working out with one arm.



Lock Down ... Mike's prosthesis literally has to be bolted to the bar.

JD: What drove you to get better?

Mike: I wouldn't be the person I am today without my wife. I used the gym to become normal again for my wife, in the best way that I could. My wife and I were there for each other through that difficult time, to help each other become well again. I feel she sacrificed more than I did because she's the one who ultimately had to become my left arm.

JD: What is like adjusting to having only one arm. Was there anything in particular that you felt you would now be unable to do?

Mike: The only thing that really bothers me is that I can't hold my wife with both hands and I can't hold my children with both hands.

JD: What causes you the most problems?

Mike: (laughs) I can't cut my own steak or tie my own shoes.

JD: How devastating was it knowing you wouldn't be able to powerlift again?

Mike: The realization was that I would not be able to compete, but I would at least stay in shape. I accepted that I wouldn't be able to powerlift right from the start.

JD: Why did you decide to try benching again?

Mike: I was working out, so why not bench. I knew there were prosthetics made for people who ski, people who run marathons, so I thought why not one for benching?

JD: How difficult was it the first few times?

Mike: When I first got my prosthetic it was a harness that went around my shoulder. I looked like a freak. I immediately went back to the Doctor. He changed the design to a sleeve prosthetic, which I wear to this day. The first few times I was able to bench and get stronger was incredible, but each time required small adjustments by the Doctor.

JD: Did you ever want to give up?

Mike: It really didn't faze me. I knew I was lucky to be alive. Even then I knew my goal would be not to quit. I would stay in good shape and continue working out. I thought about that even when I was first in the emergency room.

JD: What other injuries did you have?

endings are more sensitive there. It's a crushing, throbbing pain, but something I've become accustomed to.

JD: Let's talk training now. Who influences you now and/or before your injury?

Mike: I have respect for the powerlifters who came before me, and my fellow competitors, but I will always try to set the bar higher, always try to do more. If there is one person who influenced me, it would be Bill Crawford. He is the one who persuaded me to get my first denim bench shirt in 2001 and probably was one of the first to start with that type of equipment.

JD: Where do you currently train?

Mike: Jim Woolard's World Gym in Delray Beach, Florida.

JD: What is your current bench press routine?

Mike: Most of my bench work is done on a Smith Machine. I can't take the chance of training without constant spotters because of the balancing of my arm. With the Smith Machine, it's either up or down, less room for error. I'll train for 10 weeks on the Smith and then just jump into free weight... ready to go. It would be nice to have the constant spotters to always train "normally", but I just don't have that luxury. My pre-contest routine starts 10 weeks out. I start with 3 sets x 10 reps at 405 lbs and finish with a single at 535, no shirt. Each week I add 10 lbs. to the work sets and 10 lbs. to the max. I finish my 10 week routine with a single rep at 620 lbs. with no shirt. This will all be done on the Smith machine. (Laughing) I'd like to have a contest... raw... on the Smith machine to see how I stack up against the best. I only train chest one time a week. Additionally, I do incline presses on the Smith using a pyramid scheme. I start with 405 lbs. x 10, then 455 x 6, then 500

x 4. Generally I work around this weight throughout the pre-contest course. I also do some Hammer Strength work. Pre-contest, I'll do one day of triceps work weekly, which is a "close grip". I'll do 365 for triples followed by 405x3, then 500x3. As the contest gets closer, I'll add a heavy single... like 595 lbs. without a shirt.

JD: Do you train your whole body?

Mike: Yes. Monday: Chest, Tuesday: Legs, Wednesday: Back, Thursday: off, Friday: Tris, Saturday: Shoulders, Sundays off. I don't train my Biceps. Instead of Bis, I like to go out and have a good time on Saturday night, so I take Sundays off. I'll train abs 3x week, but not on specific days.

JD: Including protein shakes and bars, I eat 8 times a day. I stay low carb because I like to stay around my competition weight of 242 lbs. A typical meal for breakfast would be an egg white omelet, a bowl of oatmeal and a protein shake. I'll have 2-3 meals of 2 chicken breasts to which I sometimes add a sweet potato. I finish the day with another egg white omelet.

JD: What was your best bench prior to the injury?

Mike: As a drug free lifter, I set records in ANPPC, NASA, and WNPF in the bench. At 198 lbs I benched 500 lbs. At 220 lbs I did 530. At 242 lbs I did 540. I did these with a single ply poly shirt.

JD: What are some of your accomplishments since you lost your arm?

Mike: In 2002, I won the APA Bench Press Nationals with a 540 lb bench at 242 lbs. From there I decided to set my goals higher. I wanted to lift in the WPO. In Daytona Beach, at an APF Bench Challenge hosted by Kieran Kidder in 2003, I broke the 600 lb barrier with a 606.

The next meet was the Bench Bash for Cash where I did 624 lbs. at 242 BW. In a local meet in South Florida I posted a 634. Recently, at 40 and with a pec injury, I did 600 at the Arnold Classic. In the gym, I have done 650 lbs. on two occasions.

JD: I can vouch for that. I was there and would have had no qualms about 3 whites, pause included.

Mike: My goal is to break that 650 mark in competition.

JD: A lot of people view what you have as a disability. What are your thoughts on that?

Mike: It is an obvious disability, but I don't look at myself as disabled.

JD: Myself included, there are many who look to you as a source of inspiration. How does that make you feel?

Mike: It definitely makes me feel good to be able to inspire people. That is truly an honor and accomplishment in life.

JD: Knowing there may be others who have a similar injury, do you have any words of wisdom for them?

Mike: When I first received this injury it was like standing on top of a mountain. It would be easy to fall back and lose confidence. Instead, I believed in my will power to be able to overcome the obstacles that were before me. It's lifting that pulled me through this. So, if there is a person out there who doesn't have that drive in them, whether or not they have ever set foot in the gym, I want them to believe that they can accomplish whatever they set their goals to be. It's obvious that lifting can give someone the strength to overcome. Like the quote: "Strong mind, strong body".

JD: What about the future? What can we expect to see from Mike Hummel?

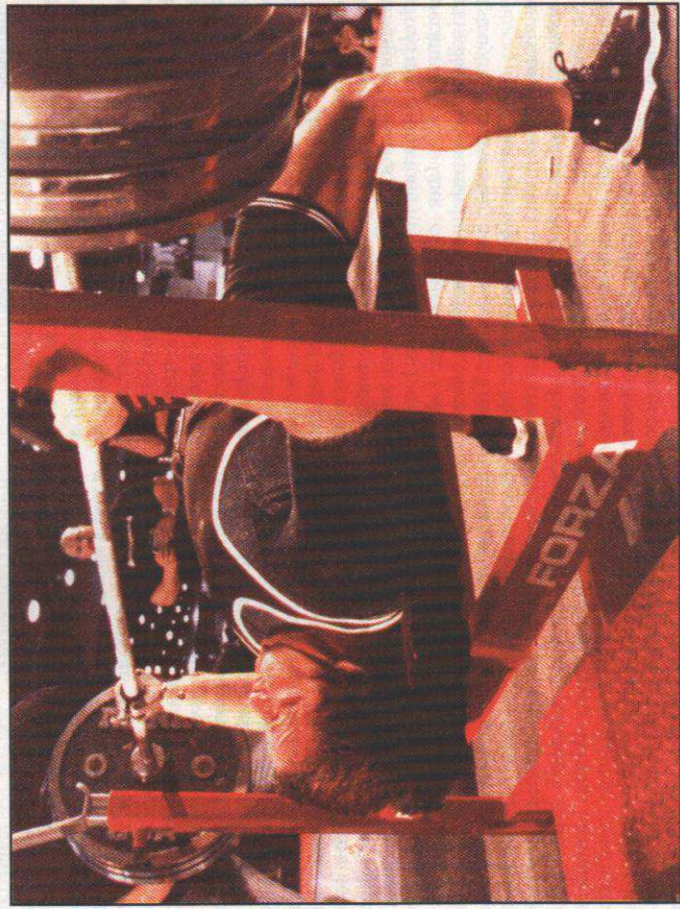
Mike: I would like to compete as a Masters Lifter. I'd like to do the APF Seniors in Detroit in June and then the Bench America in October.

JD: Is that where we'll see the 650?

Mike: As long as I'm healthy and injury free.

JD: Any final thoughts or statements?

Mike: I need to thank the people who have been there to support me. My wife, Monique, through all the years... she is my inspiration. My training partner for the last 5 years, Neal Elkan, Larry Diodato, my voice of encouragement. Yourself, for the lift-offs and training tips. I want to thank Kieran and for Powerlifting as a whole. He brings national credibility to the sport and puts his whole heart into what he does. Obviously, I want to thank my family and friends who have always been there for me.



Can You Bench 600? ... Mike does his utterly amazing benching at the Arnold Classic.