

INTERVIEW

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

JIM KILTS

interviewed by Greg Jurkowski

Speaking with Jim Kiltz, one of the strongest, pound for pound, bench pressers in the world, Jim benched 617 at 181 last September, and recently hit the all time best at 181 with 665. Rumor has it that he completed 680 in the gym also. Congratulations on those great numbers, Jim. Let me ask you a bit about your personal background first.

Greg: How old are you?

Jim: 33.

Greg: Can you tell me a little about your family?

Jim: I have a wife, Robin, and a stepson Brandon.

Greg: Where were you born and raised?

Jim: I was born and raised in Utica, NY. I live in Whitesboro now, which is not far from Utica, about 5 miles.

Greg: I know for a fact that your wife gives you great support in your lifting. Can you tell me about that?

Jim: She's always supported me; making sure I eat right, always there when I bench, coaching me, tells me what I'm doing right or wrong. She goes to every meet with me.

Greg: And, she's an aerobic instructor now?

Jim: Yes, she teaches aerobics.

Greg: And, she's competed in the past in a bench contest herself?

Jim: Yes, she's done 180 at a bodyweight of about 121, about two years ago.

Greg: Let's go back to your younger years. What was your sport of choice as a young man?

Jim: I would say wrestling, in high school. Before that, baseball and football.

Greg: Seems like a lot of wrestlers turn into powerlifters later in life.

Jim: Maybe because it's a similar sport. Wrestling and powerlifting are not really team sports. They are more individual. They both take a lot of dedication. You always try to keep a certain bodyweight. You've got to be strong to do both of them. To do the wrestling you gotta have strength, same with benching. You gotta have good technique for wrestling and good technique on the bench. They're kind of similar.

Greg: I think your early wrestling coach had a good influence on you. Is that true?

Jim: Yes.

Greg: What's this I hear about the "three Ds"?

Jim: He always told me you gotta have Desire, Dedication, and Discipline. I always try to go by that.

Greg: Did wrestling lead you to weightlifting?

Jim: Actually I weightlifted before wrestling. When I was 11 or 12, I fooled around a little bit with weights. When I was about 13 I got my first real set of weights, with a bench and dumbbells and all that.

Greg: Were any of these the plastic weights filled with cement?

Jim: When I was 11 and 12 they were plastic with cement. When I was 13 I got the steel weights. They were a little bit better.

Greg: When did you first compete?

Jim: I was 16.

Greg: Do you remember how much you benched?

Jim: Yes, I did 250 and I weighed about 125.

Greg: That's a great start.

Jim: Yeah, there were no bench shirts around then.

Greg: Back to the bench press for now. What type of shirt do you use?

Jim: Karen's Shirts.

Greg: Denim or poly?

Jim: Denim.

Greg: Double denim?

Jim: Yes.

Greg: They've got a good reputation for making some fine equipment.

Jim: Yes, I like her shirt a lot. It works good. I've been wearing that one for a couple years now. I like it.

Greg: Do you have a special diet you follow?

Jim: I try to eat a lot of protein, a lot of carbs. I try to keep my fats down a little bit. I'm not a big junk food eater. I try to get a lot of protein, and a lot of carbs. I try to eat at least seven times a day with my protein shakes and all.

Greg: How about supplements?

Jim: Yes. I get them

from Gearman Nutrition. The protein mix tastes great, shakes up really easy. You don't need a blender. It's a lot more convenient. Put it in a shaker, shake it right up, and it's good to go. I take the shakers to work with me all the time, in the lunch pail.

Greg: Do you need a lot of sleep for your body to heal?

Jim: Yes, that's probably one of the most important things. You've gotta get enough sleep. I try to get at least eight hours a night. I like 8 to 9, sometimes 7. Anything under that it and it catches up with you, like if you go a few nights only getting six hours sleep. You may not really feel tired, but you are tired and your strength's down.

Greg: What is the length of your training cycle?

Jim: Usually I like to keep it around 8-12 weeks. I try not to do more than two in a row. Sometimes you have to, though. If I have one on a certain date, I'll start training at least 10 weeks out. Then you have to give your body a break. I'll take a good 2-3 months off from benching. Not from training, just from benching. I'll do everything else, more dumbbells, more machines. It gives your body a little break, especially your joints, because when you're benching for three months at a time your joints need a break. Sometimes I'll just do some lighter stuff on the machines.

Greg: That's a good training philosophy.

Jim: That's how I've been doing it. In the past I didn't do it like that. I used to just come back and go heavy. That kind of hurts you. You got to give it a break, a little bit, you know?

Greg: What type of form do you use when you bench?

Jim: I take a wide grip on the bar. I get a big arch. I put my feet back underneath me. I keep my feet flat. I'm not one to bench on my toes. I try to drive with my hips, from low on my chest. I try to drive with everything: my legs, shoulders, tris, pecs. I try to use my legs a lot.

Greg: I notice you're a lifter that doesn't raise his head as the bar descends. A lot of lifters are doing that these days.

Jim: Yes, a lot of people do that. I will only do it if I really have to. I try to get the bar down without doing it. If you have a bigger stomach, you can raise your head, bring it to your belly, and try to drive it straight back towards the rack. If I lift my head, my arch kind of slants out a little bit. I don't have that belly there to try and hit, so I try to go that much further with the bar. For some people it's good, some people like it. If I get stuck and the bar won't go down, I'll lift my head a little bit and try to get it to touch. Other than that, I keep my head flat.

Greg: How about a little bit on your routine? Do you use any bands or chains or anything?

Jim: No, I've never tried that. I don't know a whole lot about them. I've heard that people use them. I can't say it would help me because I never really tried it.

Greg: How many weeks do you wear the shirt before the meet?

Jim: I used to bench raw for six weeks, then bench with a shirt for 4-6 weeks. Now, I just start wearing it a lot to try and get used to it. If I'm training ten weeks out, I'll wear it for like ten weeks.

Greg: Do you just do singles in the shirt?

Jim: Yes. I used to do some doubles and triples, but I got out of that. I've just been doing singles. On bench night I'll do 315, and once I get to 405 I'll put it on, then I'll go up to 500 or more, then I use one board. When I get up to around 635 or 650, then I'll take one board away and do a couple heavy singles with that. I try and concentrate more on that one rep. The only rep that

really counts is that first one. If you think about doing two or three reps then you're not focusing on that first rep, so I just try to focus on one rep. Even if it's not the best rep, I'll rest and take a few minutes break, and come back and try and do the weight again, rather than try and do another rep right then.

Greg: Do you do a down set after the singles?

Jim: No, not usually. If I hit the number that I want to hit with my shirt on, I'll take my shirt off and move onto something else like dumbbells or one of the Hammer strength machines. I'll do 6 to 10 reps, 4 sets, just to get some reps in without the shirt.

Greg: So, maybe, one exercise of an accessory bench press movement, 8 rep range?

Jim: Yes, when I'm training for a meet that's usually how I'll do it. I'll just bench, and I'll do another exercise for chest, and that's it.

Greg: Do you have any advice for the beginning lifter?

Jim: If you want to be a great powerlifter you've got to have the 3 Ds: Desire, Dedication, Discipline. I think that's great advice for a lifter. Desire - you've got to want to do it. If you're trying to be a powerlifter and you don't really want it, you're probably not going to be that great. You can't really make yourself do it.

You've got to want to do it. Dedication - you've just got to devote a lot of your time to training. Some guys don't want to put the time in at the gym, they just want it to come easy. You got to devote a lot of time. Discipline - you got to give it all you got every time you're in the gym. You can't go in when you're a little tired and just take it easy. You've got to be disciplined and give it your all every time you train. 100%.

Greg: Is there anyone you'd like to thank?

Jim: I got to thank my wife. She's always there for me and helps me out. I got to thank my training partners, Sean and John, they're always there with me in the gym. I got some great spotters, and you need them when you're benching heavy: Chris, Rich and Kevin. My chiropractor, Dr. Dave Kingwater's done a great job on me. When my joints get sore, my shoulders, elbows, my back, he does a lot of muscle work on me and helps me out a lot. Gary Klein gives me great bench shirts and wrist wraps. Greg from Gearman has great supplements, especially the protein shake I talked about earlier. Tastes great and mixes up easy. I have to thank my stepson Brandon. A lot of times he comes to the gym and helps out. Sometimes he likes to watch and film me. He's the camera man.

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Jim Kiltz with the 665 bench he made at 181, a new all time record.