

INTERVIEW

MATT KROCZALESKI interviewed for PL USA by Bruce Citerman

Bruce Citerman: Please tell us a little about your family, and what you do for a living.

Matt Kroczaleski: I am a pharmacist and I usually work the night shift at a 24-hour pharmacy. Unfortunately, I am no stranger to 90+ hour work weeks, but I never use this as an excuse to miss training. Still, I am trying to cut back on my hours, and at least my job is not physically demanding, so it doesn't affect my recovery ability beyond the sleep aspect. My brother Kurt is an ironworker and has a very physically demanding job and has made great progress over the last several years. He is on the verge of becoming one of the biggest deadlifters in the sport. I hate to hear people make excuses about work and why they can't achieve their goals because of it. Simply put, there are no real excuses—only self-imposed ones. All champions have overcome adversity to reach the top of their sport.

In regard to my family, I am not proud to say that I went through a divorce two years ago after nearly ten years of marriage, and I never wanted that or thought that it would happen to me. Still, I have come to realize it was the best thing for everyone involved. I am much happier now. I learned a lot from that experience and hope that some day I will find the girl of my dreams to share my life with. I have three wonderful boys: Logan—age 10, Garrett—age 8, and Maxx just turned 7. I love them more than anything in this world. One of my biggest goals in life is when my children reach adulthood and are parents themselves and understand what it means to be a father. I want them to believe that they had the best dad in the world. Everyone thinks their dad is the greatest when they're a child but it isn't until you're in that position yourself that you truly understand what it means to be a great father.

BC: Tell us about your time in the Marine Corps and how it has affected your life today, on and off the platform.

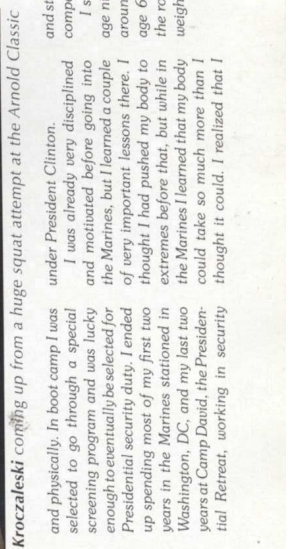
MK: The Marine Corps was just something I had wanted to do for a long time, to test myself mentally

and physically. In boot camp I was selected to go through a special screening program and was lucky enough to eventually be selected for Presidential security duty. I ended up spending most of my first two years in the Marines stationed in Washington, DC, and my last two years at Camp David, the Presidential Retreat, working in security

under President Clinton. I was already very disciplined and motivated before going into the Marines, but I learned a couple of very important lessons there. I thought I had pushed my body to extremes before that, but while in the Marines I learned that my body could take so much more than I thought it could. I realized that I

and still drives me to this day. I love competition and thrive on it. I started lifting consistently at age nine, but I remember messing around with weights as young as age 6. I remember sneaking into the room where my dad had some weights and doing curls, 10 reps

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Matt Kroczaleski coming up from a huge squat attempt at the Arnold Classic

could suffer through sleep and food deprivation, total physical and mental exhaustion, and still keep going. I realized then and there that it was my mind that was weak and not my body. That has had a huge carryover to my powerlifting success and a big reason why I often sleep no more than 3-4 hours per day and I'm still able to make progress in my lifting.

I also learned how to change and focus my anger and aggression and use it to my advantage. Before that I was too nice and lacked a real killer instinct. The Marines taught me that sometimes to do the right thing you need to be cold-hearted and lack compassion. It gave me a mean streak that I could bring out and use to my advantage. I never had that before the Marines.

BC: How long have you been competing and how did you get started?

MK: I just always had this innate desire to be big and strong. I remember at a very early age being impressed with size and strength and having a strong predilection to become that way myself. I had terrible genetics for gaining muscle and I was more of a natural runner. I had some natural athletic ability, but was very skinny, your classic ectomorph. The biggest advantage I had was a relentless desire to achieve my goals. I started training myself for track and field day in third grade. I just decided that I wanted to be a winner and I knew I needed to work hard to achieve that. I ran timed half miles, sprints up sand hills and did pushups and chin ups and lifted makeshift weights for months leading up to track and field day. I did this all on my own, with no coaching or support from anyone. My mother was actually quite concerned that I was going to hurt myself. I just always wanted to win badly. That is what has always driven me

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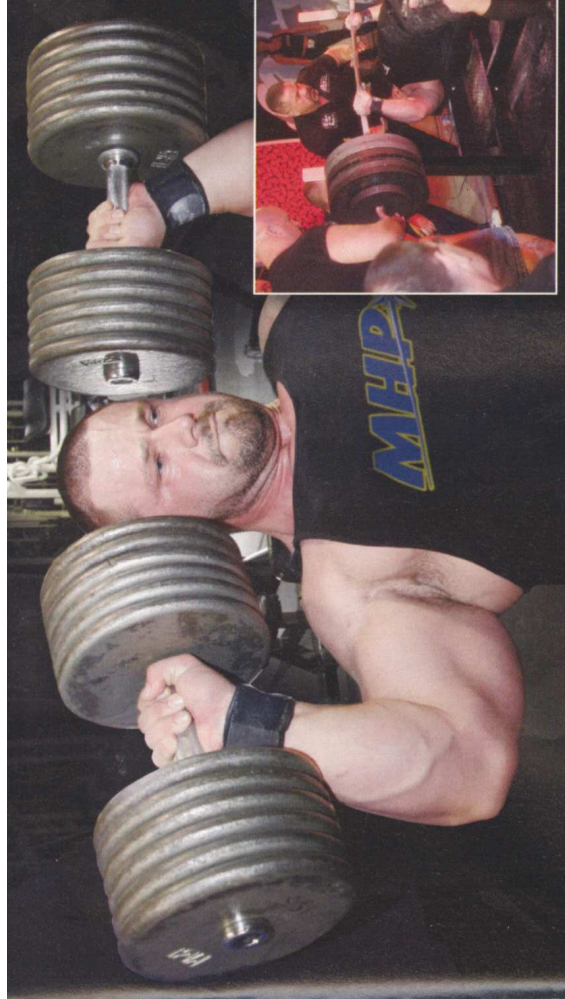
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Jeremy Hoornstra—Team MHP Member
World Record "RAW" Bench
615 @ 242

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with one arm and then 10 reps with the other until I had done 100 reps with both arms, at around age six. My first set of weights was a bunch of milk jugs filled with sand and my first bench was a 2x12" laid across two cinder blocks. A year or two later my dad made some dumbbell plates for me from lead he melted down from old car batteries. Finally, when I was in fifth grade (age 11) I received a barbell set and bench for Christmas. Even though I trained hard and consistently over the next several years, when freshman football came around I still only weighed 118 lbs. I did two high school powerlifting meets and did poorly at both of them; I didn't even place. I lifted in two more meets while in the Marines and then I started lifting in sanctioned competitions when I got out of the Marines in December of '95. I have been competing seriously for the last 13 years now while averaging about two to three competitions a year, including one bodybuilding show in '96 and a strongman



Matt (left) placed 3rd at the 2002 USAPL Men's National Championships

would have to be the WPO Semi Finals in November of 2005. I was just coming back from surgery to repair my second torn biceps tendon five months earlier and had been out of competition for the last two years due to another biceps tear

in addition to surgery and radiation therapy to treat testicular cancer in the spring of 2004. Going into the deadlifts I was in fourth place and going into my final attempt I had moved into second. I took 755 lbs, which was a 25 lb. PR for me at the time, good for the win. My second attempt at 716 had not been easy and after that my training partner and I figured I was good for 733 or maybe 738, but I needed 755 for the win. It was a very long, very slow pull which seemed to stop several times along the way, but I finally locked it out and the place went nuts. I pulled so long and hard that I actually separated my acromio-clavicular joint during the pull. My training partner ran onto the platform and hoisted me into the air and we were all hooting and hollering. That was always how I had dreamed of winning a big meet, with a PR pull to come from behind to take the victory. The part that really makes it memorable though is that about 15 minutes after it was over,

one of my training partners realized that they had added the weight and I actually came up short and took second. They debated for a few minutes to decide who would be the lucky one to come over and tell me, but I really wasn't upset because I never would have gotten a PR dead if I hadn't thought that it was for the win.

BC: Describe your training program for us.
MK: I view training as more of an evolution rather than a revolution. What I mean by this is that I am an advocate of making small changes to your program and evaluating the effect it has on your progress, then keeping what works and throwing out what doesn't. I am always making changes and tweaking my program as my strengths and weaknesses change. I focus on bringing up my weak areas and continuing to progress in my strong ones. Too many people look to others to tell them how to train when really they should be asking themselves. There is no better teacher than experience and getting under heavy iron everyday is the best experience that I know of. My current training program is as follows:

Monday: Deadlifts or some variation of it, hamstrings, calves and abs.
Tuesday: Arms.
Wednesday: Upper back, favorite exercises being heavy dumbbell rows and chins.
Thursday: Shoulders.
Friday: Squats, hamstrings, calves and abs.
Saturday: Off.
Sunday: Bench and assistance work.



Matt Kroczaleski is mastering the techniques of high level bench pressing

To see exactly what I do on a daily basis including exercises, sets, reps and weight you can go to www.elfitfs.com and click on the left hand column. I update my training log almost every day and often post pictures and videos of my lifting.

BC: What keeps you motivated to continue lifting and competing?
MK: The desire to achieve more, the desire to do something that no one else has ever done and the enjoyment I get from competing. I absolutely love to compete and thrive in those types of situations. My training partners provide me with challenges when I need them and I test myself frequently to push my limits. For anyone that has watched some of my youtube videos that is what my 40 rep drop set of squats was all about. Just putting myself in pain and challenging myself to persevere when it is difficult to do so. I plan crazy things from time to time to keep myself mentally tough. This includes things like very difficult training sessions that lead to vomiting and other methods of self-imposed pain to strengthen the mind. Probably the craziest thing I have done (and I don't recommend this) was to take a 4" long nail and just my hands just to make myself withstand the pain. I dislike pain as much as anyone else, but I have learned to be able to control it in most situations.

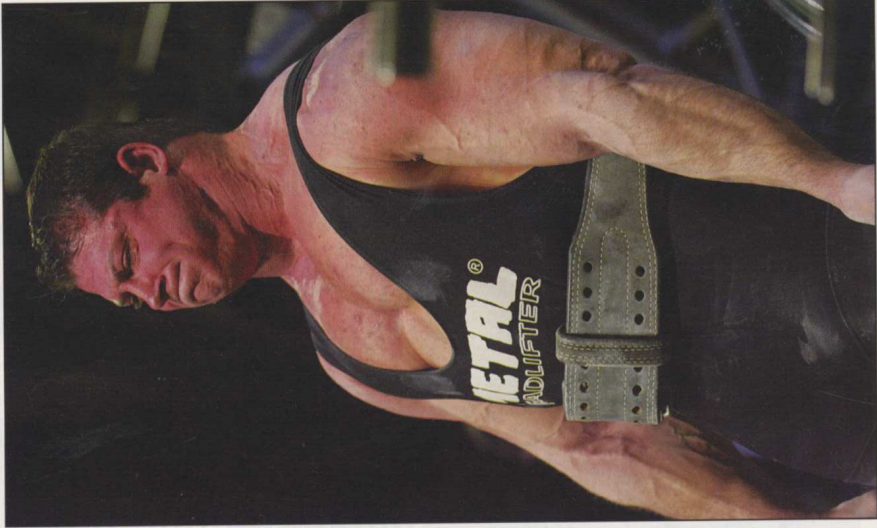
BC: You are known for sustaining and overcoming many injuries, tell us about that.
MK: I have had lots of injuries in recent years including two torn distal bicep tendons that both required surgery (right in eight, 2004, and left in five, 2005). I was on crutches three weeks out from the 2006 Arnold (my first win) with a severely swollen ilio-tibial band that to this day no one knows how I injured. I had partial tears in both triceps a couple of weeks out from the 2007 Arnold and dislocated my left shoulder the week prior to the meet while trying a new bench shirt. I have torn up my lower back pretty bad numerous times and I have torn ligaments in both wrists that often bother me whenever I do a lot of heavy shrined benching. Plus I suffered a large right quad tear last January, but came back to squat a PR 1014 lbs. in July. I have also separated my acromio-clavicular joint, torn my left calf and my left lat and all of these injuries occurred in competitions and I never pulled out of any of the meets—just put

my head down and kept going. Injuries are just part of this sport and learning how to train around them and compete with them is often what separates the champions from the rest.
BC: How did you get involved with MuscleTech and elite fitness systems?
MK: MuscleTech began looking to expand their advertising into powerlifting last year and one of their marketing guys was pretty familiar with the sport so he narrowed it down to his top five picks and took them to the guys that make the final decisions. They looked at everyone and after seeing pictures and videos of mine that are posted on youtube, I was lucky enough to be selected. They contacted me and offered me a contract, which—of course—I was very excited about. Since signing with them I had hoped and they have treated me first class all the way. The photo shoots and public appearances I have done with them have been great experiences and I couldn't feel more fortunate to be sponsored by MuscleTech.

I was lucky enough to get noticed by Elite after winning the Arnold Classic in 2006 and it didn't hurt that I was already wearing Metal Addictor powerlifting gear, which they are the distributor for here in the United States. Dave Tate, and his right hand man, Jim Wendler, have both been great to me and have helped me not only with the sponsorship, but also with training and competition advice. I consider both of these guys to be good friends of mine and I can't say enough about what great guys they are and how well Dave treats his sponsored lifters. Recently he has started holding training weekends for his top sponsored lifters called the Underground Strength Series. A bunch of us from all over the country come out for the weekend and train together and exchange ideas. This has been awesome, as not only are we often able to help each other overcome plateaus and reach our goals, but I have made some great new friends this way as well.

BC: What are your current PRs and what should we expect to see from you in the future?
MK: My current PRs are 1014 in the squat, 705 in the bench, and an 810 dead, with 2502 being my best total, but I expect to exceed all of those at my next meet. My main goal is to post the highest total ever in at least one weight class. I would give you numbers, but those are constantly evolving all the time and are likely going to be much loftier in the near future as my competitors continue to raise the bar. I am also interested in putting up good numbers raw and in single-ply competitions. I want to do well under all of the different standards of lifting, but it is tough competition that I enjoy most and currently a majority of the best lifters compete in the Jeds that have less restrictive gear rules, so far now they put their mind to.

that is where you will find me doing most of my competing.
BC: How do you want to be remembered in the sport when your competition days are over?
MK: I just want to be remembered as the guy who worked as hard as anybody, never let anything stop him, and that did what most people told him he was not capable of. I had so many people tell me when I was younger that I didn't have the genetics to get that big or strong and that I would never achieve my goals. I want my career to be a lesson to anyone else that has been told the same thing by anyone about any goal in any part of their life they want to achieve. With enough desire and hard work, I truly believe anyone can accomplish anything they put their mind to.



Keep Pushing Yourself & Never Quit... the former Marine finishes out a big DL