

Joe Mazza with his 487.5 bench at 165, raw. Now he's the best at 165 in both geared and ungeared categories.

JOE MAZZA

In any sport, the question of who is the world's best is difficult to discern. After all, you may have to go across different eras and different weight classes for accurate assessments, which makes direct comparisons murky at best. Nowhere is this more evident than in the sport of powerlifting, where rule and equipment changes muddy the waters even further.

When it comes to the bench press, you could make arguments for a number of guys as the best ever. For instance, 308-pounder Ryan Kennelly benched 1,075 pounds—a mind boggling weight that might never be equaled in the shirted division. Rob Luyando owns three different weight class records while wearing a shirt and Jeremy Hoornstra has pressed 615 pounds at 242 without any equipment at all, while Al

Davis has hit 650 raw at 275. You could throw out dozens of other potential monsters of mass with a legitimate shot in this fantasy bench press ranking, but few powerlifting experts would discount the reign of Joe Mazza as today's pound-for-pound world's strongest bencher.

Weighing in at 165 pounds, Mazza holds the all-time shirted record of 705 pounds—a mark no one in the weight class has come close to. Joe has been ranked number one in the world for the past six years and has claimed three American championships and three King of the Bench raw titles. Yet it is his movement into the raw bench press realm that has solidified his rank as the undisputed world's best bencher. Joe's 487.5 pound effort at the IPA Autumn Apocalypse on November 6th broke Rick Weil's

all time 165 raw record, which had stood for more than a quarter-century. How many powerlifters can you name who have dominated both shirted and raw competition benching at the same moment?

"I am honored to be mentioned in the same breath as Rick Weil," says Joe in his typical unassuming manner. "I consider him a legend and an icon in the sport of powerlifting, and to break his record is one of the biggest thrills I've ever experienced."

The secret to "The Hammer's" success on the bench is his longtime coach Jim Parrish, an enigmatic trainer who uses highly advanced techniques to help his clients maximize their benching prowess. Parrish's *Joe Average Strength* facility in Bangor, PA (joeaveragestrength.com), is little more than a garage filled with iron, a power rack and other necessary equipment, but his techniques utilizing twisted rubber bands, boards and high-intensity training work wonders.

"The *Joe Average* template is rotation of bands and free weight training," explains Joe. "I bench every 5-6 days, and do assistance work in between for other body parts. I go in and rotate band tension week to week, increasing band tension with less bar weight one week and then less band tension with more bar weight the

next week. It avoids the body getting stale. We do long range training cycles, but within each cycle the weight gets heavier and the tension gets tighter each week. I concentrate on the bench press—I am a benching specialist!

"The assistance work I do consists of heavy lat work (low rows, pulldowns) and heavy shrugs 2-3 times a week to prep for every contest. At my age (43), recovery is more important than the actual lifting. I can definitely feel when I come back too quickly on the next bench if I'm not fully recovered. With the system, the idea is to work your way up to one work set of maximum effort. It takes a lot of 'warm-ups' to get up to that set. The system is based on stimulating muscle to the maximum and getting done. I can go through a full 45 minute workout before reaching my max set!"

Describing a sample training session, the 5-foot-6-inch strongman says this: "Yesterday I did 705 pounds using 2 boards for 4 reps with a shirt. Ever since I started pushing to break the raw record, I've been training both shirted and raw in almost every workout. I work up to a heavy set of raw and then put the shirt on for an extra-heavy set. This way my body stays used to heavy, heavy weight. On the days I'm using free weights only, I start out with 135 pounds for a couple sets of 10 reps, then 225 for a



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Joe training with fellow MHP teammates (L-R) Mike Cartinian, Rob Luyando, and Shawn Frankl

couple sets of 5. Next up it's 315 for a couple more sets for 5 reps; then singles with 405, 495 and up to the set of the day, adding one plate at a time. On a band training day I try to increase weight with the same band tension as the last time. We still add the weight, but start with bands on the bar. We don't change bands during a workout, but rotate to tighter tension at the next band workout."

In addition to his precise training regi-

men, Joe is the first one to boast of the role of MHP nutritional supplements in his world class success. Thanks to his friendship with MHP founder Gerard Dente, Mazza was introduced to this line of sports supplements in 2000 when he was new in the power sport. He will be the first to say that MHP products have been instrumental in his record-breaking run in the bench press.

"My favorite supplement is *Probiotic-SR*," says the Roxbury, NJ, native. "It is a great

12-hour protein that keeps me anabolic all day long. I also take *BCAA 3300* twice daily and *NO-BOMB* an hour before training. It is the absolute best pre-workout NO product I've ever used. It pumps up my muscles and gives me an incredible strength boost. I stack *NO-BOMB* with *Trac Extreme NO* before every session to get a tremendous workout with lots of energy and strength. After training I supplement with *Dark Matter*—it is another all-time favorite because it refuels my muscles and helps me recover. I'm getting stronger and stronger because of the recovery I get from *Dark Matter*. I take it every day and I love the way it tastes; blue raspberry is the best!"

When it comes to his diet, Mazza's discipline is equally evident. He's not neurotic in his dietary focus, explaining that he doesn't watch what he eats strictly until he's ready to cut down to make weight, typically about six weeks before a contest. At that point he'll keep a closer eye and the weight comes off. He never gets heavier than about 175 pounds between meets so he experiences no problems making weight. "I don't have to lose 10 pounds in last 2 days and then have to put it back on," he laughs. "I have been in a sauna right before a few meets in the past, but it was because I didn't do the right thing! For the most part I try to eat clean year-round and drink a lot of water."

First thing in the morning he downs a *Probiotic* protein shake and whole grain cereal with skim milk to start the day. At 10 A.M. he drinks another *Probiotic* shake and eats six egg whites. Lunch is a grilled chicken salad, but this is not your typical diet fare. In fact, there's a local pizzeria (Mario's) in Saddlebrook, NJ, that named a salad after Joe: the Hammer Salad! This is grilled chicken over iceberg lettuce with hardboiled eggs, croutons and green olives with balsamic vinegar. Joe's dinner is grilled chicken with a baked potato and veggies, with another *Probiotic* shake before bed.

When he's not training with Parrish or traveling on weekends to set new records, Joe is a police officer and firearms instructor in Saddlebrook, where he's served for 22 years after receiving his B.S. degree in criminal justice from Kutztown University. He points to his tremendous strength as not just a benefit when he's benching, but when he puts on his uniform as well. "Being on patrol, you never know what you're going to come across on your daily routine. The last thing I want to happen is to have my gun wrestled away from me because I'm not strong enough. I've been in 'wrestling matches' where I had to put somebody down a number of times. So far I'm undefeated!"

Joe is also a devoted family man and spends much of his free time taking his son everywhere for wrestling tournaments. "Wrestling is a way of life in my family," he explains. His son Joey was ranked number one last year in the region before a concussion stopped his competition. He is on track to regain his champion status this year. Mazza and his wife, Lorna, also have a 16-year-old daughter, Gianna, and another son, Franco (7).

"Powerlifting has always been a passion of mine and to be recognized by my peers as one

of the best at the bench press is an honor," he says humbly. "There is a lot of negativity and separation in the sport regarding equipment or what federation you compete in. I always try to compete under all conditions and in all federations. I don't prefer equipped or non-equipped. I've done it all—single-ply, double-ply, raw, non-tested, tested, repetitions, singles. I just love to compete!"

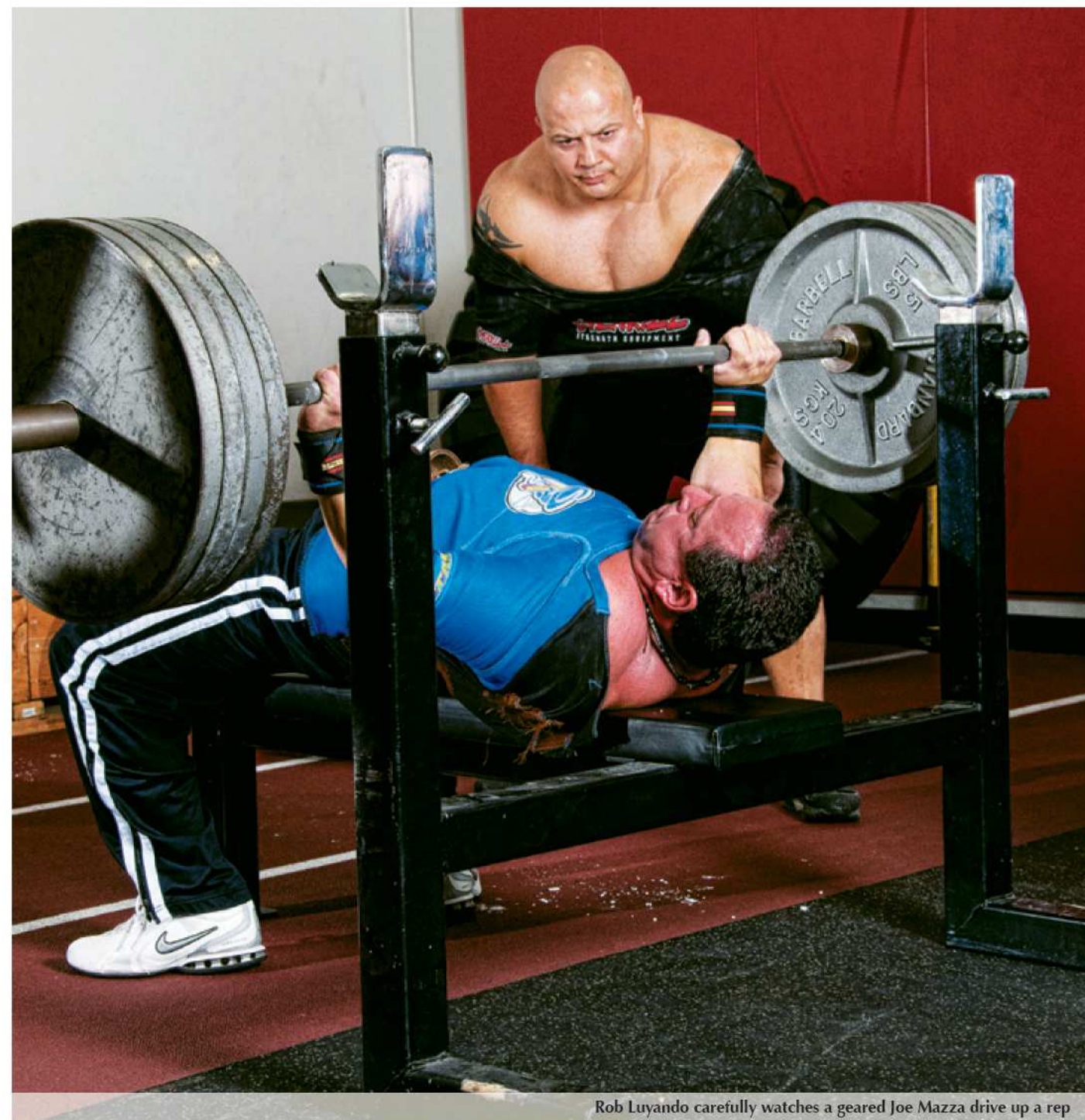
"I've met some of my best friends in the sport and people I consider legends: Bill Crawford, Bill Carpenter, Rob Luyando, Jeremy

Hoornstra, Shawn Frankl, Ryan Kennelly, Jeff Micvicar, Mike Miller, Gene Rychlak, Michael Cartinian and so many more. I just want to be the best I can be and be recognized by my peers as one of the best lightweight benchers under any circumstances or conditions.

"I also owe so much to Gerard Dente and everyone from MHP for taking me on before I won anything and sticking with me throughout my powerlifting career. I owe my success to MHP supplements! In addition, I want to thank Titan Support Systems for their ongoing

support and awesome powerlifting equipment. Also Jim Parrish for developing an incredible strength training system and being a great friend and training coach. Last, I owe so much to my family for continued support and putting up with my traveling and hectic training schedule." «

EDITOR'S NOTE: To find out more about Joe Mazza's training system, visit www.joeaveragestrength.com. To learn about MHP's line of performance enhancing sports supplements, visit www.MHPSTRONG.com.



Rob Luyando carefully watches a geared Joe Mazza drive up a rep