

Before starting this interview we'd like to congratulate Mike for his recent showing at the 2008 Orlando Barbell APF Classic where he posted lifts of 930/640/785 for a 2,355 total at a weight of 220 pounds in the Pro Division.

My name is Mike Westerdal and I have been fortunate enough to train beside Mike Schwanke for a couple of months now at Tampa Barbell. Mike busts his butt in the gym every practice and motivates every trainee to do the same. He's very team oriented, passionate about the sport, and extremely intense. I'm honored to do this interview with him and introduce "Breaker" to the powerlifting world. If you haven't heard of him yet stay tuned, he's just getting warmed up.

**Critical Bench:** Mike, your powerlifting resume is just fantastic and the numbers speak for themselves! You're right there with the super heavyweights. Awesome job! So, tell us about yourself.

**MS:** Well, my name is Mike Schwanke, "aka Breaker" I am 29 years young and now residing in Tampa FL. I have been weight training since high school and I have always loved the strength related sports. I have served over 10 years in the military now, I had dual service time six being Army and four in the Air Force. I am currently a Satellite Systems Shift Supervisor and just finished a tour in Korea. Life has always been very fast paced for me, but I will admit it certainly keeps things interesting and always presenting me with new challenges. There are many things I enjoy in life but top on my list is weight training / powerlifting. I truly appreciate the hell out of this sport and have met and trained with some truly inspirational people. I have been extremely fortunate to have trained with many pro level athletes and also huge reason behind my own success.

Currently I train at Tampa Barbell and it is by far the best barbell club I have trained with to date! We have a great group of guys there and they are all about promoting team success, not just individual!

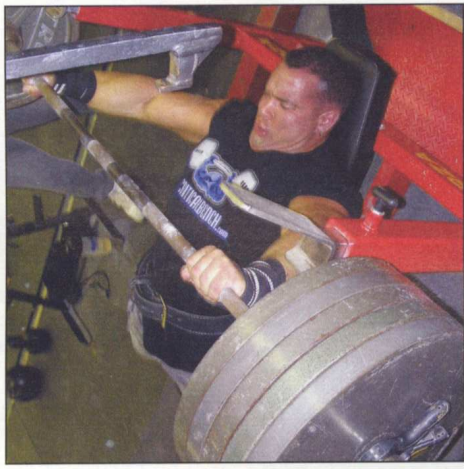
**Critical Bench:** Benchng is an individual sport, but requires the help of training partners. How important do you think quality training partners are?

**MS:** To be honest, was one far out of shape kid "lol". I wanted to get all buff, so I could get all the hot chicks. No, all of us can be Mr. Universe, but I did find out we all have gifts hidden in the most obscure places. I really started to buckle down in high school with my weight training. I was a mere powerlifting taught you about life?

**MS:** It taught me to focus my

## INTERVIEW

### MIKE SCHWANKE as interviewed by Mike Westerdal



Mike Schwanke has a big bench and everything else for a 3 lift total

attention to one certain set of goals and not to be so easily distracted in achieving them

**Critical Bench:** What drives or motivates you to the best lift you can be?

**MS:** Personal desire and training with the best; you automatically want to be where they are and they will be pushed to stay on top of their game.

**Critical Bench:** Does your family understand and support your training?

**MS:** No and it really does not matter if they did. This is something that I alone wanted to participate in, not them.

**Critical Bench:** What are your best lifts?

**MS:** So far my best lifts have been 925 lb. Squat, 680 lb. Bench, 755 lb. Deadlift and a 2350 lb Total.

**Critical Bench:** Amazing. What got you started in powerlifting?

**MS:** To be honest, was one far out of shape kid "lol". I wanted to get all buff, so I could get all the hot chicks. No, all of us can be Mr. Universe, but I did find out we all have gifts hidden in the most obscure places. I really started to buckle down in high school with my weight training. I was a mere powerlifting taught you about life?

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bench shirt do you use and why did you choose it?

**MS:** I first started off with double denim, but I had no idea how to use the damn thing, so after taking 500 in the face I finally started to listen to the voice of reason. Since I am a long limbed lifter, denim does not fit my particular lifting style and my frame, so with some research and a few trips to ECBB (switched to a poly design and took everything ground zero.

**Critical Bench:** Have you faced any adversity in your training?

**MS:** Yeah, dealing with the military's idea of what fitness is. If you're in this sport and you have to bust your ass running, they tend not to mix.

Additionally, with the added stress in doing grass drills and training heavy with weights you will be well on your way to injury. I never have a problem running and do enjoy it to some extent, but running 6+ miles is just

\*\*king stupid to me and thank Christ the Air Force has leaders with common sense.

**Critical Bench:** You were in the Army for 6 years and then the Air Force. Which experience was more extreme and what was each experience like? Was being in the Air Force or Army as extreme as powerlifting?

**MS:** Oh boy! It has been a great transition in my life and I am not going to bash the Army too harshly, but the Army treats you more like a number us, the Air Force which treats you like a member. I really enjoy my job and taking care of our Airman in the World's best Air Force, for me there is no greater honor. One thing I must say about the Air Force, it is very education demanding and they put great emphasis on it. It has put me about 5 classes away from getting again I train with the Blue. Now, for anyone going to join the military, do not take my opinion as gospel. I have my ideas and they are just that "Mine" All I can say is consider the 3-D's "do what you want to do and do it well!"

**Critical Bench:** Tell us about your powerlifting routine and diet?

**MS:** I am a real supplement nerd; I take all your basic supplementation and nothing requiring rocket science. However, I have learned how to cycle supplements almost too absolute perfection and I believe this has made a night and day

improvement in my progress! One thing I will say is to be creative, but at the same time keep it simple! Basic multi-vitamins and protein is a great start for any athlete who is pushing their body and

(article continued on page 92)

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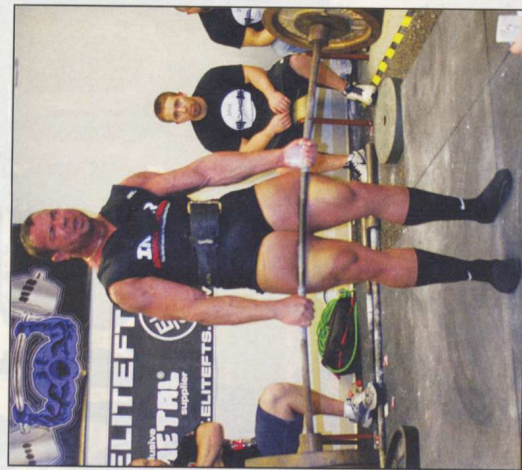
at Life Style Family Fitness in Tampa. I was coming down to visit him one weekend and he said he had a workout planned for me. I said sure. So, I get there thinking that we were going to hit the weights, and all of a sudden John Cena comes walking out and my buddy says "here is your training partner for today!" I will say this: John is a super cool guy and very down to earth and I also picked up some nice bodybuilding routines from him!

**Critical Bench:** What training philosophy do you think is the best? What are your pet peeves when it comes to the gym?

**MS:** Be open minded to new ideas and take constructive criticism from experienced lifters. Be on time and never make excuses for your own mistakes. It's just part of learning. Lastly, always be humble and not some ego-jacks - people will only hate you for it and sooner or later it will cause you to fall.

**Critical Bench:** You have helped a lot of people get better, including myself. How does helping a beginner, intermediate and an advanced lifter differ?

**MS:** I try to give back from what I have taken and truly believe that is what separates our sport from the rest! Different levels lifters are both either easy or difficult to help and coach in the



**Mike is a Deadlifting Machine** (photographs courtesy Westerdahl)

have some knowledge, but are still making small mistakes, but in my opinion, they are the easiest to help and steer in the right direction!

The Intermediate Lifter: They

achieve my goals and always wanting to be a better lifter.

**Critical Bench:** How do you see the future of benching?

**MS:** Simple answer: the numbers will only get more insane, and the bar will get set higher and higher each year.

**Critical Bench:** What do you think about the new AFPP federation? Do you feel there are too many federations or do you welcome more competition?

**MS:** I do not welcome it. We already have enough federations and making one more just puts us that much farther away from grace. I say fix the problems where they are in, spawning new federations and keep this sport from becoming even a bigger mess.

**Critical Bench:** Thanks for the interview and the insight Mike. Appreciate your time and wish you the best in your future meets. In closing, is there anyone who you would like to thank or any final words of wisdom?

**MS:** First and foremost: I would like to thank the service members of our Armed Forces deployed throughout the world. Personally thank you for what you are doing and for the sacrifices you make in your daily lives! Second, I was once under this magical delusion that a double ply bench shirt would equal a 600 lb.+ bench. I got a new flash for everybody who also believes this - you're wrong! It now has been 3 years for me using equipment and I am still learning new tricks with every workout. I see many internet jockeys bashing lifters and the whole raw us, equipped is just stupid. First off, the hating must stop. I have not one problem in admitting somebody is better than me. Matter of fact, there is always someone who will be



**Mike squatting at the IPA Power Station Cincinnati Pro-Am meet.** Truly a double edged sword: the more you ass and you will bomb out of the meet! Keep in mind, you are a thing or two. Or they will be making pettu mistakes, due to pride and not take every well to criticism.

Lastly, keep in mind that the coach can always be the student and is working for me.

**Critical Bench:** What makes you different from other lifters?

**MS:** I would say one is, being Military, I am restricted to weight standards and have to run and have to do the whole total physical concept. Second, I would say drive and dedication in willing to

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better then you and it's a good thing - it keeps you from being complacent. Likewise, there are standards and they must be enforced in competition. If the lift is questionable and it gets flamed then it was well deserved.

I would like to thank all of my training partners past and present. Tommy Fannon, Blaine Stussy and all the members of Tampa Barbells, Alan Thomas of AFPP, Pro Gear, Joey Smith, Rodney Coates & Barry Williams, Granite City Barbells, Chris Smith & Joe Denerolle of SCFF, Nutrition in Macon, GA, Reggie Felly, Jason Powell, Robert Homes aka the Korea Crew, Paul Wolford and CriticalBench.com for taking the time to interview and post my story!

**THE MIKE SCHWANKE RESUME**

06/06/99: Ft. Bragg, NC Base Bench Competition - 380 lbs. Raw Bench in 181s - 3rd Place.

06/06/00: Ft. Bragg, NC Base Bench Competition - 405 lb. Raw Bench in 181s - 1st Place

03/04/04: Western NC Bench Press Championship - 460 lb. Bench in 220s - 5th Place.

05/21/05: Charlotte, NC. YMCA RAW Championship - 500 lb. Raw Bench in 242s - 1st Place.

06/15/05: Sanford, NC 100% Raw State Bench Press Championship - 450 lb. Raw Bench in 242s - 1st Place.

08/26/05: NGBBB GA, APF State Championship "Bombed Out" in Full-Power 242s & above - 1st Place (Elite)

12/17/05: Inmo, SC, APF State Championship - 1940 lb. Total in Full-Power 242s - 2nd Place (Elite)

01/28/06: Clayton, GA APF State Championship - 2044.7 lb. Total in Full-Power 242s - 1st Place (Elite)

10/14/06: 8th Army Powerlifting Championship - 2180 lb. Total in Full-Power 220s & above - 1st Place (Elite)

06/02/07: Callahan FL - APF State Championship - 2270.7 Total in Full-Power off 2 boards. 242s - Guest Lifter (Elite)

08/20/07: IPA Cincinnati Power Station Pro-Am - 2295 Total in Full-Power Division 220s - 1st Place (Elite)

10/13/07: Tampa Barbells Invitational Meet - 2350 Total in Full-Power 220s - Meet Champion (Elite)

02/23/08: Orlando Barbells APF Classic - 2355 Total in Full-Power 220s (Elite)