

# INTERVIEW

## CLINT SMITH of Team Samson Powerlifting interviewed by Ben Tatar of Critical Bench

Congratulations to Clint Smith who recently recorded the thirteenth highest total of all-time when he totaled 2,407 at 242 pounds competing at the APF Southern States in Jacksonville, FL, on December 5th, 2009. Smith squatted 903, benched 766 and pulled 738 pounds!

**Critical Bench:** Clint, give us some background info about yourself!

**Clint Smith:** I live in Jacksonville, Florida, with my wife and little girl where I work as a Civil Engineer. I have been training with Team Samson since 2004 when I met them at my first shirted bench meet.

**CB:** Clint, after you benched around 315 for a few years, you said you got stronger very quickly when you found great training partners. Tell us why training partners have been so important for you and how you found great training partners to train with?

**CS:** Well, I think Sam Byrd ripped a quote from Yogi Berra when he told me "100% of powerlifting is half mental." Surrounding yourself with more knowledgeable experienced powerlifters allows you to grow your expertise in performing the lifts and how to mentally prepare for a weight so that you aren't defeated before you ever get under the bar.

**CB:** Give us 5 reasons why lifting with training partners works better than when you train alone?

**CS:** 1. It tremendously helps you to mentally prepare for handling heavy weight when you train alongside people who are consistently handling more than you are.

2. Intensity breeds intensity, so training with a group of focused lifters will make for a very productive session.

3. You learn a lot of little nuances with training and handling heavy weight that are best taught by example.

4. Your training partners can constantly critique your form to keep it in check.

5. Having training partners with you at the meet is invaluable and will add pounds to your total.

**CB:** How does it feel to now have benched over 750 lb.?

**CS:** I am proud of my bench, but I am humbled by great benchers like Frankl and Luyando. It feels good to bench over 750, but I think it will feel better to bench over 800. I am working on it, but it has proven elusive so far.

**CB:** Clint, tell us your reactions the first time you hit milestones like a 500 or 700 pound bench?

**CS:** Each successive milestone has been more satisfying than the last one, but they have all been the same: a brief sense of accomplish-



(Above) Clint Smith mentally prepares to handle the heavy weight and (below) a smiling Clint after winning the Best Lifter award



ment followed quickly by thoughts of how to get to the next rung on the ladder.

**CB:** How is your kid doing?

**CS:** Little Keira is doing great; she just turned 2. Every day I look forward to getting home from work and babbling with her.

**CB:** What is your best bench today? What are your short term and long term goals?

**CS:** My best bench is 788 at 220. Short term goal is to bench over 800 at 220. Long term goal is to total over 2500 at 220.

**CB:** You train with Team Samson. What does Team Samson look for in potential new members?

**CS:** We look for people that can be dependable, want to compete successfully, are willing to change their habits and training methods to improve, and know how to spell Samson.

**CB:** Do you have any tips for us when it comes to using a bench press shirt? How does one pick a shirt? Any tips on using? Share.

**CS:** As far as tips, at the top of the list are: Keep all your muscles tight for the entire rep, arch as big as you can, push hard with your legs the entire rep, tuck your elbows hard, don't let the shirt slide the bar off the bubble. The best way to pick a shirt, IMO, is good old trial and error. Experiment with older shirts from fellow lifters first until you think you found your favorite, and then buy a new one. When you first get into a shirt, don't focus on increasing the weight, handle lighter weights and focus on form and touching.

**CB:** You said in the past that it's good to take weeks off from benching so one won't bench the same weight year after year. How often would you advise one to take a week off from benching?

**CS:** That really depends on your body and how your training is set up. I even used to train with a guy that trained chest once every two weeks and had phenomenal gains in strength. A general rule of thumb would be once every 6-8 weeks, but you need to listen to your body; if you start to feel a little joint stiffness/pain and notice less explosiveness on warmup weights then a down week is probably in order. One of the hardest things to learn is the ability to recognize when to throttle back. We all want to go 100% every workout, but you will end up hitting a brick wall.

**CB:** Give us 5 tips so a person who benches in the 300s doesn't bench the same weight every week for years?

**CS:** 1. Avoid overtraining by ro-

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tating your bench press exercises every 1-3 weeks (e.g. regular, wide, close grip, boards, floor press, incline, decline).

2. Do some research, plan a routine, stick to it. After completing the plan, assess what you think worked and didn't work, so that you can tweak it and also incorporate new training ideas you have learned for the next go-round.

3. Perfect your set-up: master staying tight, getting a good arch, using leg drive.

4. Never think that you can't learn something new. Keep your ears open.

5. Take some down weeks every now and then in order to de-load your muscles, joints and CNS.

**CB:** How would you describe the atmosphere at most of the meets you compete at?

**CS:** Intense, but friendly. Most people are very gracious and willing to help a fellow lifter in need.

**CB:** What goes through your mind before attempting a world record? Do you get nervous or feel fear? How would you explain the process for you?

**CS:** I'm not strong enough yet to attempt world records, but before

a PR attempt, while waiting. I may be a little nervous about going out there and forgetting my technique. Just before I hit the platform, that fades and my mind clears—kind of like Kevin Costner from "For Love of the Game." He would say to himself "Clear the Mechanism."

**CB:** How do you see the future of powerlifting?

**CS:** I think the cash meets are going to continue to become more prominent. Other than that, I have no clue.

**CB:** Is there anyone you'd like to thank?

**CS:** I would like to thank God for the blessings he has given me. My Wife Cheryl for putting up with my hobby turned obsession. Adam Driggers for letting me train with Team Samson and teaching me so much about powerlifting. I didn't know anything when I started training, and asked him lots of annoying questions. Brian Carroll for helping me plan my training and always being honest with me about it—sometimes brutally. All the guys that train out at Adams: Tony, Nate, Gary, Blue, Daniel and Colby to name a few. Last but not least, APT and CriticalBench.com for their continued support.



Smith squatted 903 lb. at the APF Southern States in FL on Dec. 5th