

INTERVIEW

DONNIE THOMPSON

interviewed by Chris Mason of At Large Nutrition



I have to confess that I have always had a fascination with brute power. It goes back to my childhood. At that time it revolved around superheroes. Marvel Comic's Hulk and Thing characters were my favorites because they epitomized the ultimate in physical power. The Hulk held a special place in my heart as there was essentially no end to his strength. The angrier he got, the stronger he got, with seemingly no limit! My passion for physical prowess still burns just as brightly and fuels my love for all things strength related!

When I recently found out I would have the opportunity to interview a true strength mastodon in the person of Donnie Thompson I was fired up to say the least! To me, a man like Donnie is what unbridled power is all about. He hopes to soon be only the second man ever to exceed a 2800 lb. total!

What makes a guy like this tick? How did he get so friggin' HUGE? Let's find out...

ALN: Donnie, you have an extensive athletic background. Tell us a bit about that.

DT: I played high school football, baseball and track in my home state of Maryland. My first taste of competitive powerlifting was at a state level bench press meet my senior year in high school. The meet used USPF rules to include a pause. My 360 lbs. beat 181 other guy's best press.

I went on to play college football at Shepherd College in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. I was a center and was able to win several accolades to include First Team All-Conference. My freshman year I was 225 lbs but I blew up to over 300 lbs by my senior year making me 1 of only 25 NCAA players to weigh in the 300s at that time.

My father played in the NFL for both the Colts and Eagles and that fueled my desire to do the same. After college I had a brief stint as a free agent with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and then was signed by the Arena Football League. The Arena league was different then, commanding less respect from the NFL scouts and teams than it does now. Scouts told me that the league was not credible and therefore I was not given consideration. Their opinion aside, the league had a TON of talent and has done very well for itself. In fact, the NFL now owns 80% of the league (I hope the NFL is still credible...)

I played for roughly 5 years in the Arena league and only allowed 2 sacks the entire time! I left when (as mentioned above) I discovered that my chances of getting back into an NFL camp were slim to none.

ALN: When you played football were the weights a means to an end

gym and here was this sanctuary of mind-bending intensity and power and yet it had comparatively little equipment. It brought to mind the K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple Stupid) principle. Far from being Spartan, the gym had just enough of the right equipment to do the job.

For the next 4 years I made it a point to attend every meet Westside was in and to compete with and against them. Over time I made friends with men like John Stafford and Paul Childress. I trained and exchanged ideas with them and others like Chuck Vogelpohl and Matt Smith. Rob Fusner had a big influence on me because I could relate to his style. I truly believe that if he had not gotten injured he would have been a world champion many times over.

ALN: How important do you consider diet to be relative to developing maximal size and strength?

DT: I think it is very important especially for beginners. I am a big man and if you look at the top strength athletes of all-time you will see that their lifts increased as their bodyweight went up. If you want to maximize your strength potential eating like a bird is not going to do the trick.

ALN: I completely agree with you Donnie. I think this is especially true for younger lifters with their fast metabolisms. I have written more than one article that focused on consuming a ton of calories and relying on the basics in order to build the massive physique so many young men want. What about your diet? Do you follow any sort of an organized dietary plan?

DT: My diet is simple. I consume 3 food-based meals per day and make sure to include some form of meat with each. I supplement with 3 Nitren protein shakes per day. I also strive to drink 1 gallon of water per day, but sometimes fall short.

ALN: Speaking of supplements, what do you personally take?

DT: Again, I keep it straight forward and simple. As already mentioned I consume 3 Nitren protein shakes per day. I also supplement with ETS for recovery (muscles and joints). Both products are available at www.AtLargeNutrition.com. I also include a pre-natal multivitamin. Laugh if you will, but it works!

ALN: Finding out the general training routines of the champs is interesting, but I prefer (and I think our readers prefer it as well) to get a more specific insight into their training. Can you please outline for us exactly what you did in the gym last week to include sets, reps, loads, and exercises?

DT: My training was as follows: (***) Author's note: You can find

several articles on kettlebell training here: <http://www.dragondoor.com/article/mode2/Kettlebells>

Monday Night: Bench: I used a Mastodon* bar coupled with a purple band and a Monster Mini (available at www.westsidebarbell.com) doubled around each side of the bar. My working sets used 2 45s and a 10 lb plate per side (plus the aforementioned bands) for 5 sets of 2 reps. I finished with a single rep using 2 45s, a 25, and a 10 lb plate per side. That single was very tough and I had the "shakes" afterwards.

* The "Mastodon" bar is sold at www.elitefts.com (<http://www.flexcart.com/members/default.asp?m=PD&cat=211&id=872>). It is a bit longer and much thicker than a normal Olympic bar having a circumference of roughly 1 3/8" with a full 57" between the sleeves. It weighs 60 lbs.

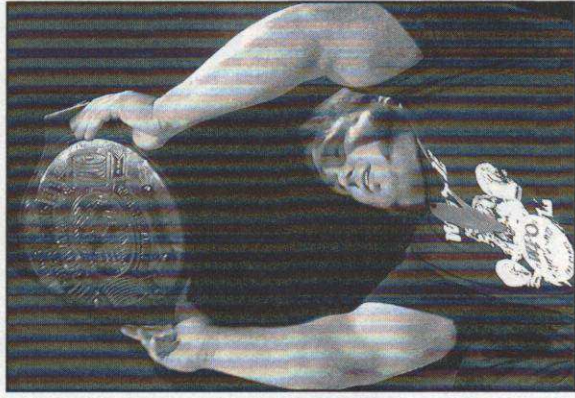
Log Presses: My log of choice was 8" in diameter (on the inside). I used the apparatus plus 3 45s per side for 3 sets of 8 reps.

Kettlebell Extensions: I worked up from 26 lb to 72 lb kettlebells while on a stability ball for 5 sets of 12 reps.

Front Pull Downs: I used the entire stack (300 lbs) for 3 sets of 10 reps.

Fat Bar* Curls: I worked up to a 45 on each side for 8 sets of 3 reps. * The Fat Bar weighs 75 lbs and has a 16.5 cm circumference. It can be found at www.elitefts.com (<http://www.flexcart.com/members/default.asp?m=PD&cat=213&qid=898>).

Band Pushdowns: I used the purple bands for 3 sets of 25 reps. **Wednesday Night:** Box Squats: I worked my way up to 3 blue bands, a purple band, and 3 45s



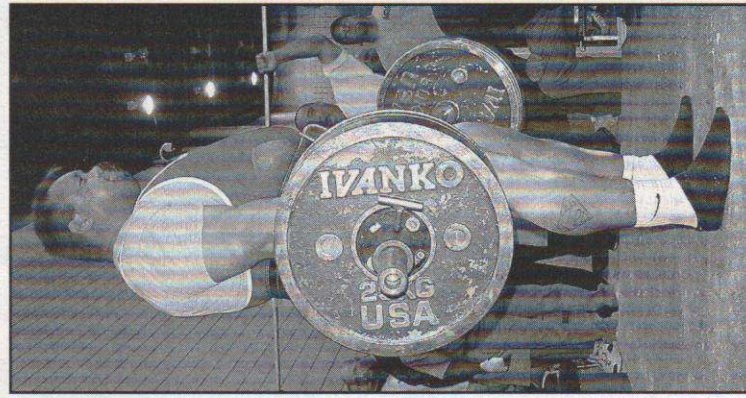
WPO Gold... Donnie won big in 2005

followed the same route so many of us have. I just copied what the biggest guys in the gym did and never questioned it. If I could do it all over again I would have sought out the proper guidance right from the beginning. Once you learn it wrong it takes a few years of de-programming and correct training to really get things right in order to be a successful competitive powerlifter or just the strongest you can be. It is easy to spot the guys that are lucky enough to get the right guidance and training partners from the start. They are the ones that come from nowhere and set records and win meets. I must confess a touch of jealousy as they make guys like me look shameful in comparison in that it took so much longer for me to reach the upper echelon of powerlifting success.

ALN: Donnie, let's wrap this up right. What is your number one training "secret" to titanic strength?

DT: My number one secret is determination! I am not as gifted as some, in the physical sense, but I have an incredible burning desire and a determination to be the best. There are literally no barriers that can stand in my way and I am willing to sacrifice nearly everything for powerlifting success. If you want to be the best it has to be your passion, your obsession!

ALN: I 100% agree with you Donnie and I must say it has been an honor to interview you and learn a bit more about how you train and what makes you the champion you are. Good luck to you in all of your endeavors!



Donnie can deadlift well into the 800s

Donnie went 1150 800 820 770 at the recent IPA Senior Nationals on each side of the bar. This is a very difficult load to handle and I did 3 sets of 2 reps. I then did a set with the bands and 5 45s per side followed by one final set with 5 45s and a 25. I was wearing Metal briefs and a belt and I will say this final set was the most brutal squat I have ever done!

Good Mornings: I used chains to suspend the bar. I positioned it such that I started the movement at the bottom and had to perform the concentric portion of the lift first. I kept my lower back arched. For this workout I used 4 45s per side for 3 sets of 3 reps.

Kettlebell Swings: I did these double handed with a 106 lb kettlebell. The kettlebell is swung between the legs and then out in front of your body to the desired height (chest level for example). I had my training partner grab the kettlebell at the top of the movement and force it down. I performed 4 sets of 10 reps.

Back Raises (a hyperextension on an improved apparatus): I held a 135 lb. bar to my chest and performed 3 sets of 10 reps.

Friday Afternoon: This was speed day for my upper body.

Floor Presses: I used a 238" bar with 3 to 5 chains and 2 45s per side.

Fat Bar Triceps Extensions: This is a traditional skull crusher using the Fat Bar with 1 45 and 1 chain per side. I did 3 sets of 8 reps.

Kettlebell Side Swings: I used 2 72 lb. kettlebells and performed the movement with both hands simultaneously. I did 3 sets of 8 reps.

Kettlebell Snatch Swings: Using the same 72 lb. bells I did 3 sets of 8 reps. As the name implies a swing is employed to execute this movement as opposed to starting each rep from the floor.

Kettlebell Snatch Press: I again used the 72

Dead Kettlebell

Snatches: You start these in the deadlift position, hence the name. I started with the 72s then proceeded to the 88s and finished with the 106 lbs for 3 sets of 3-5 reps.

Glute-Ham Raises: I did 3 sets of 10 reps.

I finished off with abs. **ALN:** You are certified in Russian Kettlebell Training and they are a big part of your personal routine. How do you recommend others incorporate them into their program?

DT: Each individual has their own strengths and weaknesses. Kettlebells are excellent at helping to address one's weak points. In my case my shoulders are my weakness and I have used snatches and presses with kettlebells to help rectify the problem.

ALN: What would you do differently if you could start strength training all over again?

DT: In the beginning I