INTERVIEW

Louis Simmons of Westside Barbell

interviewed for PL USA by Dr. Larry Miller

LM: Louie, you are probably one of the best known individuals in the sport. How did you get started in Powerlifting?

LS: *I always wanted to powerlift, although I started out Olympic lifting at 14-18 years old. A power meet was held in Dayton, Ohio in 1966, which was a few days before I was to be drafted into the Army. At that meet, there were four future world champions. Milt McKinney, George Crawford, Vince Anello and Larry Pacifico, I was sold.*

LM: How did you become so knowledgeable about the sport and the physiology and mechanics involved with the sport? Do powerlifters need to read some of the books you have recommended in order to understand the sport better?

LS: *To be good at anything, you must fully understand what you are doing. I am a full time student of strength. I learn to do things right by doing them wrong at first. After breaking my fifth lumbar vertebra for the second time in 1983, I had to find a more sophisticated method of training. I studied the former Soviet Union methods of developing special strength. You must learn and use all methods of training to succeed. This has led to my ownership of four United Stated patents on my strength equipment. I firmly believe everyone should read as much as possible about strength development by accredited authors from the Soviet Union.*

LM: What books would you recommend for powerlifters to read and where can they get them?

LS: *"The Practice of Science and Strength Training" by Zatsiorsky; "Science of Sports Training" by Kurz and "Strength and Power in Sports" by Komi. You can purchase these at Elite Fitness.*

LM: How and when did you meet your wife Doris? Without getting you in trouble, was she one of the better female powerlifters you ever saw?

LS: *I meet my wife through her work at the phone company. She never lifted weights until after ten years of marriage. She began training and became Miss Ohio in bodybuilding. After that she changed to powerlifting and became the all time WPC world champion and all time world record holder in bench, squat and total.*

LM: I know the two of you don't have any children but you have a history with dogs. What are your favorite breeds?

LS: *I have always had pit bulls or American bulldogs. They are the toughest and most determined breeds. Nitro, the pit bull, never missed a work out and actually died in the gym at 13 years old. That is why we honor him as the logo on our shirts.*

LM: Do you believe our sport will ever unify? If not, why?

LS: *We will never unify because we cannot believe the one that lifts the most weight is really the best.*

LM: I would think, minimally, we should attempt to have a unified drug tested/non-tested organization. Would this be a possibility in your view?

LS: *No, it should not because it is too easy to pass a drug test, including the IOC test and I have seen this personally. At the 2006 Tour De France there were 60 riders using banned substances that were Ok'd by their doctor, I don't call that drug testing.*

LM: There has been a great deal in the news regarding Barry Bonds and Floyd Landis. Public opinion is very negative and steroids are associated with cheating. Do you feel that the general public has misperceptions regarding steroids?

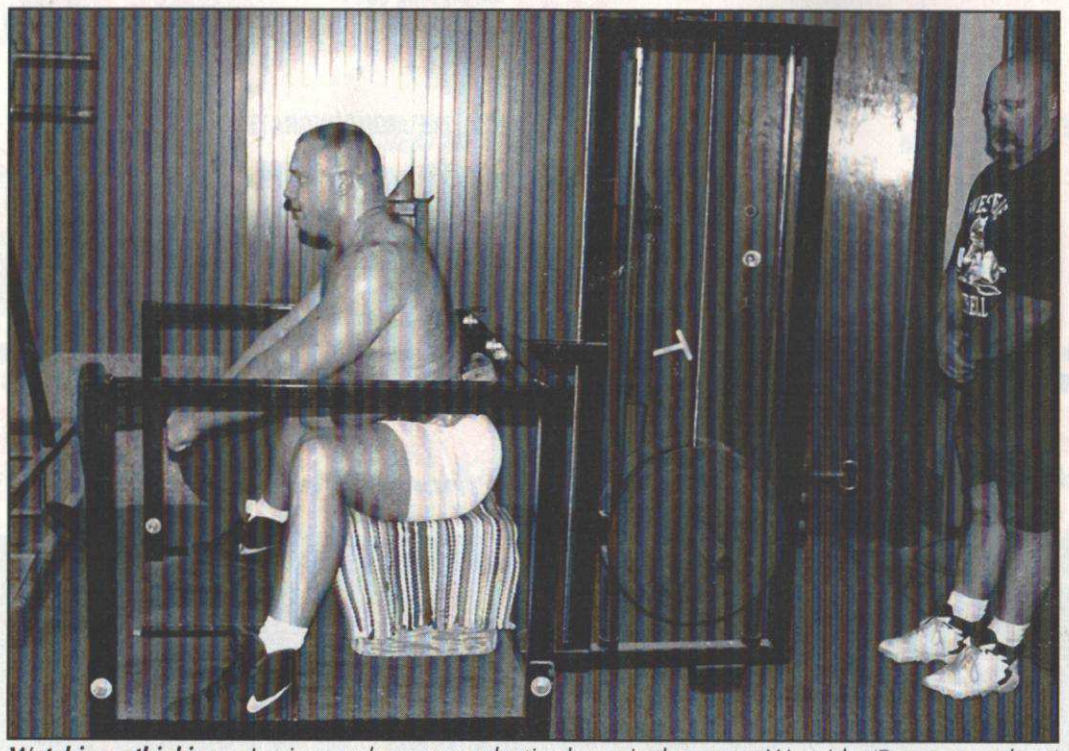
LS: *Yes, I do. In an endeavor that calls for a sports performance, why wouldn't sports performance drugs be a part of that? You mention Mr. Bonds. I ask the question did Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, or Hank Aaron take a drug test? If not, how can we be sure they were clean? Steroids became quite prevalent in the late 50's and early 60's. As far as Floyd Landis is concerned, how does a person show a clean sample up to stage 16, fails 17, and then be fine for the rest of the tour? I say if Lance Armstrong won 7 tours drug free, why drug test at all? Maybe drugs don't work on people who ride bikes, I just don't know. You are right, Larry; the general public has many misconceptions about steroids. If steroids are as dangerous as we are lead to believe, there would not be any anti-aging clinics. If testosterone were as dangerous as we were told, most people would be dead at 18. With what the TV ads say about today's medicines and their many deadly side affects, it makes steroids look safe.*

LM: Do you believe that the medical community needs to do more studies on steroids and growth hormone?

LS: *Absolutely. Check out how many people die from over the counter pain medication and how many people die from anabolic steroids…you might be surprised.*

LM: We have a number of great lifters in the US. Some wear single ply, some double ply and triple ply. Powerlifting USA magazine ranks our lifters based on their best lifts. Is it fair to compare these groups? In addition there are differences in rules and early weigh-ins. Whereas the original rules seemed to be universal at the time, do you think it was ok to change the rules whereby lifters could now bring the bar down to the abdomen or weigh in 1-2 days in advance? The bench shirt was originally defined as a tight fitting t-shirt. Now, some look nothing like a t-shirt.

LS: *Yes, it is fair. Tiny Meeker and Steve Wong both wear single ply and have passed drug tests. Steve has made 881 and Tiny 903. These men simply have the intelligence to use a strong shirt. The 48 hour weight in at the WPO was a joke in my opinion, but it was a thing in the past. You can be drug free, don't wear a shirt, do two hour weigh-ins, but if you want to be on the top 100, you must think about how to increase your odds. Boxers are using 24 hour weigh-ins and this has prevented many brain injuries and even deaths by using common sense. When it comes to where the bar touches your chest or your belly because of the strength of the shirt, I was a top ten bencher in 1980, and at that time I made the third highest total at 220 with a two hour weigh-in. My bench was 480 and I was the eighth out of the top ten. At 54 years old, I made a 575 bench, at 220, and that was the sixth on the 220 list in 2002. If I figured out a shirt, why can't anyone else? I never made the rules, I only followed the rules, and I may be the oldest to make s top ten bench, at 54 years old. I simply adapted to the rules and if you can't adapt, you are going to be extinct. Last but not least, I never hear the strongest guys complaining about gear, only the weakest ones.*



Watching .. thinking *... Louie spends many productive hours in the gym at Westside. (Bumgarner photo)*

Doris Simmons *... has done some great lifting herself, Westside style*

LM: You are known in many circles as an expert in strength and conditioning. Are you a consultant to any professional sports teams? What type of athletes do you work with and how often do you have visitors come and train with you?

LS: *We have sent people to the NFL. With the last two prospects we took 3/10 off of their 40 time. Rudy Silva trained with us this year for two months. He's a 290 lb. tight end, who was picked up by the Detroit Lions and in eight weeks with us, we dropped his 40 time from 5.1 to 4.7. I have had Green Bay Packers, Seattle Seahawks, Cleveland Browns and Johnny Parker, formerly with the Patriots and now with the 49ers, has spent time here. I honor a picture of Kent Johnson and Johnny Parker shaking hands on the Super Bowl field in 1997, when their respective teams, the Green Bay Packers and the Patriots played. I correspond with many other NFL teams. Five top rugby teams from overseas have visited us for training advice; a former goal tender from the Manchester United spent extensive time with us here and opened a training facility much like mine in England. MMA stars Dan Severson and Dan "the bull" Bobish and Kevin Randelman trained here for a while. I worked with Butch Reynolds, who was the former world record holder in the 400 meters. There is only one way to lift for explosive power and it is Westside. We do internships for Universities and have visitors from all around the world visit us constantly.*

LM: I know you are a big fan of the rubber band man, Dick Hartzell, and his equipment. What effect have the bands had on our sport?

LS: *Dave Williams, the former coach of Liberty University, asked me to do experiments with Jump Stretch bands and for my recommendations on how to use them. I never heard of them before, but Dick Hartzell was in town doing a seminar on how to use bands. The first time I used them, I was hooked. I experimented with bands for 18 months and at that point I knew for sure they definitely worked. Bands are too light in the bottom and weight is too heavy, but the combination is unbelievable. Bands have helped produce overspeed eccentrics, virtual force effect and, of course, contributes to accommodating resistance and helping develop the reactive methods of training. Even now, most machines have band connectors on them. I feel bands have taken lifting to a new height, It certainly has Westside.*

LM: Who are some of your favorite lifters to watch?

LS: *Oleksander Kutcher, Andy Bolton, Chuck Vogelpohl and George Halbert.*

LM: Who are the most impressive lifters you have seen over the years?

LS: *The three strongest would be and, in no particular order, Ed Coan, Mike Bridges and Oleksander Kutcher. The best competitor was Larry Pacifico. He never had a cakewalk, but he always won.*

LM: How did you come up with some of the ideas behind your equipment?

LS: *I invented the Reverse Hyper extension after breaking my fifth lumbar in 1973. No one was able to help me and I came up with this exercise out of desperation. It is a United States trademark; it has two U.S. patents, with a third patent pending and is currently running on television as an infomercial referred to as the CorEvolution. I also have a plyometric swing known as the virtual force swing that has a U.S. patent. We can never have enough explosive power and the swing helps provide that training effect.*

LM: Do you still do strength seminars and, if not, why?

LS: *Very few, because I prefer to train and experiment. To do that, I have to stay at Westside. I have many coaches come to me and try to pass on anything I can to help them.*

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LM: At what age do you think Powerlifters peak if they can keep themselves healthy?

LS: *I am not sure, but at least 60 years old. I am stronger in the deadlift and squat now and I will be 60 in October. Not getting injured is the key as well as having training partners. If you run with the lame you will develop a limp, so choose your training partners wisely.*

LM: Have you ever considered writing a book to challenge the Bigger, Faster, Stronger mentality that many coaches still use?

LS: *I do have a book that is 550 + pages that I hope to have published within a year. This book will teach all methods of training and defines the needs of special strength, GPP and SPP.*

LM: How often do you train and give us a breakdown of what days you do what lifts and whether it is max effort or dynamic training etc.?

LS: *8 times a week. The main workout is in the morning and secondary workouts in the evening.*

Sunday -speed bench

Monday-max effort for squat and deadlift using the conjugant system.

Wednesday- max effort for the bench

Friday- speed squatting off a box from speed strength strength speed.

LM: What are some of the injuries you've worked through during your career?

LS: *I broke my fifth lumbar vertebra is 1973. I completely tore off my right bicep in 1979. I tore two holes in my stomach and a partial tear of the tendon that connects to the pelvic bone in 1980. Refractured my fifth lumbar vertebra in 1983. Complete ruptured of left patella tendon in 1991. I had my second knee operation in 1991. Right meniscus operation in 1998. Shoulder socket replacement in 2004. Left shoulder scoped in 2004. Left bicep reattached in 2004.*

LM: Do you take any supplements?

LS: *I take At Large Nutrition© protein supplements, vitamins and minerals and many herbs.*

LM: What do you see as the number one problem with our sport and how do you think it could be corrected?

LS: *Jealousy would be the number one problem and because of jealousy, we will never unite and thus it will never be corrected.*

LM: Any final thoughts Lou?

LS: *Long live powerlifting and all of those who participate in it.*