



## WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



### **Dave DePew Interviews Mike Westerdal**

D: Well, right as promised, I'm here with Mike Westerdal of [CriticalBench.com](http://CriticalBench.com). Mike, welcome to the show.

M: Thanks for having me, Dave.

D: Well, thank you so much. Today's topic, the reason we have you on here today is to talk of...well, we could talk about anything. You've got all kinds of great products on just general fitness, on improving your health, but certainly a lot of great products on building muscle, increasing your bench press. That's what we want to talk about today. And before we get started on talking about just how to increase your bench press, let's talk about why it is that guys are so obsessed with increasing their bench.

I mean, let's face it. It seems like every...at least every big guy has always been able to relate to this. I know it seems like any time anyone notices that I work out, they ask me that question, "How much do you bench?"

M: Right, I mean, that's a great question. I was talking with my buddy Elliott about it today. I'm like, what's one question you have about the bench press? He's like, "What is the big deal about it anyway?" And I don't know if I have the exact right answer for it, but I know one thing for sure. I'm not going to fight the feeling that's out there.

And I can agree with why it's such a big deal, because a lot of people think it's just a chest exercise, but really it's a full body exercise. And we'll get into that a little bit more during the interview. But, a lot of people think it's just an ego lift, like you just bench press so you can tell people how much you bench press, but it really is a great measure of your upper body strength and it does involve a lot of muscles that you might not be aware of. So, I'm not going to fight the mainstream feeling about it. I love to bench press, so I'm glad it's popular.

D: Yea, so you were saying most people think of it is as a chest exercise. There's a lot of chest involved, there's a lot of triceps. But, you're saying that it's full body. So, what other muscles are you saying are involved with the bench press?

M: Well, if you have the right technique, you're going to be using most of the muscles in your body. I think most people know that you're using your chest when you initially push-off. You've got the triceps towards the end of the lift when you're locking it out. I think most people know about those two muscles, the shoulder, too. Obviously, the front delts, but you do use a lot of back also. Your lats are what stabilize the weight on the way down. Your forearms stabilize it when it's on your chest as well. And, if you're setup correctly and you've got your feet tucked in underneath you, as you're pushing the weight up, you should be driving with your legs, and that should push all the way through your body, helping you press the weight.

I moved to Florida about five years ago and I actually found a power lifting gym. And I learned a lot of things about the bench press, I didn't know, myself. And it was funny, after going there and getting coached-up, I was actually sore in my quads the next day from bench pressing. I had a sore lower back from getting my arch set up and it really can be a full body exercise if you're doing it correctly.

A lot of guys just lie flat on the bench and have their elbows flared out to the side and it winds up just being a chest exercise that eventually winds up hurting your shoulders.

D: Well, it seems like definitely there's a couple of schools of thought when it comes to lifting and one is, primarily that of working the actual muscle, and that's what we'd

consider bodybuilding. I mean, you're lifting for a specific purpose to try to work a muscle. And in power lifting, someone who wants to increase their bench, the target then becomes the movement itself and not necessarily the muscle.

So, it would make sense, what you're saying there with the right technique, meaning technique for improving in the lift, you would be focused on the actual mechanics more and not necessarily just working your chest and triceps.

M: Right, I mean, you can turn the bench press into a strict chest exercise, depending how you're doing it, but this is where I disagree with some people. I think that when you're lifting heavier weights, that you're going to grow and build muscle as well. I know that goes against some of the text books that say that really low reps are just for strength, and then you have to do like eight reps to reach muscle growth. And then, you've got endurance with the higher reps.

I think when you use heavier weights and you move that heavy weight, your muscles grow and gets stronger as well. I think size is a side effect of strength. I think when you get strong, you'll end up getting bigger as well.

A lot of times lifters, they're not going to do just bench pressing. They'll combine that with some muscle growth techniques. You'll do some body building exercises. So, lifting the heavy weights with the lower reps on something like the bench press, but then, afterwards, follow-up with some higher reps on some more isolation exercises to kick-in some of the muscle growth effects as well.

D: Well, you certainly bring up a really good point and something that we could probably spin-off and talk about that for some time, talking about certainly the difference in targeting a specific muscle versus actually just going with a power movement that most believe will recruit the largest amount of muscle fiber anyway, whether it's that specific muscle you're trying to work or even that plus all the secondary muscles. And the theory is that that, of course, would elicit a greater growth as a result.

M: Right. I mean, it releases more testosterone and growth hormone. The more muscles you can involve in any exercise, I mean, even for fat loss. The more muscle you can use, the more calories you can burn. The same thing with this, the more muscle fibers you can recruit, I think that's overall going to affect your body and the amount of testosterone you're creating and releasing. So, overall it's going to help you grow. Then, if you want to target-in on a specific muscle later, save that for the end of the workout and get the best of both worlds.

D: What seems to be the case with these muscle magazines is that they're really talking about a lot of sculpting exercises. They don't seem to really be focusing in on power movements, most of them. What are your thoughts about these routines that are

in the muscle mags? Would you agree with that? I mean, certainly the guys that are doing the exercises have some great looking chests.

M: Yea, maybe, if that's really the pictures that go with the person that wrote the article. I mean, I've actually written for some magazines before and they don't always use my pictures next to the articles. They'll take a muscle picture and then they'll put it next to an article that somebody wrote. And I don't know who's writing some of these articles, but they're not necessarily developing the physiques that you see in the magazines. And who knows what the models are actually doing.

Not to rat-out all the magazines, but I'm sure a lot of people are aware of this by now, unless you're just starting out and you're a beginner. But, everybody's got their role in the magazine. You've got models, you've got writers and sometimes the writers...who knows what they look like. Or, they're just coming up with a new routine to help sell a magazine.

But, second of all, a lot of the models, you're talking...models meaning they could be huge bodybuilders. If you're getting your picture taken, I guess it's still models. But, they could be on massive amounts of drugs, too. So, who knows if those routines are what works for them.

D: So, pretty much a waste of time is what you would like to tell people, right?

M: I mean, you just don't know. It's not like where you're going to go for a reference, to look in the magazine. You could get lucky and find a really good routine, or you could try them all and see what works for you. But, that's not where I would go. What about you?

D: Yea. I think for the most part it's probably a waste of time. I mean, unless you're looking at the photo... If you're in the sport of bodybuilding and you're looking at the photos to kind of see what some of the top guys that are out there look like and if it motivates you. I mean, I know as a young kid, 17, 18 years old, looking at the currently magazines and stuff, it motivated me, motivated me as a bodybuilder. I wanted to attain that sort of look. But, I didn't put any stock...even then, I didn't put any stock in the workouts that they were doing, because I had smarter guys in the gym than myself that told me different. So, I was really fortunate.

M: Yea, that's good. And sometimes you don't know what kind of advice you're getting in the gym either. I remember starting off, too, around 16 years old when you first start lifting. You're not sure what's possible. You're looking at these guys and you're like, "Wow! Maybe someday I can look like that, too." Until you're an adult later on and you realize that's not all natural, right there.

D: I think that was one of the greatest things to my benefit, is that I thought that that was possible without drugs. So, I pushed that much harder and I was able to attain a lot without drugs. So, in my case, I think that worked out pretty well.

M: Overall, yeah, you're right, now that I think about it. But, was there ever a point where you realized and it kind of hurt for a little bit? Like just figuring it out for the first time, similar to finding out about the Tooth Fairy or something?

D: Right, absolutely. It sort of took the wind out of my sails, that's for sure.

M: Right. Yea, but just overall with the magazines, it depends what kind of magazine you're reading. But, there's a big difference as far as what you're going to be doing when you're training for strength and for muscle. For strength, you need...the rep ranged to need to be lower. You need to rest a lot longer. It has a lot to do with training your central nervous system, your bones, your ligaments and your tendon strength. I mean, just because your muscles are strong enough to lift the weight, doesn't mean that your bones can handle it or your ligaments can handle it. So, that's something that's got to be gradual, and your nervous system's has to adapt.

I don't know if you've ever seen people doing a weight that they really shouldn't be handling and they just start shaking and trembling and that's just your nervous system freaking out because it has never felt weight like that before. But, after you've been exposed to it a few times, your muscles can handle it. But, bones for example, they take a little while to build up some density and get used to some of these heavier loads.

D: And that's a good point to bring out, because all too often the advice that most people hear, even as beginners, they hear that what they need to do, they need to go in and they need to lift heavy and they need to do fewer repetitions. But, they don't really understand where to start, how to start, what they should be experiencing. Maybe we could share, for them, maybe some of the mistakes or maybe one mistake in particular that they might be doing when they try to bench press a lot of weight.

M: I think the number... A lot of complaints I get from people, they tell me they don't bench press anymore and they say it's because their shoulders hurt. So, one thing that people could try fixing is what they do with their elbows. It's kind of hard to explain, but if you could imagine a typical bodybuilding bench press or what you see in the gym, would be the elbows flared out to the sides and the bar touches the part of the chest, maybe even above the nipples and your elbows are pushed out to the side as you press. So, this uses a lot of the shoulders. It puts a lot of strain on the shoulders. It's fine for doing high reps and stuff, but if you get into heavier weights, over time, not immediately, you'll start feeling that in your shoulders, or at least a lot of people do.

So, in a power lifting bench press, where you're changing your technique up a little bit, what you'd want to do is tuck your elbows in to the sides. Now, the first way to do this is when you grab the bar your elbows are kind of pointing outwards. The first thing you want to do as you're holding the bar is turn your elbows in, almost to the position of a skull crusher, similar to the starting position of a tricep extension. Get your elbows turned in like that when you un-rack the bar.

So, now you've got them turned in. Now, if you lower the weight, you want to keep your forearm perpendicular, the bar path is going to have to go a lot lower on your chest. You're going to wind up touching below your nipples now instead of on your upper chest. That's just to keep your forearms straight.

By tucking the elbows in you're going to keep them close to your sides. You pull the elbows in and now you're putting a lot more on the triceps instead of on the shoulders. That's the first technique change that most people that get into power lifting make. That takes a ton of strain off your shoulders.

Right away when you try something like this, you might feel a little weaker anytime you change your technique. But, you'll blow right past that as soon as you get this down and you'll be able to continue lifting heavier with lower reps for a longer period of time.

D: Absolutely. I was going to bring up that point that once you do make some of those changes...because now you're pressing a lot more out of your triceps and losing some of that that you were getting out of your shoulders. But, in a good way, because like you said, that's probably one of the most common reasons that people are coming out of the gym with shoulder injuries, too, is that they're blaming the bench press, but really it's their technique.

M: Right. You just might not know about that unless you meet somebody that competes in power lifting and teaches you. I trained at all kinds of commercial gyms for a real long time and never figured that out until I wound up training with some people that competed and they showed it to me.

D: Well, even as a teenager, even when I was competing in the sport of power lifting, I kept having people try to correct me and I was more of a bodybuilder than I was a power lifter and I didn't want to listen to it. But, that's also the reason I didn't have a good bench. I had a great squat, I had a great dead lift, but when it came to bench, I mean, I really suffered in that area because I didn't want to take that criticism.

M: Yes, it's tough trying to have an open mind and listen to people. Even if you're stronger than somebody, somebody else might have some good advice that's worth listening to, anyway.

D: Well, here's a question for you, too. As beginners, most people are going to the gym and they're going to stick with like...as much as they might want to use the bench press, the reality is that they're going to opt for dumbbells or they're going to use something more like the Smith machine. Do you feel like the Smith machine is actually a good piece of equipment to help them with their flat bench press or should they just only go in on a day when they've got a spotter?

M: Yea, man, I get that question a lot, people want to know. I can do 200 or 250 pounds on the Smith machine. So, what does that mean I can do on the bench? They think it's going to carry-over and be the same thing. But, if you think about the Smith machine, it's sliding on that path. The machine is guiding it for you. It's not the same as when you're on a bench and you have to control that weight yourself and you have to control the path of it and get that technique down.

So, when you're on the Smith machine, these little stabilizer muscles are not being used. Then, when you go and move over to the flat bench press, it's going to feel really strange and it's going to feel funny balancing the weight. You might have the chest power to push it, but your balance and your technique might be all off.

So, I don't recommend using a Smith machine if you have any other spotters around or people that can help you. I mean, if you're at a commercial gym, just ask somebody for a spot. Try to get a training partner anyway. That's always a good idea. If your gym has a power cage, that would be the next best bet if you don't have a spotter because then you can set the pins up to be that spotter for you.

D: Well, certainly, I think it goes without saying for us as fitness and strength professionals that if you want to get better at swimming, you've got to swim. The lat pull-downs and row machines aren't going to necessarily make you a better swimmer.

But, there has to be some sort of cross-over with a lot of exercises, too, that might be able to help assist your development of those exercises, especially if you're working through like sticking points. There's quite a few of them for people through the bench press whether it's right off the chest or midway movement or even the lockout position. So, for one person they may struggle getting it off their chest, another person it may be the lockout that gives them the most difficulty in completing a bench. So, what do you feel are the best bench press assistance exercises?

M: Right, like you said, there are other exercises just like the word says, assistance exercises that can help you with a bench press. These would probably be exercises you do after the bench press or on a different day completely. It's going to involve the muscles you use in the bench press. Like you said, it's going to depend on where your weakness is and different people have different sticking points. Some people struggle

at the bottom, some people struggle at the top and different people have access to different tools and training equipment.

I'm lucky where I train, we have access to chains, bands, we have boards and all kinds of things you can use for accommodating resistance. So, if you struggle with your lockout, you know that's a tricep issue. Things you can do, if you have access to it, you can add chains or bands to the bar and it's going to get heavier towards the top of the lift where you're locking out. You're overloading the top. So, if you make the top of the lift more difficult, then when all that stuff is off the bar, like the bands and the chains, hopefully that's going to improve your lockout strength. So, those are assistant exercises you can do where you add bands and chains to different forms of bench pressing.

D: You're still doing a lot of the bench press, your just using those various techniques like the accommodator resistance or variable resistance and those types of things in order to be able to push through.

M: Yea, those are good. I think it's called the Conjugate Method that Louie Simmons talks about where you don't want to do the same exercise every single week. Take a different max effort, chest or bench press movement, add the chains, change your grip. But, do some other exercises, too that you can use for trying to get your triceps stronger, like rolling dumbbell extensions.

But, I have one favorite. I just like taking the close grip bench press and adding a pause to it. That would be my catch-all favorite assistance exercise. Because, if you stink at the bottom, adding that pause in at the bottom of the lift is going to help you push through that and the fact that you brought your grip in, you're going to be focusing more on the triceps to help you with the lockout. I like doing the close grip bench with a pause.

D: And is that something you do instead of the bench on that day? Or, is that something you do in addition to?

M: Personally, I only like bench pressing heavy once a week. But, if you wanted to try this lift and bench a second time in the same week, I would make that a speed movement. That's basically where you do six sets of three reps, doing them really fast with about 30 to 60 second rests between each set. There you use about 50 to 60 percent of your max on that exercise. That's just to work explosiveness. Personally, I don't like doing max effort or too heavy more than once a week. I think that's too much.

D: You brought up speed movements and this brought a question to my mind here just because I know for me, personally, when I've done a lot of the speed movements and stuff, the one thing that I tend to mess-up on is a lot of the breathing and control



and being able to get as much power as I can out of the movement. But, how important do you feel breathing through the movement and how should somebody breathe to get the best out of the bench press?

M: Yea, that's a good question. When you're trying to handle heavier weight, this is completely different than how you're normally trained to do it. Usually you want to take a breath and exhale as you're pushing the weight. That would be normal lifting. When you're lifting heavier, you're doing lower reps or trying to handle heavier weight, you actually want to do the opposite. You want to hold your air.

Basically what I mean by that is, as you un-rack the bar, you want to take a deep breath and hold that air in as you complete the entire rep. Don't just hold it in until you get to your chest and then breathe out on the way up, because as you breathe out, your letting all the air out, obviously, and it just makes you softer. You need to stay tight and keep that pressure in your body and that actually helps you lift more. It's really funny how it works. So, you should hold your breath, actually, the entire rep.

Now, it depends...it takes some practice. I know some guys that can hold their breath for three reps in a row without taking a breath. Personally, I take a breath after each rep. So, when I'm at the top of the lift, if I'm doing three reps in the set, I'll take a new breath at the top of each repetition.

D: Interesting. Good, to know. That's one of the things that I think I've probably not practiced enough myself, and certainly one thing that I need to work on. Let me ask you about the equipment thing. Are you for equipment, you're not for equipment, and I don't really mean like the major stuff. With power lifting, we've got all kinds of different suits. Right now, I'm just talking about weight lifting belts and straps for the people who are getting into the gym and going for that first attempt at a one-rep max, or maybe they're looking to improve their one-rep max because they purchased your program. Are you recommending that they use weight lifting belts and straps? What's your thought there?

M: There comes a point when you need it, but I don't think it's necessary right away, and here's why. I think that wearing a weight lifting belt too often and too much can actually shelter your abs and your lower back. I think you need to strengthen your core and you use it almost any exercise you do. So, one of the worst things I hate seeing is somebody that just puts their weight belt on the second they show up for their workout and have it on the entire workout, no matter what they're doing. So, I think you don't need to have that until you're doing three reps or less. That's when you should add the weight belt in.

Now, it does have some other purposes for the squat and things and it helps you push against the belt, but for the most part, I would want you to work on your core, have your strength in your lower back, get that strong and then add the weight belt in once

you're doing three reps or fewer. So, it doesn't matter what the weight is, because everybody has different strength levels. But, once you're doing three reps or less, add the weight belt in.

And same theory holds true for the wraps. Now, the wraps are what you just wrap around your wrists and that just helps keep your wrist straight, because when you're bench pressing you want to keep the wrist straight. You don't want the hand to fall backwards. That makes it harder to transfer the power through the bar. You want to keep your wrist straight when you're pressing.

So, picture if you had your wrist wrapped all the time for every exercise you did. Now, when you take those wraps off, your wrists are going to be flimsy. They're not going to be built-up. They're not going to be as strong. So, I'd say probably your warm-up sets and your lighter sets, do it without the wraps and then add those in for your heavier sets, three reps or less.

D: Great advice.

M: Now, you did ask about straps, too. That would be what you wrap around a bar when you're doing back stuff.

D: Yea, if I said strap, I did that mistakenly. I really was thinking strap.

M: Same theory on straps, too. I mean, you're only as strong as your weakest link. So, what's the point of having a really strong back and you can't even grab something because your hand's so weak that you need straps to do it. I say get your grip and get your hands strong, too.

D: Yea, so I mean, don't use the straps until you absolutely need them, until your grip is just totally gone. I agree.

So, if you could give our listeners just one bench press tip, what would you say? What can they use the next time they go into the gym that's going to make the difference, to give them that change in their bench today that's going to make their bench better?

M: That's a good question. We mentioned a little bit about rep ranges. So, that's going to be the number one thing. If you've been eight to ten or eight to twelve reps, change that up. There's going to be a transition period. We talked about getting your nervous system and everything used to lower reps. So, I would start with five reps, maybe do five sets of five. That's always a good leeway to start with.

But, an actual tip you could use right away is squeezing the bar as hard as you can when you're bench pressing. Just squeeze it really hard and pull out to the sides

like you're trying to pull the bar apart. The reason for doing this is just to recruit more muscle fibers and to keep your body really tight.

And a lot of people can't picture how this makes a difference, so this is a little exercise I like to try to have people do. If you make a bicep and squeeze the bicep and you leave your hand open and then just kind of feel how hard you can squeeze your bicep. Now, if you do that exact same thing but you also make a fist and squeeze that fist as hard as you can, and squeeze your chest at the same time, you can feel you're contracting a lot harder. It's still your bicep muscle, it's not weaker or stronger, but you've incorporated some of those other muscle groups to help it.

The same thing happens with the bench press. If you can get your abs tight, you get your arms, everything involved and just really squeeze the bar, that makes a big difference right away.

We put our wrist wraps on so tight sometimes at the gym that you can barely feel your hands, so you automatically squeeze the bar as hard as you can just because you want to make sure you're holding on tight. But, that alone helps right there. That would be a tip you could just use right away, just try the difference squeezing it extra tight. Some people have the thumb on the wrong side of the bar. I mean, how can you be squeezing the bar really hard if you've got a false grip with the thumb on the same side as your fingers. You see their hands open like they're not even squeezing it. It's just kind of lying there on their hands.

D: Absolutely. You know, one of the things, too, it seems like one of the big mistakes that people make when they're training for bench also is that they might be working out too often thinking that the more times they bench or the more times they're in the gym working with the bench the better. If I don't feel sore then maybe I should jump back on the bench again. What are your thoughts there?

M: That's probably the number one biggest mistake people make is overtraining the bench press. Just because it's so popular and everybody wants to get good at it, you wind up training it too often. So, I mean, you need more than just your muscles to rest from this. It's like we talked about your nervous system and everything. So, give your body a break. Once a week of heavy bench pressing should be enough. But, it also makes you look forward to your next workout. If you have to wait a whole week before you get to bench again, I think you take it a lot more serious than if two days from now you get another shot at it. So, you'll just sandbag it today.

D: If you could spend a few workouts with someone, obviously a lot of your coaching is done through the internet these days. You have a very popular website and really great products that people come to you for. But, if you could grab some of these people that they're motivated, they're excited to make some changes and you could

take this group to the gym for a few days, what do you think that you would be focusing on with them during course of those few days to make the difference in their bench press?

M: Yea, sure. I mean, we spoke a little bit about squeezing the bar, holding your air, tucking your elbows. So, with those things you can practice one thing at a time. But, the number one thing I'd want to help people with is decreasing their range of motion on the lift, just making the distance the bar has to travel less of a distance. And there's a few ways that you can accomplish that.

The number one thing you want to look at is a person's grip on the bar. And just make sure, obviously, the wider your grip goes, that's less distance the bar has to travel now. Because, when you're fully locked-out, if you have a wider grip it's going to be less distance.

You can't move out too many fingers right away. But, you can right away probably move out one finger and train that way for about a month and then try moving out another finger, just gradually, gradually move it out. don't just move a whole hands-length right away. That could be a little risky. But, that's the first thing I would do.

Next, we want to work on the setup and getting a nice bench press arch. So, to have a correct bench press or one that's legal in competition as you know, you're going to want your feet touching the floor. You need your butt touching the bench. And, you need your traps or shoulder blades on the bench as well. But, your lower back does not need to be flat on the bench.

You'll see a lot of people just flop down and just lie completely flat on the bench with no arch. If you get a nice arch setup, now the bar is going to be touching less of a distance as well. Your stomach is almost going to be sticking up. So, as you come down to your chest, it's going to be a lot higher. That takes some distance off the bar as well.

What I have a lot of people do is use a foam roller and they'll put that under their lower back. It's hard to just naturally have a good arch. It's something you've got to work on. Stretching the hip flexors and use the foam roller or even a Nerf football. That's something we all do at the gym. That will help you over time, develop a better arch.

D: You could even maybe roll up a towel or something like that and put under their back. That would work?

M: Yea. Sure, that would work, too. PVC pipe, too. You know, just keep looking for...as your arch improves, you can put bigger objects in there.

D: Yea, throw your girlfriend under there.

So, I think I know the answer to this question already. You've kind of covered this to some extent earlier when we were talking. A lot of people kind of feel like the bench press is for guys who want to get strong or more specifically want to get strong in just that particular movement. Do you feel it's a good exercise for overall muscularity?

M: I think it definitely is. I'm under the mind set that the heavier you lift, the bigger and stronger you're going to get. It's like Ronnie Coleman said, everybody wants to get big, but nobody wants to lift any heavy weight.

D: That's right.

M: The sculpting, isolation type exercise for eight to ten reps, it's just not going to build the same kind of big powerful physique that you're going to get. I mean, just to get some overall muscle mass, you want to use these core exercises, that compound movement that use a lot of different muscles in the lift.

Then, if you want to work on focusing in on one muscle group, then yea, go ahead and do that. But, I think doing compound movements like the bench press with lots of muscles, that's really where you're going to get a lot of growth from.

D: Well, this brings in my next question then. For you, do you feel like there's really a difference between training for strength versus training for physique development or looks. So many people sort of take that one or the other kind of stance. Where do you stand on that?

M: I think they kind of...they'll look different, how they end up looking. I mean, someone who trains for just muscle growth, they're not going to look the same as someone who's actually strong as well. I mean, how do you think the bodybuilders train when they're trying to add mass? Do they just go heavier on bicep curls? I don't think they'll do that. They use compound movements. They're using the same lifts as the power lifters are using.

I kind of use a hybrid of both together. It depends on what your goal is. I like to do the compound movements with lower reps and then change the rep schemes up a little. But, I always think compound exercises are going to do more for overall mass building.

What's your opinion on that?

D: Oh, absolutely. I've been power lifting and body building and really a lot of the body building that I did were at the time, it probably wouldn't have been... It certainly wasn't ideal for bodybuilding. It also wasn't really in favor for power lifting at the time

either. I did a lot more power movements, a lot of compound movements, real heavy training, keeping to four to six reps most of the time. And I changed up my workout program. I basically ran about two different training splits and changed them up every thirty days. And that's probably what worked the best for me throughout my training.

At 17, it took me from like 130 pounds to 19, being 225 pounds and doing that without drugs and without really deviating a whole lot from that training model. I mean, there was certainly times in there where I tried higher reps and I did enjoy periodically doing like 100 rep squats and those types of thing. I got great results from them. But, you know, for the most part, I didn't really deviate too much from those lower reps.

M: So, you had a background in both sports, but I think a lot of athletes that compete in both power lifting and bodybuilding, they borrow from each other. I'm not sure if power lifting is just strictly low reps and bodybuilding is just high reps. Because, most bodybuilders I've met and hung out with, they still do a lot of the same exercises, a lot of the same reps and a lot of the power lifters at the gym are doing a lot of the same exercises you'd see a bodybuilder do. I think it's kind of become hybrid. Everybody wants... Well, I don't know if everybody wants to, but a lot of the CriticalBench.com readers, you want the best of both worlds. You want to actually look strong and be strong.

So, I'd say build up some kind of hybrid program where you're getting the best of both worlds, doing some low reps for the strength and then adding in a little bit higher reps. But, I always think compound exercises are a great way to go.

D: For me, I did power lifting, but I was more a power lifter by default, just because bodybuilding season, there was no time really...or there was really no sport for competition to compete in when I wasn't bodybuilding. So, by default, I'll go ahead and do some of these power lifting meets.

But, to be perfectly honest, I loved going to a power lifting meet and the competition there, far more than what I gained out of bodybuilding. It seemed like any time I was doing a bodybuilding event, I was just miserable. You know, you're dieting and a lot of times the competitors, they're not the friendliest. Definitely competing as a team, it didn't seem like any of the other teams cared for me, probably because I was winning the competitions.

But, the Masters, those guys were always really helpful. Some of the guys that competed in the Open for a long time, they were real helpful and good people. But, for the most part, bodybuilding never provided the sort of comradery that power lifting did.

I remember my first power lifting meet I won my meet, but they gave me a trophy that was damaged. And another power lifter there who was also...he was in the Open

class, he was in the 198 pound weight class like myself, we had the same size trophy. There was a difference with the little plates on there. He pulls the plates off of his and pulls the plates off of mine and switches them and gives me his trophy because for him, he felt it was far more important for a younger guy like myself to have something positive to take away from that experience. Whereas, he's probably won 50 different power lifting meets, or competed in them. So, for him it wasn't as big of a deal. I never would have seen that kind of thing in...at least in my experience, never saw that kind of thing in body building.

M: Yea, that's really cool. I don't know which is harder because they're harder in different ways. I mean, power lifting, you don't really have to be strict with your diet unless you're trying to stay in a certain weight class. So, I think you might be busting your butt in the gym. I mean, I really admire bodybuilders for the amount of self discipline and what you put yourselves through with the dieting and the nutrition and going on stage in front of everybody like that.

And then, it's tough too because with the bodybuilding, you don't know what the judges are going to think or if there's any politics involved. I mean, you're not being judged on performance. It's not like you completed the lift or you didn't. It's just based on someone's opinion of you. So, that's tough, too.

D: Right. Absolutely. Well, today has been a really good experience for me, Mike. I feel like we've gotten a lot of really great information to share with our listeners and we look forward to really having you back and picking your mind some more.

M: Yea, that would be great. Next time if some people hit that 300 pound bench press and they get interested in competing, we can do a follow-up interview and start talking about some competitive power lifting strategies.

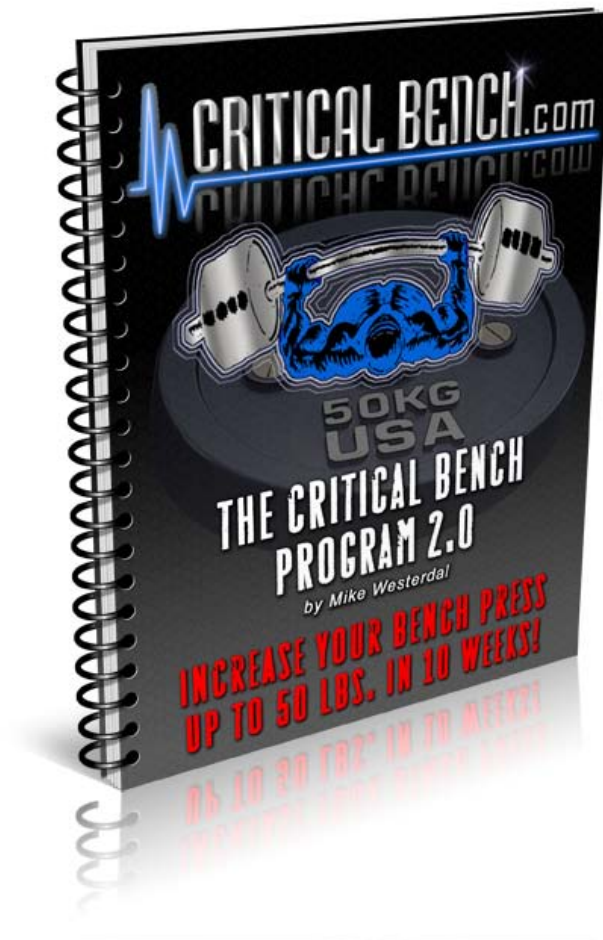
D: Sounds great. Well, thanks a lot, Mike. I appreciate your time.

You've been listening to the CriticalBench.com Weekly Muscle Building Expert Interview Series and this is your host, Dave DePew and we'll talk to you next time. Thanks a lot.

## About Mike Westerdal

Mike Westerdal is a personal trainer and amateur powerlifter residing in sunny Clearwater, FL. Mike is a contributor to REPS! Magazine and Powerlifting USA. Hi is also the founder of [CriticalBench.com](http://CriticalBench.com) one of the Internet's fist muscle building sites.

Mike is also the co-creator of the [Lean Hybrid Muscle Program](#) for those that want to gain Muscle and Lose Fat in the same training cycle.



**How A Skinny Kid With Asthma Achieved a  
452 Pound Bench And Packed On 75  
Pounds Of Muscle Mass In The Process!**

[Click Here To Read The Story](#)