

2-2009

Pressing On: Alumnus, Son Share World Weightlifting Record

Liberty University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lj_2009_feb

Recommended Citation

Liberty University, "Pressing On: Alumnus, Son Share World Weightlifting Record" (2009). *February/March 2009*. Paper 10.
http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lj_2009_feb/10

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2009 at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in February/March 2009 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.



Pressing on: Alumnus, son share world weightlifting record

February 01, 2009 | Eric Brown

During the 2001 Rose Bowl, a packed house of more than 94,000 fans watched the Washington Huskies ring in the New Year with a 34-24 victory over Purdue. Standing at the north entrance of the stadium, Liberty alumnus Bill Gillespie, the Huskies' strength coach, stared up at a firework-filled sky with tears in his eyes and thought to himself, "Why couldn't this be Liberty?"

"It really bothered me," he recalled. "It would really have meant something if it was Liberty."

After finishing his stint with Washington and serving on the Seattle Seahawks' strength and conditioning staff for two years, Gillespie returned to his alma mater in 2005 to serve as Liberty's strength and conditioning coordinator. He remembers meeting with the late Dr. Jerry Falwell, who told him his vision for Liberty athletics — the same vision that prompted the former football player to ride on a bus 84 hours from Tacoma, Wash., to walk on the team at LU nearly 30 years ago.

These days, Gillespie works primarily with LU's football program, guiding players through intense weight room workouts that enhance their on-field performance. Aside from developing champions on the gridiron, the strength coach is a 15-time World Champion and 34-time world record holder in the bench press.

When he first arrived at LU in the late 70s, a friend invited him to lift weights; convincing Gillespie he possessed the potential to become even stronger. After steadily increasing his

strength in college, he attended the National Powerlifting Championships where he competed against other lifters in the bench press, squat and deadlift. By meet's end, he ranked last in the bench press by 35 pounds.

For years, Gillespie viewed the bench press as a useless exercise, excelling more in the squat and deadlift. However, at the age of 35, he saw a dramatic change in his abilities.

“It was sort of like Sarah and Abraham where Sarah laughed at God saying, ‘There’s no way I can have children. I’m too old.’ Here I was, 35, and I’m making fun of the bench press and God in his infinite sense of humor decides, ‘Guess what you’re going to be good at?’”

At the 2005 World Association of Benchers and Deadlifters (WABDL) Southern U.S. Bench Press and Deadlift Championships in Atlanta, Gillespie became the first man over 40 to bench more than 800 pounds with a lift of 800.1.

This powerful achievement is an obvious highlight in his career, but there is another moment that remains close to his heart.

Growing up in Seattle, his son Cameron Gillespie (now a junior at Liberty) watched other World Champion powerlifters enter his dad’s gym and clean enormous amounts of weight. One day he told his dad he wanted to bench 500 pounds before he turned 17.

Taken back initially by his son’s seemingly lofty goal, Gillespie prepared Cameron for the world championships and, at 16 years old, he set a world record in his age group with a lift of 462 pounds.

Cameron’s personal best in the bench is now 485. Together, the Gillespies’ best lifts equal just over 1,285 pounds, making them the world’s strongest father-son bench press tandem.

“Getting the world record for me was probably the biggest achievement in my life, and it meant a lot to me to share that with my dad,” Cameron said. “Not a whole lot of people, especially father and son, get to share an achievement like that.”

As an inside linebacker on Liberty’s football team, Cameron is not able to concentrate on powerlifting at the moment, but he hopes to break his dad’s 800-pound mark before he turns 30.

In the meantime, Bill Gillespie is focused on returning to top form after cutting 65 pounds of bodyweight.

A month prior to the 2008 WABDL World Bench Press Championships in November, he came down with the flu, making it difficult to train for the meet. Around the same time, an explosion occurred at a bonfire, leaving him with second-degree burns on the right side of his body. Refusing to miss a workout, Bill overcame pain and sickness as he prepared for the year’s biggest competition.

“There are times when you are constantly fighting different things that are going to set you back and you’re not always going to feel like lifting,” he said. “You just learn a mentality that you are going to find a way to get it done.”

Wanting to prove age is merely a number, the 49-year-old traveled to Las Vegas for the world championships, clearing 711 pounds en route to his 34th world record and 14th and 15th world titles.

For the Gillespies, weightlifting is a tool that not only strengthens their bodies, but also their father-son relationship. While the elder Gillespie desires to reach his personal best once again, his son strives to follow in his footsteps. As they press on toward the high mark, they rely on a strength that is not measured by pounds or weights — the strength that comes from the Heavenly Father.