



Quick Study

A Conversation with 2014 IPF Junior World Champion, Mikelina Belaine

WEEKLY

By Adam Palmer

August 2014

RTS: Tell me how you got started with powerlifting?

Mikelina (Mickey) Belaine: I've been powerlifting for 2 years now. I started at A&M after a member of the A&M powerlifting team saw me lifting in the student rec center, and suggested that I come to a practice because they thought I had potential to do well in the sport and could be an asset to the team in the upcoming USAPL Collegiate National Championships. In 1 week, I had to learn how to do the powerlifts properly (squat to USAPL/IPF depth, bench w/a pause/feet flat/butt on bench) in order to try and get qualified for Collegiate Nationals on time. A week from stepping foot into the A&M Powerlifting gym, I competed in my first USAPL meet and got qualified for USAPL Collegiate Nationals.

The next 8 weeks (how long I had before Nationals) were spent trying to learn good technique and hopefully building up some additional strength. At the end of my 8 week crash course in USAPL standards of powerlifting, I won the Collegiate National Championship for the 198lb class. This experience is what got me started in powerlifting, and ultimately what made me fall in love with the sport (the Aggie Powerlifting Team & Coach played a huge role in this). I've been competing/training ever since!

RTS: So are you a crossover athlete at all? What was your sports background before powerlifting?

Mickey: Before powerlifting, Swimming and Tennis were my main sports. I had opportunities to play Tennis at NCAA Division 2 and Division 3 schools, but passed because I wanted to go to a big school like A&M.

RTS: What club did you swim for?

Mickey: I swam for the Arlington Stingrays for most of my time as a swimmer, then MARS in DFW because the head coach was also the coach for my high school. Then I picked up tennis, ended up being good at it, and tennis kind of took over my life (laughs). I played varsity, club, and had two a day practices throughout the week.

RTS: Then you are from the Fort Worth-Arlington area originally?



Mickey: Yep! I grew up in Arlington, TX-- right down the street from the Ballpark.

RTS: How did you end up in the dc area?

Mickey: So I'm actually only here for the summer. I'm about to start my 2L year at Harvard Law (in September). I'm in DC this summer working as a law fellow at the ACLU, so I'll head back to Cambridge, MA in a few weeks.

RTS: I didn't realize you were attending Harvard. That's pretty tough curriculum isn't it?

Mickey: Yeah, 1L (1st year post-graduate) year just in general is extremely miserable. There just aren't enough hours in the day to do all the reading, and analyses necessary to be prepared for class. It's basically constantly being in class or studying. 2L (2nd year post-graduate) and 3L (3rd year post-graduate) year are supposed to be much better. I enjoyed it though. It's really more the lack of having enough time that makes it challenging.

Train like an animal. Think like a human.

RTS: So then do you think powerlifting has kept you sane and/or balanced or has it been tough to stick with training while taking tons of classes? How many credit hours is a standard load for a Freshman/sophomore/junior?

Mickey: That's probably the question I get asked most frequently, "How did you survive 1L year while also pursuing powerlifting?" The answer is complicated, but the best way I can describe it is—I just did it. I refused to sacrifice on either end, school or powerlifting, and just decided I was going to make it work. While it was definitely tough, and took some extreme time management, self-discipline rather than spending the little free time I had watching TV, or going out with friends, instead I would go train, cook my meals, etc., I never once felt that it was a burden or not worth it. The love I (and I'm sure many of my fellow powerlifters) have for powerlifting is just indescribable. People would often say to me, "why not just take some time off from competing—you'll be so much more relaxed/happier", but they had it completely backwards. Powerlifting has become such a huge part of who I am, I wouldn't be anywhere near as happy or as successful without it. While powerlifting is definitely a big time commitment, ultimately I actually think it has helped me in law school. There are a lot of traits and characteristics I've developed and enhanced through powerlifting that have had tremendous carry over to my law school and career endeavors. Powerlifting has instilled a lot of good traits and values in me—for example: how to be disciplined, how to plan ahead, and how to "grind". All of these things help me to be a better student, and just a better person in general. As a 1L we take 18 hours. So that's 18 hours of class time a week, and basically anytime not spent eating, showering, or in my case training, is spent reading, re-reading, and analyzing cases for class. Like I said before, it's really the lack of time that makes all of this so challenging, luckily I love both law school and powerlifting—so it makes it a bit easier.

RTS: Then, was your undergrad was in pre-law?



Mickey: My undergrad was Political Science. There wasn't (and most schools don't have these) a set "pre-law" program. You can major in anything, and still go to law school. Just have to take the LSAT and apply, interview, write the essays, etc.

RTS: What made you decide to pursue law?

Mickey: Honestly, law always seemed like the career path for me. Very early on, while I was generally good in school, I excelled in the social sciences, English, and writing—whereas I had to work harder at math and science. I also have always been in love with reading, so the basic characteristics that tend to feed into the legal field were very apparent ever since I was a kid. Additionally, as I got older and more aware of (and involved in) social justice issues and other efforts, I came to realize that there was a lot of injustice in our world and I wanted to try and find a way to help (if even in a small way). I figured that due to where my strengths were in school, getting a legal education was going to be the best way for me to pursue being a part of making a positive impact in the world. It seems very naive & idealistic to me, but it's what brought me to law school. All I've ever wanted to do since I was a kid was make a positive impact

RTS: I wouldn't call that naive or idealistic. Some of the most successful people I know cling to that as their primary motivator for what they do. Just helping people. It's when it becomes about money that things sometimes go sour.

Mickey: Absolutely. I see it a lot in law school actually—people that were brought to Harvard by their passion for public interest work and social activism, but get caught up in the idea of "with this degree I can make so much money" and then they kind of lose their way.

Train like an animal. Think like a human.



There isn't anything wrong with making money, but it shouldn't be what drives you.

RTS: I couldn't agree more. Have you considered coaching in powerlifting or sports down the road?

Mickey: Absolutely. Honestly, my dream is to work as a lawyer, do some good in the world, then eventually make a career change, and coach powerlifting and/or open up a powerlifting gym. It's something I've always wanted to do, and I figure if I work hard enough -- I can make it happen (pretty much how I view all things in life).

RTS: Switching gears a little bit, can you go over your recent competition history? What are your best lifts in training and in competition?

Mickey: Sure, in terms of competition history...

- 2012 USAPL Collegiate National - National Champion 198lb class
- 2012 Raw Nationals - 2nd place Open 181lb class
- 2013 Raw Nationals - Open National Champion, Junior National Champion 84kg class
- 2014 IPF Raw Worlds - Junior World Champion 72kg class (also 1st place medal in Deadlift, 1st place Medal in Bench, 2nd place medal in Squat)
- 2014 Raw Nationals—Junior National Champion, 2nd place Open, Best Junior Lifter Award (highest wilks of all Juniors)

Best gym lifts : Squat - 345 / Bench - 205 / Deadlift - 455 (lbs)
Best comp. lifts: Squat - 340 / Bench - 187.5 / Deadlift - 425 (lbs)

Granted this is a mix of weight classes. I dropped from the 84kg to the 72kg this past year

RTS: Tell me how you met Mike and how RTS has changed your training

Mickey: So I had known about Mike since I first started powerlifting at A&M. My college coach's programming was somewhat inspired by Mike/ he often consulted with Mike in putting together programming for the team/ different athletes on the team. So I had always known about Mike and have always been under the impression that he is one of the best raw powerlifters and is one of the most knowledgeable powerlifting coaches. Once I graduated from A&M, I was sort of on my own/ checking in with my college coach for guidance. That's when I picked up the RTS Manual. I started putting together my own programming in an attempt to program for myself for the Arnold of 2013. It was a few weeks out from the Arnold that I emailed Mike with a question about

peaking for the meet, which is when he asked if I would consider having him do my programming for Worlds (I had mentioned that I was going to be on the USA team with him). I eagerly accepted the generous offer-- and we've been working together ever since. So, honestly working with Mike didn't change my training that much because I had always been doing some version (either my Coaches altered version/interpretation of Mike's programming, or my own) of Mike's "style" of training (auto regulation/RPE's/ etc.). However, it's definitely benefitted greatly by going "straight to the source". If anything-- the biggest change is that my training has been simplified in a way. There's less "extra" stuff-- and more just quality movements/training that directly benefits my powerlifting endeavors.

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RTS: Mike has a way of keeping things relatively simple. It's elegant, in a word.

Mickey: It's incredible. I've made so much progress with Mike in such a short period of time, I can't wait to see what we can accomplish this upcoming year w/o me having to cut weight or anything (and having longer than a few months).

RTS: Hey, thanks for your time.

Mickey: Not a problem! I enjoyed chatting with you!

About the Author: Adam Palmer is an active duty Air Force officer and the managing editor for [Reactive Training Systems](http://ReactiveTrainingSystems.com).