



The Versatile Athlete-Coach

A conversation with Bryce Lewis

WEEKLY

By Adam Palmer

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RTS: Tell me about where you are from and how you got into powerlifting.

Bryce Lewis: I used to live in Southern California and never really had too much interest in sports until the 10th grade when my friend and I decided (pretty randomly) to try out for the boys' volleyball team. We both made it, and I found a sport that I had a huge passion for. I played volleyball for three years in high school, two years in college for San Francisco State, and ended up coaching at the high school and club level for an additional five years. It was during the search for training methods to make myself a better college volleyball athlete that I stumbled upon bodybuilding.com and the forum sections there, and read everything I could and built a small group of friends online who would become really influential in my future. I began liking the workouts more than the training for volleyball, and decided to enter and compete in a natural bodybuilding competition. I ended up winning the novice division, and competed in natural bodybuilding for another 3-4 years before competing in my first powerlifting meet. I always like lifting heavy in training, and have not looked back since that first meet. I've been competing now for around 5 years.

RTS: That's a much different background than I'm used to hearing, pretty refreshing actually. A volleyball player turned bodybuilder turned powerlifter; that's not something you see very often.

Bryce: Yeah, (laughs) I was not built for volleyball, and I think that's actually something that turned out to my advantage. At 5'6" with a stocky build, I had to try REALLY hard to hang with the other guys, and I think the challenge at least aided, if not built the type of work ethic I have in training today.

RTS: So when you came into bodybuilding, you were already fairly heavy for your size?

Bryce: The average volleyball player is probably around 6'0", and most at the national level are 6'2" and up. I did have a fair amount of size, but I wasn't anything impressive at that point. I still don't think I am, but my powerlifting total is certainly up there for my weight class.

RTS: Well you placed 4th at this past (2014) nationals against some very, very stiff competition this year. I'd say that's nothing to shrug at.

Bryce: Not at all, and Adam you can attest that day could have gone better. Next year!

RTS: How has your training been going so far this season? Since we're talking about it, go ahead and share your best lifts gym/meet so we can publish these for the readers.

Bryce: In competition my best performance is a 585 squat, a 425 bench, and a 700 deadlift. In training, I've recently hit a 620 squat, a 450 bench, and a 725 deadlift.

RTS: So you did hit meet PRs at nationals if nothing else.

Bryce: Absolutely, and I'm really happy about that. I sometimes have to remind myself to stop and smell the roses when things don't go perfectly to plan. I have to

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remind myself that 50 lbs on one's total in a year at any stage of powerlifting is a great thing, even more rare the more experienced an athlete gets

RTS: What did your numbers look like when you started?

Bryce: When I started, I think my bench was 335, deadlift was 565 or so, and squat was 495 (in competition)

RTS: Wow, so you were already pretty strong, presumably from years of bodybuilding?

Bryce: Yep, exactly. A lot of "bodybuilding" training tends to resemble the same goals of a powerlifter, especially at earlier stages. There's less of a direct difference than I think people realize

RTS: Do you think bodybuilding and coming from that background has helped you with injury prevention?

Bryce: I'm not sure if coming from a bodybuilding background has helped with injury prevention. I think that trying to keep to good technique has helped with injury prevention, and trying to choose loads I can actually manage has been good as well.

RTS: What training method did you use when you started out?

Bryce: For years, I was doing a variation of Westside actually. You can call it conjugate training or something else, but Eric Helms, my coach, tweaked it for the raw powerlifter and that was actually my first training program for powerlifting. Essentially it was a biweekly rotation of heavy squats or deadlifts, with the opposite lift on "speed" work. So, squatting heavy was paired with "speed" deadlifts. There was a lot of variation in that program, but nothing of the likes that Louie would suggest (I think). A lot less bands, chains, and bar varieties.

RTS: How did you meet Eric Helms? Rather, how did he end up becoming your coach?

Bryce: I have to thank the internet for that one. I was around when 3DMJ (3D Muscle Journey, a bodybuilding / powerlifting prep company) first got started. I was coached by Layne Norton for a year for bodybuilding, and then applied to be coached by Eric Helms. We actually both



competed in the same natural bodybuilding competition before that, and kept in touch. He's been doing my training for about 5 years now, and though I continue to coach athletes myself, he's been a great mentor, friend, and of course, a great powerlifting coach.

RTS: What do you do for a living? I know you run TSA, but is that your full time job?

Bryce: It is! I'm lucky enough to be able to pursue my passion as a career, and we have about 75 athletes in total between 4 coaches. We're coming up on the one-year anniversary on just a week or so.

RTS: That's awesome.

Bryce: On that note, it's amazing that all of this essentially comes from the internet. Without social media, I don't think I ever would have been able to pursue this. A website does help create that brand and image you want clients to identify with you.

RTS: How did you really get started with that?

Bryce: I had maybe 3 clients before I started The Strength Athlete proper, but I spent an intense few weeks brainstorming the business name, creating a website and all the back-end things I would need, with the support of 3DMJ. I talked online to a lot of close friends and influential people, and had them all announce and give their recommendation (if they wanted to), on the same day to drive business. I originally had something like 100 applications, it was crazy.

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RTS: So then you are selective about the clients you take on? Or rather can you afford to be?

Bryce: I could have, but I didn't want to be. I wanted to give everyone the same degree of fairness and not play favorites. The only thing I asked was for clients to be dedicated and have good communication. There have been some that fall off the radar for sure, but a huge amount didn't. I imagined that if 3DMJ were selective from the start, they would probably screen for someone other than a newbie bodybuilder wanting to do his first competition who plays volleyball. So I took everyone that applied, and eventually found a few other coaches to help out, and they've developed into amazing coaches in their own right.

RTS: When did the workload become such that you needed extra coaches?

Bryce: I think I hit around 35 clients and just couldn't serve the amount of applications I was getting. I could have taken on more clients, but I didn't want the quality of coaching to drop because I was frantically trying to respond to 50 emails a day. Taking on other coaches kind of happened organically. They were friends that turned into co-workers, with the exception of Rede Frisby, who was a referral from Eric Helms, and a damn good one. We try as much as possible to be a team instead of 4 separate coaches, and hold each other to the highest standard.

RTS: Do you think it's harder for an online coach that doesn't have a huge total 'X' or has won some huge competitions in their past? In other words, do you think it's more important to establish yourself as a great coach or a great athlete first?

Bryce: Off the start, it's helpful to either be a good athlete or well-known in some other way. Simply because having a reputation as a good coach is something that requires time

by its very nature. I can think of great coaches who aren't great athletes, and being a good athlete certainly doesn't make you a good coach. What we've done is said "if you want to be coached by TSA, we'll assign coaches based on their availability. If you're cool with that, we'd love to have you and can provide excellent coaching. If you're not, there's plenty of other coaches we can refer you to. No bias on the side of the athletes or the coaches.

RTS: Right, nobody just comes out the gate being a great coach. I can definitely attest to that myself.

Bryce: Yeah, and I have to say that I've learned more about coaching and programming over the past year than I have in my lifetime.

RTS: Have you been on the [RTS classroom](#) events, or at least seen a few of them?

Bryce: I've seen a few, and really want to purchase a few more. It's an amazing thing and I think the format has great potential. Seriously. It's a primer in powerlifting training, and RTS has done an outstanding job of making that available.

RTS: So on that note, how did you meet Mike? Had you met him before nationals this year?

Bryce: Actually I met him for the first time at nationals and was definitely a little star-struck. He's a role model in a lot of ways for me, between being a public speaker and writer, a great coach, and a great athlete. Those are all things I strive for, and who doesn't like seeing a drug free 800lb deadlift? But I had read about him and learned about him through Eric Helms, and familiarized myself with more and more of the work he was doing.

RTS: How has RTS and auto-regulation impacted your training?

Bryce: Quite thoroughly. Originally I used it to tell my coach the rough difficulty of a set, because it was such a better tool than "that set was pretty hard". Later, I moved to a fully auto-regulated program and ran that for about half a year. What we've done now is utilized a DUP framework, but kept the core of auto-regulation. What I've found through RTS a while back is just that there are so many more ways of prescribing work for an athlete than basing it on %1RM, and that other methods can lend insight for an athlete. It's a very cerebral approach, and that fits well with my personality. But when I say it's affected my training/coaching deeply, I mean that is so nice



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now that the majority of athletes I talk to are at least informed about the RPE scale, and that if I say, "can do you do this weight for a triple at a 9?" that they know what I'm talking about. Mike uses the scope on a rifle analogy, and I've been implementing something like that in training for athletes. I have some athletes who do daily max training. It's so much more refined to say "work up to a single at a 9" than it is to say "work up to a heavy single, but don't go too heavy." I see lots of potential in using the "reps in reserve" terminology as well, over some conversations with Eric.

RTS: When is your next meet?

Bryce: A local meet in Denver, CO in about 9 weeks, and then the Arnold in March 2015.

RTS: Can you talk about your dad a little bit?

Bryce: My dad and I trained together for many years, and it was a really cool bonding experience getting that time with him. He competed in bodybuilding as well, and fell into it after seeing some of the winners of his division at my competitions. But yeah we were training father's day morning and we were benching and alternating sets between us of I think 330lbs. He was false gripping the bar, and through a freak accident, the bar slipped out of his hands, and dropped onto his throat. I lifted the bar off as fast as I could, but not before serious, life-changing damage could occur. It was the most traumatic experience of my life. He was rushed to the hospital and the scariest thoughts ran through our family's mind. He was in a medically induced coma for a while. We weren't sure if there wasn't permanent brain damage or that his throat would stay open. His vocal chords were destroyed, and he will permanently talk with a loud whisper now. BUT...he's alive, we didn't lose him, and I'm forever thankful for that. He's living basically like normal now in Southern California

RTS: I've actually yelled at people about false grip on bench press after meeting your dad. The conversation usually begins, "Are you a f'ing idiot?"

Bryce: (laughs)

RTS: So now is he just a very "soft" spoken individual, and has it affected his personality at all? I would imagine that living that way might get frustrating.



Bryce: He's always had a really big personality, so he makes jokes about it all the time and I think he's just carried on. For people who are just meeting him, it might be hard to understand him, but he's finding that it actually makes people listen closer, instead of just waiting their turn to speak. There was a tough period there, and still his medical condition isn't totally stable, but I think he's hopeful, and has the best attitude about it all.

RTS: Do you know of any technology being developed to help his situation? I would imagine there probably is something out there.

Bryce: Yeah there are some technologies that may help, but they would require functioning vocal chords I believe. There are a few cool devices, but in my opinion, they're even harder to understand than his whispering (think Stephen Hawking).

RTS: Thanks so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview.

Bryce: Not a problem dude, thank you!

About the Author: Adam Palmer is the managing editor for [Reactive Training Systems](http://ReactiveTrainingSystems.com).