



# A True Strength Sensei

A conversation with South Brooklyn Weightlifting Club Head Coach Paulie Steinman

## WEEKLY

By Adam Palmer

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RTS: How did you get into powerlifting and consequently end up working with Mike?

**Paulie Steinman:** I got into powerlifting through CrossFit. It was 2009 and CrossFit was still kind of underground. I sucked at most of the body-weight and endurance workouts and I excelled at powerlifting - in the framework of CrossFit.

RTS: How were you introduced to CrossFit?

**Paulie:** I found CrossFit on my own. I wanted to learn more about kettle bells. I was looking for something different. I believe I did a web search for kettle bell workouts and CrossFit South Brooklyn popped up. I had no idea what CrossFit was or what it was about. I just wanted to learn something new so I signed up for a free class.

RTS: How did that go for you, your first workout that is? I'm assuming you had a similar experience to mine, ending in a pool of misery.

**Paulie:** It was hard. Tabata air squats were involved and I was sore for a week. Yeah, physical sadness followed by euphoria. Haha.

RTS: So you found CrossFit and then powerlifting. When did you decide to compete in powerlifting and then I'm guessing you ended up meeting Mike somehow?

**Paulie:** I competed in my first meet in 2010. It was a USAPL meet. I didn't connect with Mike until 2013 when I asked him to do my programming for me. I just started a weight cut to get down to 105kg and I my goal is to make a good showing at Raw Nationals 2015.

RTS: While we're on the topic of competing, what are your best lifts in competition and in training? I'm assuming you are only competing in raw lifting.

**Paulie:** So, the last meet that I competed in was the American Open in 2013. I totaled 610 with a 202.5 squat, 132.5 bench, and a 275 DL. I weighed in at 137kg and I was 43 yrs old. In the gym I have hit 500 on squat and 325 on bench. I am currently working

my way down to 105kg and I will probably compete in July and then compete in at Raw Nationals.

RTS: Nice. I'd say those are respectable numbers

**Paulie:** That's good to hear. I always want more! It's all a story in itself. My numbers aren't amazing and my training has been erratic. It's kind of a sore spot for me that my numbers aren't better because I know what I am capable of. For better or worse, I have always put my lifters first. Basically I have poured all my energy into building my gym. We end up coaching about 7-9 hours a day in addition to programming and administrative work. I tell people that if they want to be a good or even a great powerlifter then don't open a gym. I feel like I am finally at a place where I can resume training in earnest.



RTS: What about your lifters; any recognizable names?

**Paulie:** I am currently coaching Joanna Welsh. She is a 47kg lifter who won M1 and Open at the 2014 Raw Nationals. She is currently training for the Arnold and then Worlds. I have been working with Joanna for a little over two and a half years. She has only been powerlifting for about three years. I like bringing up lifters from scratch. There are many

*Train like an animal. Think like a human.*



**strong lifters at my gym and many have passed through my doors. I have handled many world-class lifters at meets such as Raw Nationals but I can't and won't claim them as my own. I feel like we are a brand-new sports franchise that is taking time to bring up our superstars. I guess I could recruit lifters but that is not really my style.**

RTS: When you get a new lifter, how do you determine where to take their training?

**Paulie: How do you mean?**

RTS: Well, I guess you exclusively coach powerlifting? I remember your wife saying she is into Olympic weightlifting. You also coach that?

**Paulie: Ah, I see. I coach both, in fact I was recently certified as a USAW Advanced Sports Performance Coach. Usually a lifter will come to SBWC with a general idea about the kind of training they want to do. We then assess their skill, mobility, strength. Finally, we'll make a recommendation on the path that would best suit them. We also do all of the programming for our lifters.**

RTS: So your gym has a lot going on at once. I'm also assuming it is friendly to CrossFit as well. Do you run classes or an open format?

**Paulie: Yes, there is a lot going on at once but no CrossFit. There are plenty of CrossFit gyms in the neighborhood. CrossFit has been great for exposing people to powerlifting and Olympic Weightlifting. It's also been problematic in that it often creates unrealistic expectations. We run our sessions in an open coached format. Most of our veteran lifters are following our programming.**

RTS: So you have a group of veterans all training together or is it pretty mixed among experience levels?

**Paulie: I like to mix it up whenever I can and place novices with veterans. It helps the novices feel more comfortable and the veterans can share their knowledge. We have developed a very strong culture over the years. All of our lifting sessions are open to all of our lifters.**

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RTS: You must have had a profession before you became a full time coach?

**Paulie: Yes. I have had a few professions before I became a full time strength coach. I have worked as a Grip in the Film and Television industry in New York. I eventually joined IATSE LOCAL 52 where I continued working as a Grip. I also started and ran a specialty film equipment rental company. That all lasted for 15 years. Then, Becca Steinman, my wife, and I started a screen printing and embroidery company in Brooklyn. That lasted for 10 years. At our peak we had 14 employees and we were pushing out around 30,000 units per month. There was definitely overlap with my first business and our second business.**

RTS: Wow, so you have a lot of experience in different markets. What happened to your screen-printing work?

**Paulie: A lot happened with the company. In a nutshell, it was too expensive and too competitive to run this kind of company in New York and we eventually had to shut it down. All off that experience has helped shape me as a strength coach.**

RTS: Got it. I'm guessing it was at worst successful because we are having this conversation?

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**Paulie:** Eh, maybe that I am really adaptable and good at survival.

**RTS:** As a coach what do you think has helped develop you the most? Did you have a lot of experience as a younger athlete?

**Paulie:** I practiced Judo through my teens. Sensei Marc Cohen helped shape my philosophy towards training and competition. I am 44 now so that started over 30 years ago! As a coach, life experience has helped me develop the most. I have been through a lot and I have done a lot. I have experienced failure almost as often as I have experienced success. All of this has given me a unique perspective. I believe that being a good coach quickly evolves from teaching someone how to lift to teaching them how to be a lifter. I also try to surround myself with great people.

**RTS:** Do you find that many of your athletes don't distinguish between lifting weights and the commitment that comes from being a competitive weightlifter, or is that something you have to break them of early?

**Paulie:** It's rare that we have a new lifter who truly understands the commitment that is required to be a competitive lifter of any sort. We do have to break

many new lifters of their preconceptions and simultaneously build them up. We don't expect everyone to understand right away but we ask them all to keep an open mind.

**RTS:** To that end, what advice would you have for an intermediate lifter looking to become an advanced lifter?

**Paulie:** Simple, get with the right people. There is so much noise out there and it is very easy to get lost. If an intermediate lifter is looking to advance, they should start by finding a good coach. It is immensely helpful for a lifter to have their lifting and their expectations objectively managed. It's a plus if they can find the right lifting environment with the proper equipment. Honestly, that's why I started SBWC.

**RTS:** Thanks so much for your time Paulie.

**Paulie:** No problem, thanks for thinking of me!

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