

# Steve Gough Interview

## Steve Gough Interview - Part I

Steve was asked about his background in sports and how he got started in weightlifting, who some of the lifters he coached were and what they had done, how he would describe his training philosophy, and a little about some of the coaches who had an influence on him as far as his training philosophy, and his thoughts about the OTC program.

In future questions, we will ask Steve more about his training philosophy and some lifters he has watched who impressed him, and his ideas on improving lifting in the US.

**Marty:** Thank you for the opportunity, though I must say that it is you who is really helping our sport with your out-in-the-front leadership. The old refrain "that it is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease" seems not to be the case with USAWeightlifting. Sometimes it seems that what we say is falling on deaf ears. And then again there is anecdotal evidence that what we have to say is being heard (and acted upon) by more than just a few of our more open-minded peers. I believe that it will take the power of the voting booth, aka the BOG, to determine whether or not our peers are really listening... and believing. Then and only then will GoHeavy really be reaching its potential.

I will try to answer your questions fully. I will confess that often times I tend to leave out much that maybe pertinent... a penchant of the wandering and aging mind I suspect.

As a kid growing up in San Francisco much of my life was filled with playing organized basketball and baseball, along with stickball, strikeouts, pickup games of hunch, touch football (always running up the steep hill I lived on). CYO had a lot to do with the organized part and in particular certain individuals (adult men) who freely gave up their time (and probably money). The example set by those men had a profound impact on me in later years when it came to be my turn to do my duty, to do my part. I still feel that way.

As for weightlifting, in the late 50's one of my neighbors built a small gym in his garage. And often times we tried to emulate the Konos, Emrichs, Schmanskis, etc in the old Strength and Health. Yet, I was unaware of any competitive goings-on in my area at the time. In late '65 I enlisted in the Marine Corps, subsequently going to Vietnam later in '66 and spending almost the entire year of '67 in-country. More than any single entity the Marine Corps gave me the realization of just what a man could do, how much he

could withstand, both physically and emotionally. What people could do working together for a common goal, even under the most trying of circumstance.

I became a San Francisco policeman in January of '69 and within a year or so I started to lift weights again. In San Francisco there was really only one place to lift weights seriously... and that was Jim Schmitz's Sports Palace. Meeting Jim Schmitz brought on a 35 year friendship, which exists to this very day. Jim had a profound impact on me and when I began coaching years later it was his basic format that I began with. Training in an environment loaded with National Champions, record holders and Olympians (the likes of Ken Clark, Mario Martinez, Dan Cantore, Bruce Wilhem and on and on and on) tends to give one a different perspective... a perspective which holds few bounds.. The Sports Palace of those days was a competitive environment that did much to shape my thinking and subsequently help produce very good results later on in my coaching career.

Never having formal training or schooling as far as our sport goes I was always particularly keen on digesting the experience, thoughts and methods of others. From Jim Schmitz's basic three days a week training I added a day... soon I added another. Why not? I loved this coaching thing. The Angel Spassov visit further ignited the learning process, expanding the known limits of training capacity beyond anything I had seen so far in my w/l experience. Then Lyn Jones and Drago came aboard and good things really started to happen. I use to bend Drago's ear on a near-daily basis... especially when some of my more talented juniors went to the OTC. But, it was actually a Lyn Jones article in Bob Hise's magazine about the Bulgarian training system that really opened up my eyes. I had always tended to drive my lifters towards the extreme. But that included besides the lifts every assistance exercise you could think of. But so many of those assistance exercises I could never really understand the why's, the wherefore's, the when's to place them in your scheme of things. Then here comes along the best lifting country in the world saying to forget them entirely. Made sense to me, at least enough to give it a try.

My first real go at it was with my son Tom (82.5) and my super lifter Jasha Faye as they both prepared for the '91 Junior Worlds a few weeks away. School interfered with doing Jones interpretation verbatim, so I broke it up somewhat and gave it a shot. As I look back I concede it was a "killer," too tough at the time for Jasha to handle, and yet, Tom really took off with it. Mind you, I steered this effort without a really good grip on the dynamics involved, not realizing all the little

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nuiances, etc etc. I was coaching from a magazine article not really knowing the why's the Bulgarians did it this way, only knowing that they did.

In approx a two week period Tom went from a 132.5 snatch to 142.5 (straps) and from 165 C&J to 175 C&J. Outstanding to say the least. It was a rush job ,quite frankly, fueled by Toms own incredible drive and toughness. I was jumping the gun on a system that would actually take me years to understand, and really never quite master.

For several years all my best juniors went to the OTC (Tom, Jasha, Pete (Pietro) Sciano, Tom Logan and subsequently followed by Jason Kristol in the latter part of the 90's. With the best off in Mecca, there were lean years at the old' Marin Training Center, until fortune brought back Jasha from the OTC and the coming together of Jasha, John (Barney) Tremblay, the great Jeff Michaels, Dan Lang, Dave Conragan, Louie Nave and to a lesser extent Kevin Winters (who I had worked with over the years) and John Coniff among others. All vying for a shot at the '96 Olympic Trials. Five made it from the Marin Training Center's team, with three more on the bubble. It was a most exciting and satisfying time for me in our sport. The funny thing about the system that I have come to employ is that it doesn't necessarily rely on any creative genius on my part. I was fortunate enough to have intelligent, driven athletes. I put it out there the level they needed to reach and they went after it and, for the most part, succeeded. You know the ol' "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make 'em drink."

For some, school got in the way, jobs got in the way, distance and travel got in the way, family commitments/responsibilities got in the way. The situation was never perfect ala say the OTC. But spirit and fire and determination were never lacking. It is easier to explain by citing our three supers (jasha, barney and jeff). All trained together, by and large following the same outline, ie, snatch, C&J and squat. To quote a recent Jeff Michael's recollection "it was like competing in a meet against each other three days a week, every week for nine months." The sessions usually concentrated on one lift and squat. Every session was intense, self-driven, yet always mutually driven by three individuals who couldn't stand losing to their training partners, no matter what the endeavor, no matter how fatigued, how wornout, whether attempting something never tried before or something that defeated them that day, over and over. And all done with a smile, an occasional flash of anger (though rare), a ton of barbs and more humor than SNL. Some of the highlights training-wise was the

three of them pushing/driving/compelling each other to a 160 snatch and/or a 200 kg C&J in a training session. Not particulary great weights except when you realize that Jeff was approx 35 years of age and coming off a long lay off. Or Barney pushing 30 with a passel of kids to feed all the while working late nights and less than three years in the sport and never really able to devote near enough time to train. And Jasha, having left the OTC in early summer of '95, a couple of bulging disks in his lower back, torn pec and shoulder, disheartened after only a 137.5 snatch at the Nationals and ready to hang up his lifting shoes (only to come back and nail 165 at the OLY Trials the following year).

The dynamic really hasn't changed, except that more training sessions are added that we weren't able to do before. There is more attention to rest periods given throughout the course of a workout. And both lifts are attempted each training session. The philosophy is quite simple.... three days per week (preferably pm), snatch, rest, c&J, rest, squat, rest snatch and so one with occasional fine-tuning and some alterations of sequence, depending on.... well I hope you get the picture. Morning sessions of those three days are shorter and at a lesser intensity. Alternate days less intense yet, sometimes utilizing power movements depending on the individuals needs. The process was and is to find what each lifter had/has in his tank and bring it out of him. Target weights are attacked. And if the competitive environment can draw even more, then so be it. If one can't seem to quite reach it, then consider the options of which there may be many. Options I sometimes use include: reset your target weights or stopping altogether (if warranted) or dropping down and coming backup (whether using the same sequence or a slightly different one where you think applicable) or coming back for another session (and another if fit enough and warranted). Often times we will hold an impromptu meet with targeted attempts followed by a complete training session or conversely, a complete training session followed by an impromptu meet... always trying to mimic that competitive situation and seriousness of purpose.

When to push on, when to call it? What are you looking to get out of this training session? Is it reasonable? In the larger scheme of things will it help you reach your goal? How's the energy level (both physical and emotional)? Will one more help you today, yet hurt you tomorrow? When is enough, enough? or not enough? These are questions I imagine that our more successful foreign counterparts must ask themselves. These are questions that I ask myself. Time is of the essence, waste it and you will

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not get it back. Which brings up the question of the OTC. You can't but help get the feeling that there is no sense of urgency coming from the very place whose every effort should be one of urgent necessity. If our lives depended on their modus operandi we would be exactly where USAWeightlifting is in international rankings... all bet dead and buried. It takes courage to lead, especially if you are wracked by indecision, afraid to take steps not affirmed by the status quo. But the status quo is the very reason we are where we find ourselves. Fifteen years ago our leadership took the chance and brought in qualified (or so we thought) people to get the ball rolling. We had success and in time it ran its course. Time does not stand still. We have to do it again, and again, and again if need be until we get it right. Search and find those willing and able. We have to support those people all the while holding their feet to the fire. We have to create and maintain a sense of urgency until there is no longer a need. There is no other way.

As a final note, some of the athletes I have coached from inception are: Tom Gough (Olympian, world jr, srs, pan ams, many time record holder, winner Silver Dragon) Jasha Faye ( Super Natl jr champ and nat jr record holder, jr worlds), Pete Sciano (natl jr champ and record holder, jr worlds), Tim Logan (natl jr champ and record holder), Jason Kristol (super nat jr champ, record holder, bronze medalist jr worlds). Chris Marie (french super nat champ record holder), Justin Braun (super nat coll champ), John Tremblay (super '96 oly trials), Dave Conragan ('97 Sr Nat champ).

I have also coached/trained hands-on: Ric Eaton (87 Pan Ams, 88 oly trials), Kevin Winters (88 oly trials), Jeff Michaels (95 amer, 96 nat champs, oly trials), John Coniff (gold medalists '95 sr nats C&J, 96 oly trials), and Dan Lang (nat level competitor silver med nat chmps,etc) Matt Thompson (super, 2000 NACCI)

Steve

### Steve Gough Interview - Part II

Tell us more about how Tom (Gough) trained near his peak. What were his best in front/back squats? What are your thoughts about the OTC and Tom's and your experience there?

One thing I have heard about training at the OTC is that almost all of the lifters train the same irrespective of their weaknesses. True? Agree or disagree? Why?

Tom was a resident of the OTC twice (91-92 and 94-

2000)) and was in Dragomir's hands until the last year or two when Tom started to apply his own take on what I had been preaching. Tom and Dragomir had a history/habit of butting heads of which I got to witness first hand several times. The relationship put a pall over the whole experience, yet Tom trained well right up to the Games. Unfortunately, it didn't really pay off till he reached Sydney where he was in excellent shape. But, alas, he didn't get to lift there and we never got to find out what he really could have done.

I would much rather you talk to Tom directly and get it straight from the horse's mouth as much of my contribution was mainly by telephone. Although, in 1999 I spent two and a half months at the OTC working with him daily in prep for the Athens Worlds. Tom created an unusual approach after the 2000 Oly trials leading up to the Games.... basically, on Mon, Wed and Friday mornings he would snatch 120x1,140x1,160x1 (Apparently getting to the point of being rote). His confidence with the big jumps reminded me somewhat of David Rigert after Munich (Rigert was one of Tom's heroes). Tom has always been very strong mentally with the weights. Just ask Randy Strossen of Milo who trained with us during Tom's early stages of his lifting career. The pm sessions would find him snatching up to 170 kgs. I don't recall his C&Js and squatting poundages for that period, but in an effort to improve his jerk (which cost him in Atlanta and Thailand dearly) he would jerk off the blocks to the point he one day advised me he jerked 200 kgs for triples and one set for 5. Once there he called me routinely from Australia where in one of the last weeks of training leading up to the Games he had worked up to 170 kgs in the snatch and 210 in the C&J on both his heavy workouts that week. He was very excited and confident, planning on moving up to 175/177.5 and 215 for the following week which was to be his last hvy training sessions before tapering off somewhat for competition. His bodyweight was always kept at 94 kgs due to his experience at Atlanta coming in way too heavy a week out (6 kgs over) and costing him unnecessarily. In Australia Tom was more confident than I had ever known him to be before. He was now routinely handling a 380 total approx twice a week and determined to up that to 390 or better on the "big day." Not quite the 400 kg level that the medal dais demanded, but respectable, very respectable. It is too bad that he hadn't gone that route several years before. I've always felt that both he and Wes really missed out by not putting the pedal-to-the-metal right after Atlanta. There you are... that sense of urgency that I have mentioned to you previously. Honest to God I don't know what we are waiting for.

His best BS was 272.5 X2 or 3. His best FS was

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240 kgs (several days ago we talked about it and he reminded me that it was very easy). He actually c&jed 215 in training at that time, weighing in the high 90's in prep for the '97 Worlds. At those World Championships he twice cleaned 212.5 for the bronze only to miss the jerk. Dragomir would subsequently relate to me that they got to Thailand way too late, no time to acclimate, possibly costing him that medal. Drago's sentiments at the time, not mine. Too bad!

Tom had developed a real discomfort in his left upper back (rhomboid area?) over the last couple of years in his career and wound up front squatting soley. A position of which I have advocated for years now.

As far as the OTC and one size (routine) fits all... I do not especially find fault with one size fits all if (and a big if) you are training under a Bulgarian style approach. After all, what is the name of the game? but snatch and clean and jerk. Of course subtle and not so subtle differences in fitness levels and general talent for either lift may dictate a somewhat different approach for certain individuals, yet they will all concentrate on the lifts and at a very high intensity. But if not utilizing the Bulgarian approach what do you generally see, especially in American lifters? For my money I see a lack of real speed and explosiveness (at least not where it could and should be). An apparent unfamiliarity lifting big/max weights as a matter of course in one's training on a regular basis. And as a result of that lack of a heavy lifting history in training an almost certain TIMIDNESS when it comes to the international platform and challenging the "big dogs." My real criticism of the OTC and the training methods/philosophy employed would be that "it is not working, it has not worked for years. And no one seems to want to rectify it, much less admit it." There is an incredible rigid inflexibility in our thinking, bordering on and including self-denial. Yes, the emperor has no clothes, but apparently he refuses to look in the mirror and see himself for what he is.