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The Strongest Raw Female Powerlifter – April Mathis



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Like many people new to the sport of powerlifting, I wanted to know how I would measure up and what standards had already been established. The name that consistently showed up at the top of that list was April Mathis. I don't know if I ever told her how much I actually stalked, I mean, admired her before we befriended one another, but I was awestruck by her amazing strength and ability. I remember the first time April messaged me to give me advice, I woke my husband in the middle of the night because I couldn't contain my excitement. She demonstrates the possibilities of the female strength athlete while at the same time setting the standards extremely high. Allow me to introduce the strongest raw female powerlifter in the world, April Mathis.

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Please, introduce yourself.

My name is April Mathis. I'm 29 years old. I've been lifting for 12 years and competing for 7 years.

What made you want to start competing in powerlifting?

I liked lifting since first day I tried it. I wasn't sure first if I wanted to do bodybuilding or powerlifting. I went to Tampa Barbell in October 2008 and decided to try competing. My first competition was bench only in February 2009 and first full power meet was in December 2009.

April Mathis Breaks All Time Powerlifting...



(April at RUM 3, one of the very first videos I ever saw of Mathis)

What are your best competition lifts and what equipment did you use?

Best contest lifts are 650lbs. squat with belt and wraps, and 615lbs. with just a belt, 451.9lbs. bench with just wrist wraps, 589.9lbs. deadlift with just a belt. I have never competed with gear but plan to bench with a shirt sometime this coming year in a meet.

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How do you train? Do you have a specific gym? Do you follow a specific program?

I do what I feel ready to when I feel ready to with lifting. Almost always heavy though, with exception of a few things that respond better to moderate weight. That's the best I can explain it. I need a lot of recovery time now. I used to train more often, but I train 2 days per week usually now. I do not train every lift every week. I do not follow any specific program. Go by feel and try things that I think will help. And peak strength last 6 weeks or so before a meet. That's the only time I really follow more of a definite plan. I train at several gyms around here, but most of the time go to Powerhouse gym in downtown Tampa for right now.

What is your favorite lift and why? Do you have a favorite accessory lift?

Bench press. Always been my favorite since I tried it. I joke that it's because you get to lay down and lift at the same time, lol, but in reality I just enjoy it most. I don't really have a favorite accessory lift but enjoy any other kind of pressing movement.

This video is private

(April hitting a 447 pound bench press – she has since improved this number)

You have mentioned your thoughts on how the various classes and categories should be divided in powerlifting, can you explain your opinion on this?

I don't really disagree with how it is for the most part. I definitely do not think there needs to be juniors or submasters at all. There also doesn't need to be a separate category for crossfit or anything like that. I do think the overall winner should be whoever puts up the biggest numbers that day, regardless of what age, weight, sex, etc that they are. I don't believe in formula for that. If the biggest

bench press at a meet is 600lbs, then that person is the best bencher that day. If the biggest total is 2000lbs, then that person is the overall winner of that meet. Just my opinion though.

Name some of your favorite lifters and why.

Ok, this is a hard one because there is a lot of people. I learned a lot from many different people I've trained with in many different places and also a few I have discussed different ideas with. So first thanks to all the people I've trained with throughout the years. I'm going to limit this to people that I find really impressive at lifting or was really impressed with at the time. Tommy Fannon and Mike Schwanke was interesting to watch them compete on squatting when I first went to a powerlifting gym. Steve Goggins very impressive to watch lift (seen him pull 800lbs easy at around 50 years old) and always enjoyed squatting with Jon Grove when I lived in Georgia.



(Steve Goggins – one of the greatest powerlifters of all time)

Jon Bernor maybe the best squatter I have ever trained with at a gym, even though I couldn't squat heavy for the short time he was here in Florida due to injury, it was fun lifting with him some. He did paused triples with no belt and no wraps over 800lbs. Never seen anyone else do this. Dru Patrick one of the top few best shoulder pressers in the world and also great at incline and other pressing movements. Richard Ficca probably the best bencher I have ever trained with. Greg Jurkowski as far as being a great puller, and the way he trains deadlift I have used a similar idea more recently. John Manly, the only person who has done more than me on goodmornings in person in the gym and made it look easy. As far as people I have not trained with, Andrey Malanichev

was the most impressive full meet lifter I have ever seen in person.
Every squat record he does looks like an opener.



(2013 RPS South Fl Conquest – Dru Patrick is the massive guy standing in the middle)

Eric Lilliebridge also very impressive. Zahir Khudayarov and Jim Benson the two craziest people I've watched in meets, but also both have huge lifts. Jeremy Hoornstra the best benching I have ever watched in person. George Leeman the best deadlifting I have seen in person. Vince Urbank was also very impressive to watch deadlift several years ago. I really liked watching Amit Sapir squat without wraps 826lbs. in person also, considering he is my height and I outweigh him by 50lbs.



(Zahir & Anna Khudayarov with me and April, Anna, and I at the GPC Worlds 2015)



(Amit Sapir – recently named the greatest squatter of all time)

Of course the greatest ever benchers and pullers I have only seen lift on video. All of the shirted benchers pressing over 1000lbs are amazing- Gene Rychlak, Scot Mendelson, Ryan Kennelly, Mike Womack, Tiny Meeker, Dave Hoff (may be forgetting someone). Hard to imagine holding that weight in your hands like that. Scot Mendelson, Eric Spoto, and Kyrill Saryachev benching in the 700s raw. Eddie Hall pulling 1102lbs. Donnie Thompson and Gary Frank both two huge lifters that put up totals never done before.



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1150 ALL TIME 242 WORLD RECORD SQUAT. Finally after 11 years in the sport of powerlifting I have reached a new milestone in my life. After suffering an almost career ending knee injury 3 and half years ago when I thought I would never squat again. I can now claim what is my birthright as the king of the squat for my weight

class. Knowing I've done something no one in history of this planet has ever done is overwhelming and encouraging. against all the odds I've faced in my life and the obstacles I've overcome. I can proudly say. I'M THE MAN. Thanks to all my teammates my family and friends and everyone who believed in me. THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF MY LEGACY. #dirtysouthbarbell #focused #warriors #warriorspirit #warrior #warriorelite #valhalla #epic #legacy #squat #powerlifting #242 #gameon #king #always believe #nevergiveup #neversaydie

A post shared by [Jim Benson \(@warriorelite49\)](#) on Sep 10, 2016 at 6...

(Jim Benson and his recent 242 multiply world record squat of 1150 pounds)

Becca Swanson deadlifting always impressed me. I'm pretty sure I'm much stronger raw on the other two lifts, but her deadlifting was well beyond what anyone else has ever done still till this day. She also had a great total in gear, especially for her time.

Becca Swanson - Deadlift practice, 660 l...



(Becca Swanson hitting a 660 pound deadlift in training! Wow!)

I also really admire the people with decades of experience that still coach and help others, help at meets, and some of which still compete. Ernie Lilliebridge Sr., Andrew Yerrakadu, Steve Goggins, Fred Hatfield, and Louie Simmons are some of these people that come to mind, but there are many more. I could go on, but that's enough for now.



What inspires you or pushes you in powerlifting?

I haven't hit the numbers yet I want to and it's also my favorite thing to do. I've always wanted to bench 500lbs. raw. That is my main goal in lifting. I would like to squat 800lbs with a belt and wraps on and total 2000lbs. raw also. I would also like to bench at least 700lbs. with a bench shirt in the next few years. I've considered breaking the gear total also, but my focus is mostly on raw lifting while I'm not that old yet.

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