

Master at Powerlifting

Skip Sandberg's records lifted him into his sport's Hall of Fame

By Gail Clark

Bennie Dooley of Kennewick learned first hand what to expect in the warm-up room at his first meet.

"I'll teach you everything I know if you are serious about powerlifting," World Champion powerlifter Skip Sandberg of West Richland told Bennie. His offer has led many serious powerlifters into Sandberg's private gym for training from the master.

"I had just met Sandberg for the first time when he told me to just calm down," Bennie recalls.

Bennie went on to win his division that day. He then spent more than a decade training at Skip's gym, subsequently breaking world titles in his division.

"Skip taught me three-quarters of everything I know about powerlifting," says Bennie. "When training for a meet at Skip's gym, you can cut the intensity with a knife, yet the lifters are never pitted against one another. We all

work together. There's great camaraderie within the group."

Skip attracts good lifters, says world record holder Jeff Conley of West Richland.

"There is no one better to have on your side," Jeff says. "Skip's enthusiasm for the sport is infectious. Skip is willing to coach and will put out extra effort if you're serious. Skip knows the difference between training hard and training stupid. He has helped others prevent many injuries."

Jeff has lifted with Skip since 1986, setting records in his age and weight division.

"I keep an eye on everyone training with me and get a feel for what they can achieve that day," says Skip. "I'm looking for the razor's edge, erring on the side of success, not on negatives. I want us to make all our lifts even in training."

Skip recognizes if he or others just don't have it that day.

Born and raised in Denver, Skip never competed in sports as a youngster. But something about powerlifting enticed him. He hoisted his first dumbbell at age 19, training with a few friends and some "big boys who were training with the Denver Broncos football team."

Attracted to the sport as a way to train hard and stay in shape, Skip caught the bug and never looked back.

Training with Skip is to acquire skills of learned intensity, absolute dedication and purging all bad habits.

"We train smarter by not overtraining," says Skip. "Every lift counts."

As a result of his discipline and dedication, Skip holds nearly every record in powerlifting's three main

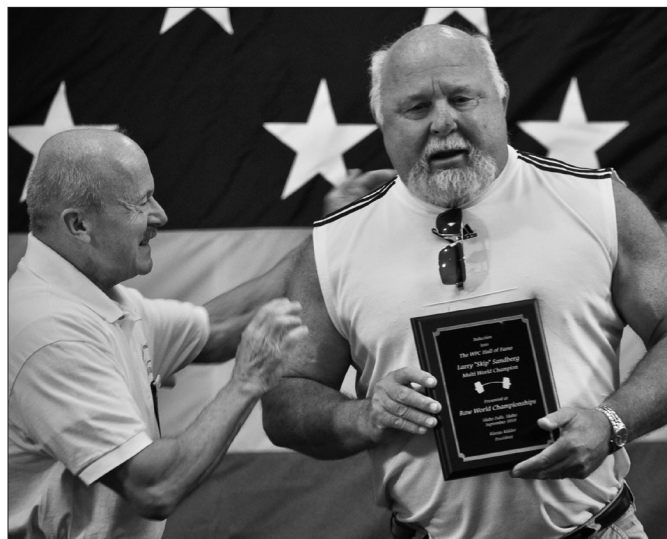


Above, Skip Sandberg's trophy room at home is lined with trophies, medals, certificates and other awards from his decades as a champion powerlifter.

Photo by Gail Clark

Right, Gordon Santee inducts Skip into the World Powerlifting Congress Hall of Fame after 40 years of lifting. The presentation was during the Raw Powerlifting World Championships in September 2010.

Photo courtesy of Skip Sandberg





Skip puts his full might into another world record at the World Powerlifting Congress Championships in Idaho Falls in September 2009. Among his record best lifts were 677 pounds in the squat, 451 pounds in bench press and 639 pounds in deadlift, while winning his division at just one meet.

Photo courtesy of Skip Sandberg

disciplines—bench press, squat and deadlift—in every age and weight division in which he has competed. At a competition in Idaho Falls, he not only won in his Master’s age group but was inducted into the World Powerlifting Congress Hall of Fame.

After more than 40 years in the sport, Skip is a legend in the world of powerlifting and has made many friends as he competed around the world. Today at age 70, when many athletes have retired from their sport, he is as dedicated as ever. He rarely misses a workout, and has proven to be as strong year in and year out as men in their 20s, 30s, 40s and up.

That same dedication and hard work to achieve his goals served Skip well when coming back from injuries. Although relatively injury-free throughout his career, he had surgeries for a crushed disk, shoulder and knee injuries. Yet he has come back to train harder and lift more.

Moving to Washington state in 1968, Skip started

his fence company, Tri-City Fence in West Richland. The success of his business stems from the same work ethic, discipline and drive to success as a powerlifter.

Skip and his wife, May Hays, own the Sandberg Event Center and Gardens in West Richland. May is also the executive director of the West Richland Area Chamber of Commerce and a Benton REA employee.

Skip and May are at many community events. But when it’s time for Skip to train, there is only one place to find him: in the gym.

Powerlifter Brent Mikesell of Spokane says fewer than five men in the world hold as many world titles as Skip.

“Some lifters won’t even enter the competition if they know Skip is lifting, since Skip never loses,” he says. “Skip’s dedication to the sport and willingness to help everyone from kids to masters has helped many others achieve great results.” ■