

2017 European Classic Bench Press Championships preview

Sheridan Wray



A short interview with Sheridan Wray ahead of the upcoming European Classic Bench Press Championships

You compete in 'Full Power' and 'Bench Only', which of the two do you prefer?

I'm better at the bench only. I do like competing in the three lift competitions; I was a British champion for a number of years in three lift but I'm a lot more competitive worldwide in the bench only.

Leading into a bench only competition how would you change your training?

I got a back injury this year so that cut down the three lift training, which was a natural progression into concentrating more on the bench only. It also coincided with me being elected as the Great Britain Bench Team Manager and Head Coach. Ordinarily I just slow down on the squatting and the deadlifting and pick up more on the accessory work for the bench.

Do you have a favourite accessory movement?

Narrow bench has been good for me at the minute. If I do tend to fail a lift on the bench it's usually on the lock-out. I'm quite strong off of the chest and I'm quite quick off of the chest, so I concentrate on the final portion. My typical training preference though is usually to focus on overloading push work. I'd overload in the 120-130% region.

Where do you stand on the overhead press? Do you find that it has a significant carry over to the bench press?

Yeah I'd say that it definitely does. I implement some OHP training in the build-up to competitions but I'd do it via machine work rather than free weights. I do think that there is a high risk for injury with the standing variation. There's a big danger of hurting your back. You see people hyperextending all the time and I

don't think it's worth the risk. There most definitely is a carry-over though. Having strong shoulders will definitely help on the bench press but it's not something that I've had to concentrate on. I do like it to be included but it's not too much of a problem for me because I already have strong shoulders.

Do you have any advice for people looking to improve their bench press?

What I believe, and what I teach other people is to get the set up right. So you'll hear me telling people to raise the chest and to brace the back. It's the foundation; it's like building a house. If the foundation is off, then the house is off, so you've got to concentrate on the set-up. If you don't set up correctly then everything past that point is going to be incorrect as well.

Do you have any advice for people when it comes to competing internationally?

I do have a few people that haven't lifted internationally before within the GB bench team and what I say is that it doesn't matter where you start, it's where you finish. So get yourself on the board. Don't worry about the nerves. Just ignore it; it's you and the bar. That's all you've got to concentrate on.

How is the team dynamic at these international competitions?

Brilliant. I'm very much a team player and I've been trying to drill that into the team since I've taken over this year. I get as much of the team involved in the coaching and the handling as I can, even if it's just helping people warm-up back stage. What people have to remember is that we're all volunteering our time. It's not a paid position and we're all in it together so we have to help each other out. As for the team, it's working well.

Do you have any goals for this meet?

I don't really like chasing numbers beforehand because you set yourself up for a fall. I've had a bad year this year through a back injury. I've also had a long bout of illness that has affected my performance and my training. I'm not back to 100%. I'm the strongest that I've been in the last four months so if I make it to the podium I'll be happy.

This has been the worst year for me so far in terms of competing so I'm trying to redeem myself a little bit at this competition. This is through injury and the fact that I got a serious chest infection that lasted over two months. That knocked my training massively. This competition is all about trying to salvage something from the year.

As you're at less than 100% fitness, do you think that puts more pressure on you to perform? Or maybe takes some of the pressure off?

I don't cut myself any slack just because I'm not at 100%, I still expect to perform. It's purely down to ability at the time. When I was ill I was 50kg down on my bench. I probably dropped by about 25-30%, so psychologically it proved

very difficult. When you're strong in a certain event and then all of a sudden you're not, it's quite difficult to deal with. I've got my head around it now and my performance is getting better. I didn't visit the doctor because I'm a bit paranoid about them giving me medication. An old teammate of mine did that and then ended up getting banned even though he told the doctor that he was competing. I kind of refuse to go to the doctor, that's why I was ill for so long. I eventually tapped out and went to the doctor and within a week it had cleared up. Then it was like starting from scratch again. This is all about trying to salvage something for 2017 so if I get on the podium I'll be more than happy.

Do you have any longer term goals?

I'm the coach and I've always been the coach since I started, so what tends to happen is that I get neglected. Nobody coaches me. So I'm going to get myself a three lift coach and I'm going to get my three lift powerlifting back up to scratch. I'm going to do the YNE qualifier with the idea of going on to the British and trying to get a good result there. That's also on the back of building the British Bench Team and making it as strong as I can.

What does a normal training week look like for you?

Mondays are my main heavy bench sessions. Since I've started training I've been lifting with my training partner Young Tom Collins. He's been my training partner for the last six or seven years. We'll train every Monday at six o'clock unless either one of us is out of the country. We haven't missed a session in the last six or seven years. Every Monday is heavy bench day. My body is telling me that it needs to slow down with regards to the amount of work that I do. When you're doing 100% work, the elbows and the joints tend to tell you to slow down a little bit. Bench-wise this is backed up by accessories on a Thursday.

I've been concentrating on the back, ironically. You bench quite a lot with your back, more than you might think, so I'm working the back as well. I am still giving some attention to the squat and deadlift but I haven't deadlifted from the ground since my injury over the past year. I do rack pulls to work on core and upper back strength. Not too long ago I did a rack pull from the knee of 380kg which was a PB. That is what training has been like for the last two months. I've reduced the number of occasions that I visit the gym because I've been getting beaten up and needed a bit more recovery.

Where do you and Young Tom usually train?

We're training at Momentum Fitness in Doncaster at the minute, at New Bodies. That's our main base. We've trained at a number of different locations. We were training at Eggborough as part of Five Towns Powerlifting but we've recently moved from there. It's been taken over by Phoenix and we've been down there a couple of times since. New Bodies is the base but I do visit about three other gyms. I'm lucky enough to be sponsored by Doncaster so I can use any of their facilities for free as part of a local scheme which they offer to elite athletes.

What are your favourite things to do outside of powerlifting?

Spending time with my girlfriend and her two boys. We're actually going on holiday when we get back from Finland. Unfortunately my missus doesn't like flying so that will be a UK holiday. She won't get on a plane, as much as I've tried to get her on one. Activities-wise, I'm always active but I've never got any time to myself, I'm always busy.

Do you have a powerlifting hero? Or somebody that motivates you?

My training partner Young Tom Collins. Bearing in mind that he's 72 years old; he out lifts about 90% of people that are half his age. He's always chasing me. I'm a little bit more than half his age but he's actually chasing my numbers. I think that that's quite inspirational. I like the look of Ed Karim as well at the minute; he's doing quite a lot of good stuff with the bench. His numbers are going up; he's looking very very strong. I've just selected him for the Arnold Classic as well. Of course we've got our own Andy Rigby; he's looking really really strong. He's come down a weight class to the 93s and he's still benching 200+kgs. He's Mr Bench GB. I'd personally be more than happy doing anything that any one of those three is doing.

