

Commonwealth Powerlifting Championships Preview

Hannah Topp



A short interview with Hannah Topp ahead of the upcoming Commonwealth Powerlifting Championships.

When did you start lifting?

I started last year in Australia as a bit of a hobby and after I moved over to England in December I started training a bit more seriously. I then did my first competition in March at the YNE Spring Open. So all in all not that long, probably about 8 months.

I learnt from my current PT and then after doing that for a few months I decided to take my powerlifting to the next level, so I found myself a sponsorship. Now I'm sponsored by a company back in Australia called JPS Health and Fitness. They sponsor me over here and I do all of my coaching and programming online with my coach Jacob Schepis.

Did you find that there was a difference between powerlifting in Australia vs in the UK?

Not really, and to be fair in Australia I didn't compete under the IPF. It was just a few novice comps at gyms so I didn't really get to experience what the environment was really like over there. I haven't really experienced much of it in Australia but over here I quite like it because it's so friendly, it's such a friendly environment, everyone's so supportive of each other, which is what I'm assuming it would be like back in Oz as well.

What did your training leading up into this competition look like?

So I've been training four days a week. I've usually been having a heavy squat session on day 1, day 2 is my heavy bench session, day 3 is my heavy deadlift session, and 4 is usually accessory stuff. It's mainly paused bench press and a few paused squats as well, but on each day I'm doing accessory work to help with all my main lifts and stuff. It's not too bad. It's pretty good only training for four days compared to five or six so I suppose it gives me a chance to rest and recover which is good.

And do you train using RPE programming or percentage based work?

It's a bit of both actually. Jacob programmes my three main lifts with percentages and then any accessories are usually RPE. I had a heavy squat session today at nearly my max. My max is 152.5kg and I did a 150kg single today so over the past few weeks it has been getting quite high which is pretty awesome.

How is training going?

Training is going really well, everything is moving extremely well leading up to the Commonwealths which is what we want. Everything is moving a lot better than what we had thought it would. It feels quite hard but when I look back over the videos I'm like - holy crap that moved so quickly. It's good news coming in to this comp and hopefully we'll get some decent numbers out of it.

Do you have any goals in mind?

Yeah so I'm hoping to hit a 400+kg total in South Africa. I'm hoping my squat will be about 160/165kg, I'm hoping for a 75kg bench press and maybe a 170kg deadlift. But obviously it depends on a lot of things over there but those are the numbers that I'm hoping for.

Do you think that there will be any added challenges with competing in an international meet?

Yes and no. I think just being in a different environment; it's been quite cold here over the last few weeks and in South Africa the temperature is supposed to hit 30^o+. It's going to be quite nice although I guess I'm not used to training in that heat, but I don't think that the temperature will have a massive effect. The other thing will be to just make sure that I'm rested and don't get caught too much with the time difference. There's not that much of a time difference but when I fly over there I'm flying to Dubai and then I'm flying from Dubai to Johannesburg, so I'll be flying for 18 hours. As long as I don't let the flight mess me up I think I'll be alright.

Is this your first international competition?

Yeah it is which is pretty exciting? If somebody had told me this time last year that I'd be representing England at the Commonwealth Championships in South Africa, I'd be like - no I'm not, you're stupid. I can't believe I'm going, it's so exciting.

What are you looking forward to most over there?

The whole thing really, just the chance to be competing as part of the English team and being part of the experience over there. And I think we're planning to do a tour as well, which I think will be exciting to see a bit of the area.

Have you checked out any of your competitors?

Yeah, I have. I'm up against some pretty strong ladies, it's going to be quite competitive which I'm really looking forward to. I haven't been competing for that long and everyone else has been competing for at least five or ten years so I'm really excited to have the challenge of competing against them. I think that the fellow girl that is representing England with me, Deidre, is going. I competed with her at the All-Englands and she's got a whopping deadlift on her.

Do you have any further long-term goals after this competition?

I do have one goal in mind, I'm planning to drop down a weight class after I come back from the Commonwealths. I'll take the rest of the year off and focus on dropping down to the 72s. I'm not 100% sure yet what is in store for next year but I guess we'll see. One day I'd also like to represent Australia at the World Championships.

Do you have any tips for lifters looking to break through to the elite level and compete internationally?

Just go for it. Train hard and work hard. Find a good coach, work closely with your coach and absolutely smash it. Get yourself on social media and Instagram which is what has helped me. Put all of your training videos online. I've picked up a couple of sponsors who are sponsoring me to go to South Africa, I've picked up an ambassadorship for a clothing company from it and it just gets your name out there a bit more. Don't be scared to just enter that competition even if you don't feel ready. Get as much experience as you can competing and then your name will get out there and you never know, you might get asked to go and represent England.

How do you prepare yourself for competitions?

It can be quite difficult at times. Working with my coach online has worked out really well but working with the time difference can be hard. Sometimes I'm up at stupid o'clock at night Skyping him. Jacob is always on Skype with me at my competitions. It can be 3 o'clock in the morning in Australia and he'll be on Skype with me watching my lifts and telling me my next attempt selections; I wouldn't have it any other way. It's been perfect, it's been such an experience and I've loved every minute of it.

Are you and Jacob approaching this meet differently to your past meets?

Sort of, the programming and training has been the same, however, I'm hitting numbers that are a lot closer to my maximal numbers at the moment. Leading up to my first competition and then the All-Englands I was only hitting submaximal numbers but since then I've had quite a bit of a break in training. My last proper competition was in May so I've done a couple of blocks between then and have had the chance to increase my strength. Over the next couple of weeks I'll be hitting some new PBs and that should give us a good idea of how we'll be going into the Commonwealths in terms of openers and what numbers we'll be aiming for as well.

What do you like to do when you're not training?

I'm working full-time so when I'm not working I'm training and when I'm not training I'm working, so I don't get a lot of time outside of powerlifting and working. When I do, I enjoy hanging out with

friends and travelling around. Obviously, I'm not from here so I just want to get around and explore as much as I can and travel around Europe and the UK while I'm over here.

Do you have anybody within powerlifting that you look up to or have any competitors that are pushing you?

That's a tough one because I haven't been involved in powerlifting for that long. I sort of look up to everyone I compete with which is really nice but I think, coming back to my coach again, Jacob has inspired me throughout this whole experience. From him seeing me last year and seeing potential in me has really pushed me and I look up to Jacob as my coach and a friend. His motivation, drive, and ambition inspire me so much to become a better person and better myself in powerlifting. In powerlifting as such I look up to all the girls I compete with. Especially at the All-Englands; they were so amazing and all so strong and talented and it just pushes me to want to become like them and keep pushing forward.

Do you have any message that you'd like to give to anybody out there?

It's going to sound so cliché but if you do have a dream, just go chase it. No dream is too big, chase it because you could be living it. Keep chipping away at it, and enjoy the process of your training enjoy the process of competition and just enjoy it because it's so much fun.

