

UW Health: An uplifting story of Love

Posted on Wednesday, Dec 14, 2022

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON, Wis. – Michael Love has been passionate and competitive about exercise since he was a teenager, but in 2021, at age 65, he was as dedicated to the gym as ever when he met one of his biggest challenges yet.

One evening, in June 2021, Love lifted weights in his home gym, as usual, but later he began to feel some unusual chest pain. When the pain expanded down one of his arms, his wife took him to the University Hospital emergency department in Madison, where they lived at the time.

There he learned he was indeed having a heart attack and would need open heart surgery. Despite this serious news, Love said he was not going to let this be the end of his weightlifting career. He was training to break the United States Powerlifting Association national deadlift record and the need for surgery wasn't going to dampen that ambition, he said.

"I remember telling the surgical team at UW Health, 'this is my goal, this is what I want to be able to do,' and they listened to me and said they would work with me," Love said.

Ultimately, Love required quintuple bypass surgery to create new paths for blood to flow around blocked arteries in his heart, according to Dr. Satoru Osaki, cardiothoracic surgeon, UW Health, and professor of surgery, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

"Michael was one of the healthiest people we've ever seen who needed this procedure," he said. "It was clear to us that he would take his recovery very seriously because he was so serious about his goals."

With Love's healthy lifestyle, it is a reminder to all that genetics also play a role in heart health and to be mindful when symptoms emerge, Osaki said.

While this procedure is typically completed with stainless steel to repair the sternum - or breastbone - Osaki and the surgical team used a titanium plate instead for Love's unique needs, since his body would continue to be under significant stress and titanium was better suited for this.

"They told me to take my recovery slow because if I pushed myself too hard in those first two months, I was in danger of permanent damage to my sternum," Love said.

Still, Love felt better every week post-operation, adding more weight to his workout routine regularly.

"At first, my goal was to deadlift 300 pounds by the end of the year," he said. "On New Year's Eve, I lifted 425 pounds."

For Love's age and weight class, the national record for deadlifting was to lift approximately 452 pounds. In July 2022, just 13 months after quintuple bypass surgery and weighing just 165 pounds himself, he lifted 457.5.

"It was three years of work for a two-second lift, but it was worth it," he said. "It felt unbelievable."

Love is not done yet, he said. He is training to break his own record and lift 500 pounds in February 2023. He also wants to break the bench press record for his age and weight class.

His experience with open heart surgery taught him that the present moment is something to be grateful for, while he can also continue to strive toward the next goal.

"Every day is a gift," he said. "Dr. Osaki and the team at UW Health saved my life and gave me a second chance."

Recorded interviews with Love and Osaki are available, as is heart surgery B-roll and a video clip of Love breaking the USPA national deadlift record.