

The IRON Grapevine

Dear IGH,

I was interested in your comment on page 35 of the recent IGH regarding Goerner's 727 one-hand deadlift. I hadn't thought about it before, but I agree that surely it must have been some sort of a partial lift performed in a straddle position. Somewhat similarly, the 562 that Frank Ciavattone did a few years ago was almost certainly not a "full" deadlift, as a photo on the internet shows the bar barely reaching his knees. I suspect that is as far as it went. I'm sure that Iceland's "Benny" Magnusson could make a huge one-hand deadlift, but not many mortals will succeed in making a full one-hand deadlift with a weight far in excess of 500. I never did the lift when I was in my prime, so my best was only 345, made at the Zercher Meet when I was 47. I toyed with the idea of attempting 400 when I was in my mid-forties, but never tried it. When I did the lift, I always stood all the way up, with the bar stopping not far from my groin. Presumably I could have done 420 or so in that manner when I was in my prime.

Tom Ryan

Atlanta, Georgia

Most strength historians have become increasingly skeptical about Goerner's legendary one-hand deadlift, and it seems more and more clear that neither Goerner nor anyone else has ever done a full-range, one-hand deadlift with anything close to 727 pounds. A straddle- or partial-deadlift with such a weight would be phenomenal enough. Another confounding factor is that the standards for various sorts of deadlifts vary from era to era, country to country, and even federation to federation. When we saw Frank Ciavattone perform at one of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen meetings some years ago he didn't do a full-range movement.



Dear IGH,

Just a note to tell the two of you how grateful I am for the magnificent work you are doing in preserving our iron game history.

Having weight-trained on a regular basis since 1955, I have always been inspired by the amazing story of the great Bruce Randall! I believe he made the greatest recorded transformation of the body—through a combination of weight training, diet, and sheer willpower—of anyone else in any endeavor. Would it be possible for you guys to publish an article on Bruce Randall (if you have not already done so)? In this day of apparent rampant BB "drug freaks," Randall's seemingly unbelievable natural BB accomplishments have been long ignored and forgotten! Do you know if Bruce Randall is still living?

By the way, Jan, I guess you have probably made the greatest recorded transformation in the female body through weight training, diet, etc. Furthermore, your and Terry's magnificent book *Lift Your Way to Youthful Fitness* is a true classic! In my efforts to encourage others to take up natural weight training over the years, I have probably purchased some 15 copies and given them to various individuals. Thanks again for all you do!

Hugo (Richard) Schmidt
Via Email

*Bruce Randall is alive, and we hope to produce in the future a comprehensive account of his remarkable life. For the time being, we hope Mr. Schmidt and other readers will enjoy the short article on page 23 about Randall in this issue. The article is excerpted from Randy Roach's new book, **Muscles, Smoke & Mirrors**, and it deals with Randall's extreme diets and training routines. [Copies can be purchased at: www.musclesmokeandmirrors.com.] Randall's uniqueness extends far beyond his unparalleled weight gain/loss, and we were privileged to have spent many long hours in conversation with him. Mr. Schmidt's mention of Jan no doubt refers to the fact that over a period of three years she purposely and gradually increased her bodyweight from 160 pounds to 230 pounds as she tried to increase her strength, break powerlifting records, and stay ahead of the women in the sport who had begun to take anabolic steroids. When she decided to retire, she dropped over 80 pounds in 18 months and, at a bodyweight of 146 pounds, established a world record in the deadlift with 474.5 pounds—the first drug-tested record in the history of women's powerlifting.*



The following letter was sent to us in regard to our article in IGH about the 2008 Arnold Strongman Classic and about a recent article in Flex that listed the Flex staff's choices of the top ten (eleven) strongest men in history. Flex tried to take into consideration the era in which the lifts were done, possible steroid use, and the many ways to demonstrate strength. The top ten men, according to Flex, in order, were: 1) Zydrunas Savickas, 2) Mark Henry, 3) Bill Kazmaier, 4) Vasyl Virastyuk, 5) Louis Cyr, 5) (tie with Cyr) Louis "Apollon" Uni, 6) Brian Siders, 7) Andy Bolton, 8) Leonid Taranenko, 9) Paul Anderson, and 10) Ronnie Coleman (who was probably included because of his potential and because Flex is a bodybuilding magazine). Such lists are always subjective, of course, and we don't agree with all of the placings. Even so, such lists often produce interesting arguments similar to the Ruth vs. Aaron, Dempsey vs. Marciano, and Bird vs. Johnson arguments in other sports. John Coffee has earned the right to a place at the head table of judges on the subject. He has devoted his entire adult life to the operation of a heavy-duty gym and to the coaching and sponsorship of scores of lifters (primarily women weightlifters, who owe an enormous debt of gratitude to John for giving them so much of his time and treasure), and travelling the globe to attend the big meets. We also invite your response to the Flex listings and/or to John's comments.

Dear IGH:

Concerning the ranking of the top ten "most powerful men to ever walk the earth" article in the most recent issue of Flex magazine, the first observation that must be made is that it's really impossible to say with any degree of clarity just who the strongest man in the world may be. There are so many ways to measure strength. I personally favor what can be lifted for one rep on a standard Olympic barbell. Also, do we take into consideration whether or not a man ever used steroids? Were his powerlifts made wearing a supersuit? Were they done officially or unofficially? And even if his lifts were official did he perhaps get some help or a "gift" from the officials? One or two inches in depth can make a big difference in the squat . . . or, was a deadlift hitched, etc.

All that said, I can't disagree too much with the first three placings. I know both Bill Kazmaier and Mark Henry personally and have seen them both lift on many occasions. Even though I wasn't too familiar with Zydrunas Savickas, after talking with some of the boys here at Coffee's Gym and doing a little research I'm con-

vinced that Savickas can legitimately be called the strongest man.

I can't really agree with most of the rest of the placings, however. During most of my association with the Iron Game, which dates from 1956 when I was ten years old, Paul Anderson was generally accepted as the world's strongest man. He had excelled in so many various feats of strength in so many diverse fields—Olympic lifting, powerlifting, and strongman feats—that even though his world Olympic lifting records were exceeded in the early 1960s he [for a time] still had to be considered the strongest man.

Both Apollon and Louis Cyr may have been tremendously strong natural men in their era but as far as I can tell neither man ever had access to an Olympic-type barbell and probably never trained consistently enough on pulling, pressing, or squatting-type movements to be really considered for this list. Had they lived a little later and trained, they may have been number one and two on the list, but we'll never know. And who knows what giants of strength and potential may have lived in the Scottish Highlands or in the Carpathian Mountains five hundred to a thousand years ago? Here again, we'll never know.

Although Brian Siders, Andy Bolton and Leonid Taranenko (who I've seen lift and know slightly) are all at the very top of their fields, none has excelled in the variety and diversity of strength sports to quite put them in the same boat with Paul Anderson. There were several very strong men who were completely left off the list and who certainly deserve to be considered when discussing the strongest men in history. Powerlifter Don Reinhoudt is one. Also Shane Hamman—perhaps the only drug-free man to snatch and clean and jerk well in excess of 400 and 500 pounds—who also did a 1000 pound squat early in his career before he switched to Olympic lifting. The names Ken Patera, Serge Redding, Vasily Alexeyev, Antonio Krastev, and the Iranian super-heavy Hossein Rezazadeh also come to mind.

I'm sure that I've left many deserving men off the list. If humanity survives another thousand years and men continue to lift weights with barbells and perform feats of strength with other heavy objects, who can imagine what fantastic feats may be performed by super homo-sapiens using genetic engineering, new drugs, and new training methods? I'm not sure I'll regret not being around to see it.

John Coffee
Marietta, Georgia

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