

## A FINAL NOTE



Our belief is that everyone who is involved in any aspect of the Strongman world, including fans, should reflect on the life and the death of Mike Jenkins, an unusually admirable young man. We should also all reflect on where we go from here, given the autopsy that revealed the factors—including PEDs—which probably contributed to Mike's death. As for Dr. Baptiste's recommendation of creating an annual series of elite, drug-tested Strongman competitions that would qualify the top men for a final competition open only to those who had taken part in the series, most of the people who have studied Strongman closely realize that the sport is currently so international, yet so small and unorganized, that rigorous drug testing would be "a bridge too far." Imagine how difficult it would be to find the will, the diplomatic skill, and the money to create a series of good-paying, international, fairly-judged, and drug-tested Strongman contests that would over time earn the trust of the strongmen and the interest of the fan base. Even so, even so, we hold the opinion that such a circuit is a worthwhile long-term goal. Such a circuit would indeed make the sport significantly safer at the elite level because the top men who use the most potent of the strength- and muscle-building substances to increase their muscle size would need to limit their intake during certain periods of the year—or even stop it altogether—in order to pass the qualifying drug tests in the satellite events. What's more, we have thought for a long time that—as a group—the colossal men who dominate Strongman would be among the easiest converts to drug-free training and competing. Men like 42-year old, lifetime drug-free Mark Henry and Mike Jenkins—who weighed as much as most college linebackers when he was twelve—were always the biggest and strongest boys in their grade and, as such, didn't develop the deep psychological need of many boys and young men for a magic pill or injection which would provide them with size and the implied power such size confers. We need

to remember that most of the attributes which make us look up in wonderment at the shadow-casting mass and brute strength of Strongman's titans is natural—God-given. These men are anything but "scared little boys in gorilla suits." They *are* the gorillas. For this reason, most of them would probably be comfortable switching to "clean" training and drug-tested competition—so long as they believed the testing process was fair and strict enough so they wouldn't have the feeling that they were taking a BB gun to a bazooka fight. Also, there's a related reason; these gargantuan men realize they're risking their health—and even their lives—by taking the very substances which have been implicated in the deaths of so many of their friends and colleagues. Many of them, in fact, consider the use of such substances to be an occupational hazard. This is not simply an opinion, by the way. This is what many of these men have told us over the years.

But even though effective drug testing may be well down the Strongman road, it should not be forgotten. In the meantime, perhaps those of us who administer these events could find other ways to address these concerns. Perhaps we should take a close look at the suggestions from Coroner Hetrick and Cardiothoracic Surgeon Baptiste that we pre-screen the Strongmen prior to major competitions and then provide individual, professional medical counseling based on the results of that screening process. Although such a process would need to be thoroughly discussed prior to implementation, it would allow the Strongman competitors to know whether they—in the opinion of specialists in the related fields—would be placing themselves at a significant risk by competing. Perhaps such a pre-screening in the fall of 2013—prior to the World's Strongest Man contest in China—would have revealed some of Mike Jenkins' underlying health problems, and perhaps those revelations would have kept him from competing. And perhaps today Mike would still loom large as a living townsman of Harrisburg and not, in A.E. Houseman's words, a "townsman of a stiller town." Perhaps Mike would be 32 now, only 32, running his gym, wearing his colorful gear, making people laugh, and, in his own words, being a man "just like everyone else—with a family, interests, and life." —Terry and Jan Todd