

Paul Anderson's Moscow Triumph

Arkady Vorobyov

Editors' Note: Although the story of Paul Anderson's 1955 trip to Moscow with the U.S. weightlifting team is well known, we thought our readers would enjoy this article by Arkady Vorobyev, which describes how the great Russian lifter viewed Anderson's achievements. It is reprinted from: John Williams, trans., *USSR-USA Sports Encounters* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

June 15, 1955 was a rather cold, wet day in Moscow. Fifteen thousand spectators wrapped up in raincoats and sheltering beneath umbrellas or newspapers waited patiently for the start of a weightlifting match in the open-air Zelyony Theater.

The coming encounter between the weightlifters of the USA and the USSR had been on the lips of people in trams and shops, in restaurants and movie houses. By evening the streets of the city became deserted. The unfortunate ones without tickets had flown off like moths to the light of their television screens. Upsetting all the normal notions about the size of its following weightlifting took its revenge on soccer and ice-hockey. To be honest, if the match itself had not taken place and only one man had remained on the platform, thousands of spectators would have still stayed in their seats, if that man had been Paul Anderson.

When he stepped out of the airplane and onto the gangway an enthusiastic "exclamation" was heard from our side. The "Dixie Derrick," as Anderson was nicknamed, really staggered the imagination. Powerful arms, somewhat reminiscent of a bull's leg in shape, bulged beneath the short sleeves of his shirt. The twenty-two year old Paul Anderson stood 177.5 cm [5' 9.8"] and weighed 165 kg. [364 pounds]. He had a rolling gait that reminded one of a pair of compasses: one leg stood firm while the other drew an arc and bore it forward. This gait underlined even more his bulk and power.

Immediately, when he set foot on Moscow soil, Anderson became extremely popular. Scientists and pensioners, schoolchildren and housewives followed the news of this miracleman with great interest. Everything seemed unusual, such as the fact that Paul trained right in his own bedroom, where he had fitted a platform and equipped a small spats hall. And the fact that at the age of nineteen he weighed 120 kg. [264 pounds].

He had a varied sporting career. Paul threw the discus and put the shot and played football on a university team in the state of South Carolina. But in 1952 he took up weightlifting. He made rapid progress and could probably have become world champion in 1954 if it had not been for an injury to his left hand. No sooner had he recovered from this setback, however, when he was involved in a road accident. Nevertheless, he did not let weightlifting happiness pass him by.

In those days much less was said about the five hundred kilogram barrier in the total than was subsequently said about the six hundred kilogram mark, probably because few believed it was possible. Thirty years of expectations had made even the most confined optimists skeptical. And suddenly, like a genie from the lamp, a miraculously strong man appeared who lifted 518.5 kg. [1143 pounds.] — although the result had not been officially ratified at the time.

With his unusual strength and size, Anderson became a living legend to be touched and pinched. He once joked to a journalist that several cows grazed on his front lawn so that he could drink three gallons of fresh milk each morning. The journalist duly reported this

to his readers in complete seriousness. If Anderson had said that each morning he ate a whole roast lamb for breakfast, no one would have dared doubt him.

We went to the joint training session with the Americans as to a revelation, once again because of Anderson. The question everyone wanted to solve was: what was this — a miracle or a triumph of methodology? Justifying his nickname, the Dixie Derrick declined the warm-up, and began by cleaning a weight of 147.5 kg. [325 pounds] to his chest (John Davis had won the world championships five times with 145 kg. [319 pounds] and less) and pressed it above his head six times in succession. Not bad for starters! Then he asked for 172.5 kg. [380 pounds] which was four kilograms more than Canadian Doug Hepburn's world record. Oblivious of our astonishment, Paul pressed this weight three times. At the same training session he also snatched 135 kg. [297 pounds]. Then, lying on a bench, he pressed 205 kg. [451 pounds] three times.

Finally, Anderson lifted 275 kg. [606.25 pounds] off a rack and onto his shoulders whilst barefooted. The bar bent with the weight. Paul gave the weight a jolt as if to show that this monstrous weight was no more than a trifle for him. And indeed the strength of his legs, which resembled inverted pyramids, was boundless. He did live knees-bends without difficulty, and it was quite obvious that this was not his limit. There was a ripple of applause in the hall which was crowded with people, as the training session had turned into a performance. I made no discoveries for myself as far as methods or technique were concerned, but the fact remained: world records were falling like tenpins. The good-natured, curlyheaded lad toyed with them like he would with a dumbbell.

When the day of the match arrived, I kept a careful watch on Anderson. He lay unperturbed on a couch, his chest heaving noisily up and down. When his turn came, he got up from the couch with all the elegance of an elephant and went straight out onto the platform. Although our Alexei Medvedev was also competing and made several appearances on the platform, his presence was somehow unnoticed. Anderson was the absolute master of the platform. He performed his solo with complete calm. The bar, heavily loaded with weights, was raised and then lowered without a murmur of dissension. And the same weight seemed to grow incredibly heavy when Medvedev tried to lift it.

Anderson returned to America leaving behind the belief that it would take a superman to compete against another superman. Once he retired, America could find no successor to the great man, and for a time the records of "wee Paul" stood like a rock. At his final appearance at the 1956 U.S. championships before turning professional, he staggered the weightlifting world with a total of 533 kg. [1175 pounds]. In time, of course, many great lifters, such as Yuri Vlasov, Leonid Zhabotinski, and Vasily Alexeyev exceeded Anderson's lifting, but the legendary lifter left quite a "legacy" for the strong men who followed in his footsteps.