



IRON GAME HISTORY



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ARNOLD'S STRONGEST MAN

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In much the same way as the event played out last year, the 2003 edition of the Arnold's Strongest Man contest provided displays of pageantry, superhuman strength, and high drama as eight outstanding athletes battled each other in Columbus, Ohio, to determine who had the most valid claim to be called the Strongest Man in the World. Readers of *Iron Game History* will recall that last year was the first time this contest was held, and that Mark Henry, the 400-pound professional wrestler, powerlifter, and weightlifter dominated the event. But this year the WWE needed big Mark for a tour of South Africa, and so the 2003 show was anyone's to win.

As was explained in *IGH* last year, the Arnold's Strongest Man contest was born in 2001 during a conversation involving Arnold Schwarzenegger, the most famous iron man in the world; Jim Lorimer, who has organized and promoted the annual Arnold Bodybuilding Classic in Colum-

bus for the past 28 years; and the author, who argued that a strength contest could be devised which would test brute strength more accurately than it was currently

being tested in the television event called the "World's Strongest Man." The basis of the argument was that the "World's Strongest Man" TV show demanded so much endurance that it was possible, even probable, for a stronger man to lose to a weaker, but more enduring, man. In any case, after that conversation, Arnold and Jim Lorimer asked the author to design and direct such a strength contest as part of the three-day physical fitness extravaganza held each year in Columbus near the end of February or the first of March. With Arnold's help, we put together a prize package that was the highest ever offered for a contest of strength—over \$150,000 in cash and prizes, with the winner to drive away in a new Hummer H2 and \$10,000 in his pocket.



Zydrunas Savickas of Lithuania won the event and brought joy to the multitudes by getting Apollon's Wheels to arms' length four times within two minutes.

Photo by Jan Todd

For the second contest, the same team worked together to help design the events and choose the eight competitors. The team included Bill Kazmaier, the iron game giant whose many exploits in both powerlifting and the "strongman" world have made him a legend; and David P. Webster, Scotland's ageless expert on all things having to do with human strength. Kazmaier, with his dozens of world records, and Webster, with his 40 books and many hundreds of articles in the field, bring instant credibility to the event, especially since they were joined by the author's wife—Jan Todd, a university professor, an author of many books and articles in the game, and a powerlifting pioneer who for many years was considered to be the strongest woman in the world.

Together, our group once again decided to use only four events. We did this so that we would not unduly tire the contestants and thus increase the chance of injury. We also decided to continue what we began in 2002 and to invite contestants from the three main disciplines of strength—weightlifting, powerlifting, and "strongman" shows. All three sports claim that their top man is the world's strongest, so we wanted to put those claims to the test. But we had to do our best to design events that were fair to all three strength sports. The resulting four events took all of our contestants out of their normal comfort zone, because none were exactly like a standard lift or test in any of their respective sports. This is what we wanted.

We knew that in 2003 we would have one of the most knowledgeable crowds in the world, as approximately 80,000 people were expected to attend Arnold's Fitness Expo, and at least 6,000 were expected to gather around the stage and literally stop traffic at the Expo whenever our eight strong men competed. Those who have never attended one of Arnold's shows have truly missed seeing one of the wonders of the strength world. The scale of the show and the enormous throng of enthusiasts that floods the Expo Center to look at the 650 booths, mingle with the stars of the game, and/or watch a three-ring circus of sporting events and demonstrations involving over 11,000 athletes has to be experienced in person to be fully understood.

We were able to slightly increase the prize package in 2003, and the winner of the overall event would earn for himself a new H2 Hummer, \$15,000, and a year's supply of food products provided by one of our top sponsors—MET-Rx. Because there was so much money and prestige at stake in the contest we brought together an outstanding team of officials. David Webster was the chief referee, and Larry Pacifico, Dr. John Fair, Jill Mills, Francis Brebner, and George Oates served as judges.

Apollon's Wheels

For the 2003 contest we kept three of the four events we used in 2002, but we made minor changes even in those events; and we added a new event—the Medicine Ball Throw for Height. We wanted the events to be contested in a particular order, and we wanted the first event to be Apollon's Wheels. As many *IGH* readers know, the Wheels got their name from Apollon, a French professional strongman from a century ago who made a barbell out of a set of railway wheels. Apollon's original Wheels weighed 366 pounds, had a thick handle (1.92" in diameter), and had a bar that fit so tightly into the Wheels that when the bar turned the Wheels turned, too. Since Apollon made the Wheels, only three men before our 2002 contest had ever managed to lift them from the floor to arms' length overhead—Charles Rigu-



Weightlifter/strongman Raimonds Bergmanis from Latvia was the only competitor who used a standard technique to clean the "Wheels," and he made three reps, barely missing his fourth. He caught most of them in a thighs-parallel position, came up, and then used a split jerk to put them overhead.

Photo by Rick Fowler

lot, John Davis, and Norbert Schemansky—all of whom were Olympic lifting champions and considered to be the strongest men of their era.

In our event the men used an exact replica of the Wheels created last year by barbell-maker extraordinaire Tom Lincir, president of Ivanko Barbell Company. The men were given two minutes to lift the Wheels from the floor to overhead as many times as possible. Last year Mark Henry shocked the world by making three complete repetitions, using a power clean to take the bar to his chest; the second-place man only made one rep; and none of the other six superheavies could put the Wheels up even once. This year, however, some of our eight men had been practicing—and it showed. We allowed the men to take the bar to their shoulders in two or more movements if they needed to do so, and to get it overhead they could use a press, push-press, push-jerk, or jerk. They had to lower the Wheels to the platform and bring them to the shoulders before each overhead lift.

As the huge mob of fans crowded around the raised stage, the eight contestants representing six countries marched one by one across the platform and lined up at the front of the stage, carrying their country's flag. Zdenek Sedmik of the Czech Republic, one of the world's best powerlifters, finished eighth with the Wheels, as he was unable to get the ponderous bar to his shoulders. Minnesota's Brad Gillingham, who has twice been the world powerlifting champion, hadn't complete-



Most of the competitors who were able to shoulder the Wheels did so as Savickas is doing here—by first placing the bar on their abdomen and then boosting it on up in one, two, or three motions before attempting to put it overhead. The men were not allowed to catch the bar on their belts and then "jump" it up from there.

Photo by Rick Fowler

ly recovered from a biceps tear and so was only able to get the bar to his shoulders once, failing in his attempt to get it overhead. Poland's Mariusz Pudzianowski, who won the prestigious "World's Strongest Man" contest last fall, tied Gillingham by also shouldering the bar once. Finishing fifth was strongman competitor Steve Kirit of the U.S.—winner of this year's "America's Strongest Man" title—who managed to take the bar to his shoulders twice. Fourth went to 6'6", 325-pound strongman Phil Pfister, who placed third overall in the 2002 show, and put the bar to the full length of those long arms twice to the cheers of the appreciative crowd.

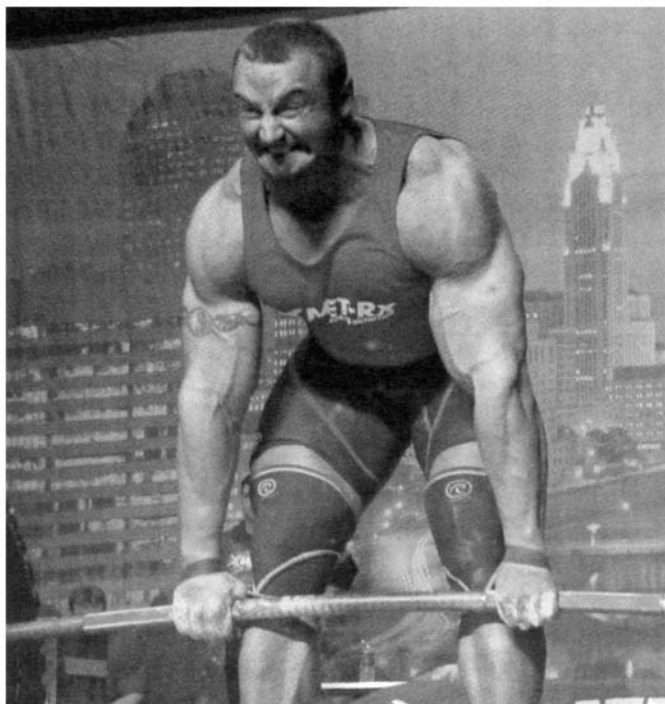
Svend Karlsen, the 2001 winner of the "World's Strongest Man" TV show, improved on his performance last year by matching Pfister's two complete reps and earning a higher placing by "cleaning" the bar to his chest in one motion (with a reverse grip, which we allowed) instead of using two or more motions as Phil had done. Second place went to Latvia's weightlifter/strongman Raimonds Bergmanis, who made three powerful cleans followed by three explosive jerks, barely missing a fourth. But the man who stole the show was 6'3", 335-pound Zydrunas Savickas of Lithuania, who hauled the Wheels crudely to his abdomen, bounced them to the top of his chest, and then push-pressed them to arms' length each time with virtually no leg drive at all—four times! Just raw, brute strength. Savickas—

who has an outstanding record in both "strongman" events and powerlifting—earned eight points for his first place. The next seven places were worth, in order, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one point, with the points being split in case of a tie.

The Hummer Deadlift

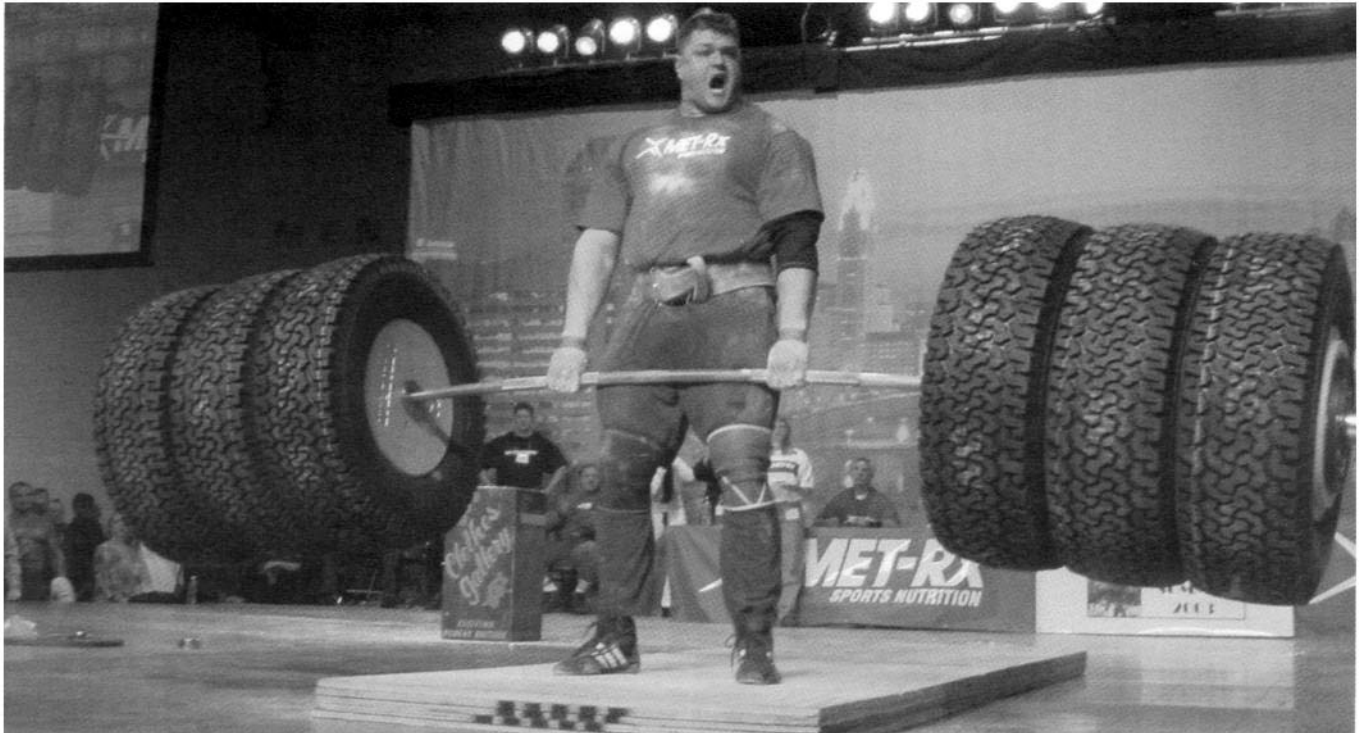
To honor one of our major sponsors, we designed a deadlift-type event that required once again the technical skill of Tom Lincir. We told Tom that we wanted the bar to be able to accommodate at least three Hummer tires on each end of an extra-long lifting bar that would also allow us to add weight plates to give the men the extra poundage they wanted for their three attempts. We knew that such a bar would have a different "feel," and so would remove some of the natural advantage of

the great powerlifters. To add to the "difference" of our event, we allowed the men to wear straps to minimize the effect of grip, and we placed them on a raised plat-



The spectacularly-built Mariusz Pudzianowski of Poland, winner of the most recent "World's Strongest Man" contest on television, had problem with the heavier events that constitute the Arnold's Strongest Man Contest. He competed with all of his heart, however, and hopes to return in 2004.

Photo by Rick Fowler



One of the highlights of the competition took place when big Brad Gillingham, representing powerlifting, dominated the Hummer Deadlift by hoisting a remarkable 975 pounds. As can be seen, the men stood on a low platform, constructed so that the specially designed, 13 foot bar would be approximately 2" higher than a normal Olympic bar loaded with 45 pound plates. Straps were allowed.

Photo by Rick Fowler

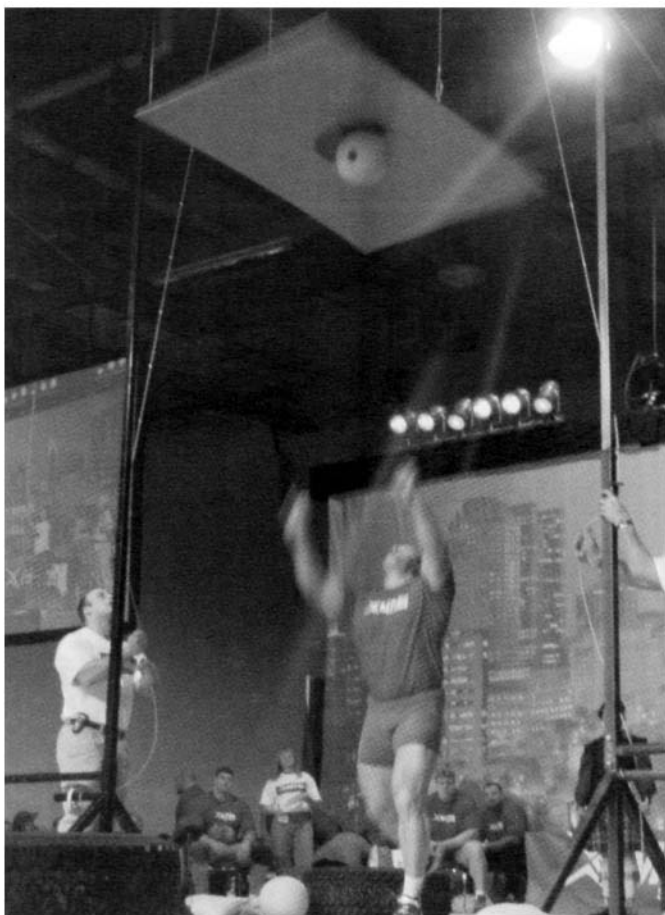
form in order to partially allow for the great height of the Hummer tires. The bar Lincir designed was just over 13 feet long, weighed 192 pounds, and was 1 3/8" in diameter. Packed with six Hummer tires and used in the way we used it in the contest it looked like what it was—a giant barbell loaded with giant weights and lifted by giants.

Phil Pfister made only his first attempt—with 740 pounds—and finished eighth. Seventh went to Steve Kirit with 762, while Pudzianowski and Bergman is tied for fifth with 861. We had another tie—this time for third place—between Sedmik and Karlsen, both of whom made their second attempt, with 872. Zydrunas Savickas also made two attempts, and his best, with 883, earned him seven valuable second place points. The winner of the Hummer Deadlift was Minnesota's Brad Gillingham, a 6'4", 335-pound human derrick. Brad was the only man among our eight dreadnoughts to make all three lifts, and his best was a truly majestic 975 pounds, which looked even heavier than it was as the long bar bent and swayed when big Brad jacked it up. In every way it was a great lift that would have passed the strictest powerlifting judges, and the crowd loved it.

Medicine Ball Throw for Height

Last year the men pushed one of the original Hummers with the tire pressure reduced to five pounds, but this year we decided to replace the Hummer Push with a throwing event in which technique was minimized. Many "strongman" contests feature the throwing of an object of some sort over a bar or wall, but this requires that the men direct their throw fairly precisely in order to get the object over the bar. This means that a stronger man can lose to a man with better aim, and so we designed an event in which the men only had to throw a 50-pound medicine ball straight up so that it would hit the bottom of a 4'x6' piece of plywood suspended on four wires. The men had to grasp the ball with both hands, swing it back between their legs and then explode upward as they tried to generate as much power as possible. Each man was given two throws at each height.

We started at 12', which caused no one any trouble, then went up to 13', and again everyone succeeded. Ditto for 14', but at 15' three men fell out—Pfister; Gillingham, who unfortunately injured a biceps that had given him twinges earlier in the year; and



The Czech Republic's Zdenek Sedmik's toss of the 50 pound medicine ball is caught just as it hits the bullseye on the 4'x 6' piece of plywood that was suspended on wires as a target. The men didn't have to hit the bullseye, but it gave them a focal point. Svend Karlsen won the event with a throw of 16', but Sedmik's 15'6" put him in a tie for second place. *Photo by Rick Fowler*

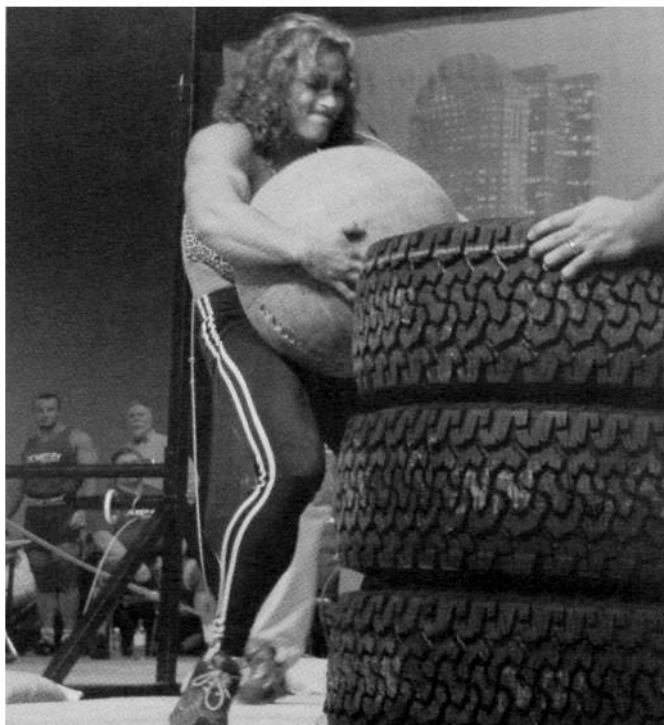
Bergmanis, who—with his weightlifting background—was expected to do a bit better. The top five men also succeeded with 15'6", but 16' stopped Sedmik, Kirit, Pudzianowski, and Savickas, giving the win to the Viking—Svend Karlsen of Norway.

The Timber Carry

This event is a variation on the Farmer's Walk, a staple in Strongman competitions. It usually involves picking up two equally weighed objects such as suitcases, and then walking or running a certain set distance as fast as possible. In order to make our event different we designed an apparatus that was all in one piece so that the competitors would stand inside it and lift it using handles set into the heavy timbers we used to build the framework. We made it even more unfamiliar by requiring the men to walk up a 40' ramp with a grade similar to that used for wheelchair ramps. Finally, we shortened the normal time limit and used much more weight than

is used in Strongman shows. Last year the apparatus weighed approximately 815 pounds, and six of the eight men carried it all the way to the top within the allotted limit of 30 seconds. The top three finishers in the 2002 Timber Carry—Mark Henry, Svend Karlsen, and Phil Pfister—all thought we should add a little weight for this year, and so an additional 50 pounds was piled on top of the timbers. No straps were allowed, so the men had to make a partial deadlift with the 865-pound load, and then carry the timbers up the ramp as quickly as possible.

For whatever reason—and it would appear that several of the men didn't have the weight balanced properly—the additional 50 pounds proved to be real trouble for most of these leviathans. After the first three events, the men came out in reverse order of their accumulated points—so the lifting order was Pfister, Kirit, Pudzianowski, Sedmik, Bergmanis, Gillingham, Karlsen, and Savickas. At that point in the contest, it was primarily a two-man battle for first place, with Karlsen and Savickas separated by only one point—19.5 to 20.5. This meant that if Karlsen finished first and Savickas second they would tie, in which case we would



Texan Jill Mills, winner of the past (and only) two World's Strongest Woman contests, filled in as we changed the heights for the Medicine Ball Toss. Weighing approximately 170 pounds, Mills was able—after missing it on her first attempt—to lift to shoulder height and then onto three Hummer tires a smooth 300 pound stone. This was a personal record and, as far as we know, a new record for women. *Photo by Rick Fowler*



Norway's Svend Karlsen, a past winner of TV's "World's Strongest Man" contest and runner-up to Mark Henry in the 2002 Arnold's Strongest Man Show, got a standing ovation from the crowd on Saturday when he carried an 865 pound pile of logs up a 40' ramp after the previous six men had failed to do so. He was so overjoyed that he ripped off his shirt, yelled "Viking Power," and hit a double biceps shot for the fans. *Photo by Classic Productions*

bring out a replica of a famous English dumbbell, called the Inch Bell (172 pounds with a 2.47" handle diameter), and let the men break the tie by seeing who could lift it highest off the floor with one hand. But first things first.

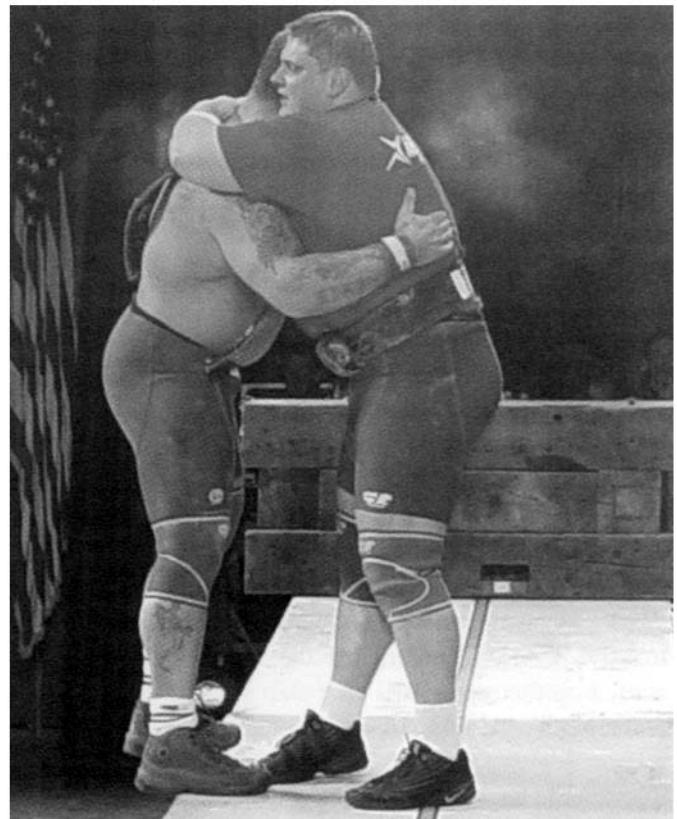
The Timber Carry was the only event not done on the raised stage at the Expo Center. Arnold and Jim Lorimer wanted to move our final event to the prestigious stage of the Columbus Memorial Auditorium on the same night that the winners of the top bodybuilding and fitness competitions would be crowned, and the Timber Carry was chosen because it takes a relatively short time and because it is so dramatic to watch men try to carry almost 900 pounds uphill with their bare hands.

Phil Pfister—who won this event last year—was first out, but he took an incorrect grip as he picked up the timbers and this caused him to drop the load a few steps later. This cost him valuable time, but he still recovered and managed to elicit a huge cheer as he made it 23'7" from the original starting point. Next up was Steve Kirit, who struggled mightily and dropped the timbers several times—taking it only 5'4". Heavily-muscled Mariusz Pudzianowski followed Kirit, and after numerous drops finally edged ahead with a distance of 5'11", muttering, "very heavy" and shaking his head as he walked off the stage. Raimonds Bergmanis almost doubled Pudzianowski's performance with 11'8", although he also dropped the timbers two or three times before his 30 seconds was up. Brad Gillingham came out for the Carry, but with his right arm heavily bandaged after the biceps tear he was unable to stand up with the colossal

load.

Now it was down to the final two, and so far no one had managed to master the Timbers. Jim Lorimer was so worried that no one would succeed that he came backstage and voiced his concern. But with the top two men still to go we suspected the crowd might be treated to a spectacular finish. By that time the audience was absolutely convinced by the six failures that the combination of the weight of the Timbers and the angle of the ramp made carrying them all the way to the top an almost impossible task.

And then out came the Viking—Svend Karlsen—with his massive but muscular 6'3", 320-pound body. After urging him on with shouts of encouragement the audience grew quiet as he took his grip and then they began to stand and scream as he caught his balance and started up the ramp, slowly at first and then faster and faster until he stood atop the platform at the end of the ramp and, for good measure, held the timbers in his hands and smiled at the cheering, stomping, clap-



After the jammed-to-capacity crowd at Columbus' Downtown Auditorium saw Svend Karlsen's performance in the Farmer's Walk they thought they'd seen everything. But then the final contestant, Zydrunas Savickas, carried the logs up the ramp even faster—in the amazing time of 7.96 seconds—and won for himself a brand new Hummer and \$15,000. As the crowd stood and roared, a disappointed Karlsen showed he was a true sportsman by walking out and giving Savickas a Viking hug. *Photo by Jan Todd*



Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jim Lorimer share a moment of happiness and relief after Svend Karlsen electrified the crowd by carrying the 865 pound load of logs up the ramp. They were worried that none of the strongmen would make it all the way to the top. In a way, however, the failure of the first six men to take it all the way made the performances of the final two men all the more dramatic. No straps were allowed.

Photo by Jan Todd

ping, standing crowd. Svend then turned to face the pumped-up fans, tore off his outer shirt and then his inner shirt, shouted "Viking Power," and hit a couple of shots worthy of a man who once held a pro card in bodybuilding. Jim Lorimer and Arnold were both standing, too, and it appeared that no one in the sold-out auditorium remained seated.

But as the crowd settled down Bill Kazmaier announced that Zydrunas Savickas had to beat Svend's time of 12.75 seconds to win the event outright. Few, however, expected the thickset Lithuanian to finish at all, and certainly not to finish more quickly than Svend. Fewer still expected that Zydrunas could do what he did.

After walking up the ramp to assess the challenge, the bearlike man bent down and wrapped his chalk-covered mitts around the 1 3/8" handles, set his back, heaved the massive pile of timbers off the blocks and started up the ramp. His first step was deliberate, but by his third step he was almost running and he reached the top so quickly that it was clear he had won the Hummer, the \$15,000, and a solid claim to the title of "Strongest Man in the World." As the crowd realized the significance of what they were seeing they leapt collectively to their feet, brought up by the stark power of Zydrunas Savickas, who stood atop the platform with

his clenched fists raised in victory and celebration. And when the announcement was made that he had covered the distance in the seemingly impossible time of 7.96 seconds, the crowd—still standing and applauding—roared even louder. At that point Svend Karlsen, the Valiant Viking, walked up the ramp and the two huge men embraced in a touching show of comradeship that spoke eloquently of the brotherhood of strength.

Arnold and Jim Lorimer always strive to make each Weekend more extravagant and spectacular than the Weekend of the year before, and they urge those of us who are responsible for individual aspects of the Weekend to do our best to make improvements. So this is our goal. Next year we intend to bring together another outstanding group of strength athletes—including Mark Henry and Andrei Chemerkin, the two-time Olympic gold medallist in weightlifting—and pit them against each other in four or five tests of raw, basic strength. But even so we doubt that we'll be so fortunate as to stage a finish that matches the dramatic impact of what we saw this year. Our chief referee, David Webster, who has been attending, organizing, and officiating at strength competitions for over 50 years said after the show that he had never seen the equal of Savickas' trumping of Karlsen's conquest of the Timbers. So if you like big men lifting big weights at the biggest Iron Game event of the year, make your reservations at a Columbus hotel now and share in the excitement as eight human Hummers chalk up, cinch their belts, and do their best to stake their claim to being the strongest of the world's strong men.

2003 Arnold Strength Summit Results February 28 & March 1, 2003 Columbus, Ohio Final Results & Prizes				
Competitor	Country	Points	Place	Prize Money
Zydrunas Savickas	Lithuania	28.5	1st	Hummer + \$15,000
Svend Karlsen	Norway	26.5	2nd	\$15,000
Raimonds Bergmanis	Latvia	17.5	3 rd	\$10,000
Mariusz Pudzianowski	Poland	15.5	4 th	\$5000
Steve Kirit	USA	14.5	5 th	\$4,000
Phil Pfister	USA	14	6 th	\$2500 (tie)
Zdenek Sedmik	Czech. Rep.	14	6 th	\$2500 (tie)
Brad Gillingham	USA	13.5	8th	\$1000