



Legendary Strength Podcast Episode 10

Strongman Journey

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Hey there, it's Logan Christopher and welcome to another Legendary Strength Podcast. This should be an interesting episode. What I've decided to do is chronicle My Strongman Journey. I should start off with what am I talking about with that.

When I explain what I do, the whole feats of strength thing, to most people I need to talk about Strongman and most people at least have some awareness of what they see on ESPN, the Strongman that is done in the competitions. But what I do is the professional strongman, not that those guys aren't professionals but the old-time style where what strongmen did was they performed feats rather than in competition. Most people don't have awareness of the golden age of strongmen, guy like Arthur Saxon and Eugen Sandow, all those guys and how they used to perform during the Vaudeville circuit as well as sold out theaters and all that. That is a key distinction between them and I've definitely focused a lot more on that old-time style of strength rather than the modern competitive style, not to say that there's anything wrong with that. You can obviously build huge amounts of strength by the stone lifting, log lifting, all the events that they do there. That's also more suited for bigger people simply because having more muscle mass in those events is a big help in doing them.

Let's talk about how I got started in this. Why did I start doing these feats of strength anyway? My first taste of it really came with the Iron Mind bag of nails. If you're not familiar with Iron Mind, you can check out IronMind.com. They have all sorts of great training resources and tools, a lot of it focused on grip strength and a lot of it is also focused on the Strongman Olympic lifting, all sorts of different great ways of building strength.

In the beginning, the Iron Mind bag of nails was the way to get started with bending. The thing is there are five nails in it and really it's a very crappy progression, I have to say. The jump from

the white to green nail is not very big. It's just a short of the same stock but then the jump from the green to yellow is quite a big jump and most people are going to get stopped there. The jump from yellow to blue is a small jump. Once again, it's just a shorter piece of that. Then the jump to the red nail once again is huge. There are much more progressive ways of training bending but you have to get involved in buying your own steel, cutting it, and all sorts of other things. Anyway, this is what I got started with.

In the beginning, I could just do the white and green nail. It took my friend Tyler and I some training and we eventually got to point where we could bend the yellow nail. Of course, we were actually doing it wrong in the beginning. We were doing braced bending which is not how you're supposed to be doing the short bending. It's supposed to be done just with the hands held away from your body so you're not bracing your arm or your hand against any other part of your body. That can be a legitimate way to train the feats. The first time you do it, do some braced bending just for the assist as you move on.

Along with the bag of nails, I got started with some of the other grip strength like using a pinch block, grippers, and all that stuff. I have to say I was not good at this stuff from the beginning. When I first tried, I couldn't even close the trainer. That's how strong I was when I got started in this training, I couldn't close the trainer. Fairly rapidly, I was able to then close the trainer. It still took awhile to get the one in and even to this day, I'm not that great with grippers because I haven't really trained them. The best I've ever closed is I think I got the two one time after doing some training on it but besides that, I really haven't practiced with grippers much. The truth is almost everyone that trains with grippers says that grippers don't really translate to anything else besides grippers while other grip training does translate to a whole bunch of different things.

Moving on with my story, if you're talking about the old time strongmen, all roads, all paths lead to Dennis Rogers. If I remember correctly, how I originally found out about him was through John Wood and his site, Functional Hand Strength and in the book that I read about "The Mighty Atom" called the Spiritual Journey of Joseph L. Greenstein, which is the book more responsible for getting people interested in the strongman stuff. You ask any strongman and that is the book to read. Unfortunately, it's out of print but you can still find editions somewhere. I would highly, highly recommended you get a copy of that book and read it. There's so much information there. It's really biographical but the ideas you get from it and just the understanding of strength that comes across in that book is just amazing.

In that book, it's detailed how The Mighty Atom had a protégé, Slim the Hammerman, and how that all came about. Slim the Hammerman, in turn, ended up being the mentor for Dennis Rogers so there really was this strongman lineage. If you look at anyone who does the strongman stuff today, it basically is because they got started with Dennis Rogers.

Besides guys like John Brookfield who were doing it at the same time, Dennis was the most

well-known, the most popular, and definitely has gotten the most coverage as a performing strongman. Everyone that has done strongman stuff owes it to him for that. Dennis has taught tons of other guys like Pat Povilaitis who's also become quite famous as a strongman doing it.

Anyway at Functional Hand Strength, I think I first heard about and saw Dennis in action through a DVD he had called 336 Pounds of Fury. It's not because Dennis weighed 336 pounds, not even close, but he and Pat Povilaitis, they each weighed 163 pounds apiece so not very big guys. I'm actually bigger than Dennis but I definitely wouldn't be messing with them. This was really not so much a training DVD but just showcasing feats and having fun doing all sorts of stuff.

Having been introduced to Dennis, the first DVD of his that I bought was a Grip that Rips. This DVD is all about phonebook tearing. I bought it. I wasn't even that interested in phonebook. For whatever reason at the time, I wanted to tear cards and I was hoping that this DVD would cover that to some degree. It didn't so I just got started with the phonebooks.

What you can do with phonebooks because it's not always easy to find whatever size you need is tear along the spine just to make whatever phonebook thickness you need. Phonebooks are great in that it's one feat of strength that you can pretty much do for free. It's really easy to come across phonebooks at libraries. I've gotten old ones there. There are places where they just have stacks of them. You can take them. You can even have them delivered to you. Once you get into this, people save their phonebooks to give it to you. So it's a really great feat to get started with.

When I was starting, I was literally starting with a quarter inch thickness of phonebook and tearing through that. That wasn't even all that easy to begin with but I kept at it and kept practicing. One day, everything clicked in the phonebook tearing and I was now able to just rip through the local phonebook that I was practicing with. It was somewhere between an inch and an inch and a half. Everything just clicked and I was suddenly able to shred these normal sized phonebooks.

I was travelling down to Los Angeles or surrounding area for an Iron Maiden concert and ended up staying with friends where we had a party at night. He just kept handing me phonebooks and literally the entire floor of the house was just covered in shreds of phonebook, which is actually something of a common occurrence if you get into phonebook tearing. That was really when I dedicated myself to a single feat and I just worked at it and that one time, I just hit something and it took off from there. Of course, I continued to work on it here and there over time. I've been able to do even thicker and harder phonebooks.

I continued with the bending. I remember the time I first hit a 60 penny nail. A lot of people would tell you that bending a 60 penny nail is sort of like the feat that you need to accomplish. That's your entrance into the strongman club. What happened with the nails—this is actually a

fairly common occurrence, too—once I hit it, I started showing off that I could do this to everyone. I was like, “Check out what I can do.”

Basically, I was taking something that I’d just accomplished that was close to a max effort and I was doing it over and over and over again several times throughout the day. What happened was I started feeling a lot of pain when doing this. I remember after doing it one time and showing a person, I knew I shouldn’t have done it before because I was already in pain and it was starting to hurt but I did it again and my arm was just on fire for several hours afterwards.

I had obviously done too much and this happens to a lot of people when they get into bending because it’s so fun. Because it’s so exciting, you go and do too much and you’re placing a lot of stress on things that aren’t used to getting a lot of stress. It is something that needs to be broken into, not necessarily slowly, but you definitely need to break into it. You can’t rush it and you can’t go all out. You will suffer consequences like tennis or golfers elbow. I’m not exactly sure what it is but you can’t put yourself into pain from doing this.

After the 60 penny nail, at some point I got onto a grade 5 bolt. I did work my way up to a grade 8 bolt which I successfully bent one time. At some point in the future, I’d like to go for the red nail but I really haven’t been training bending at all in quite some time. That’s a bit of bending but that’s sort of getting ahead of the rest of the story.

Having bought Dennis Roger’s DVDs, at this point I probably had them all, he opened up a thing called the Old Time Strongman University which was monthly content and there was a forum just for his members. It became a who’s who of people who are strongmen today. He also held a contest. I don’t remember the details of it but it was basically send in a video of you doing a feat and you could win something.

My friend and I both had long hair at the time and having read about The Mighty Atom and his feats of pulling vehicles and even stopping the airplanes from taking off with his hair, we decided to pull, I believe, a van the first time we did it by our hair. We did it in tandem so both of us were pulling. We literally went to the hardware store, “Okay, how can we set this up?” got some chains, got some zip ties and everything, and then tried it out and it worked. That was the first hair stunt we ever did. From that point, and I’m going to get to it later, I’ve have gone further with that.

Then what happened which was sort of the game changer was Dennis decided to hold his first workshop. Like I said, a lot of these guys from the Old Time Strongman University were there, people that are some of the biggest strongmen today. Chris Ryder, who has also done a number of hair feats, this guy looks like a Viking, very strong, I remember him bending a horseshoe there that was I believe was a PR for him. It was a huge max attempt and he was screaming. This is not something you do for a show because you’re supposed to make things look easy. It wasn’t easy for him and it would have scared children had they been present. Mike Gillette at

the time had never done any of the strongmen training but now, he has done a whole bunch and really gone onto a pretty big level with it. Mike Bruce was there and Pat Povilaitis, of course.

In this workshop, Dennis taught his six staple feats. These are basically the feats that every strongman should learn how to perform. This includes the short bending, the long bending or doing some simple scrolls, horseshoe bending, phonebooks, tearing cards, and driving a nail with your hand. The cool thing about these ones is it really doesn't take much equipment to do. Of course you need the supplies but it doesn't take a lot. You don't need to carry a whole bunch of things that some other feats may require. You get these and you're going to have fairly well-rounded strength, a lot of grip strength because everything goes right through the hands in these feats, especially the long bending and the horseshoe bending. Those aren't really full body strengthening exercises.

The truth is you don't need to be able to do every single one of these six different feats. I remember Mike Bruce, as strong as he is—I don't know if this is still the case till today--has done some really crazy stuff and is strong at all sorts of things but he could not get the phonebooks. For whatever reason, that just eluded him completely. Once again, I don't know if he's gotten, achieved, and accomplished with the phonebooks these days but he could do some very crazy stuff. A big part of this is also finding what your specialties happen to be. Mike Bruce has done some crazy neck feats, bending steel, bending horseshoes across his neck, even hanging from a noose just by neck strength alone, so some dangerous stuff, too. Chris Ryder, as I mentioned, has also done some of the hair feats.

With every strongman, in order to stand out, you've got to find out what you can do as a specialty. I'll talk about my own specialties, how I developed these, and why I developed them in the future as we're going along with this. A big part of it is also the showmanship, learning how to put together a show and also then of course going out and getting paid for it.

What also was really cool about this workshop was having met Dennis and really befriended him, he connected me with Bud Jeffries. If it weren't for Dennis and doing this, all this stuff I've done together with Bud may never have happened because Bud at the time had some business problems he was looking to come back from but he didn't want to have to deal with any of that stuff. Hence he partnered with me and we've grown and done all these workshops together and everything since then. This workshop was the catapult for a lot of these guys. Basically, everyone that was at that workshop has more than made their money back just doing a few events even if they didn't focus on that at all.

Some other cool things regarding doing the strongman stuff, I attended many RKC's after doing the first one but really assisting. I think I assisted at three or four of them after that. They'd typically have a night where everyone would go out to dinner and this night would end up being a night where people would get together and just display their strength. Brett Jones was really

strong. He could bend the red nail and had a lot of strength along these lines. Just the people that were into that stuff would get together and would have a lot of fun.

A short time after this workshop with Dennis Rogers, Atomic Athletic which is owned by Roger LaPointe, he holds an annual strongman, The Atomic Athletic Great Black Swamp Olde Time Strongman Picnic. This is an annual event he holds in which he brings out some super strong people to display their strength. It's a really cool thing. I really wanted to go out to it so I decided to just say like, "Hey, would you like to have me?"

I remember talking on the phone with him. He was saying, "What can you do?" and I mentioned the hair pulling stunt which is obviously a fairly unique feat that no one does. At that time, I think I had maybe done it once or twice more possibly by myself—I don't remember the full details of it—but he said, "Okay. My friend has this fire truck." Somehow we got on the subject of that and I'm just saying, "I can do it."

I had absolutely no clue if I actually could do it or not. He was talking about this fire truck which ended up weighing 8,800 pounds. It was about four times as big as anything, as heavy as anything as I've ever pulled before, let alone by my hair but I said I could do it.

Leading up to that of course, I did quite a bit of training. If you've seen the video which is available on YouTube, it wasn't an easy pull at all but I did pull it off after a false start. The tricky part with that was we were on flat ground. There really wasn't any slope, maybe like a degree up or down. I didn't have it measured or anything but there was no pressure rating on the tires simply because they're old and they didn't use to do that for whatever reason. We were trying to fill them up but with no pressure rating, you have no way to test and see where it should be. The tires probably weren't as inflated as they could have been. The truck was sitting there overnight.

The first time I tried, I just couldn't get it going at all. What we ended up doing is we took a short break and it took like six guys just to move it forward a little bit and then from there, for whatever reason, just because it wasn't sitting and weighting itself down after getting it moved a little bit, I was able to get it started and pulled it maybe something like 50 yards. It was one of the most difficult things I have ever done.

At that event, I also had the pleasure of meeting Andrew Durniat who is quite the strongman himself as well as a kettlebell competitor in the Gear Force Sport. He's also someone else that's really good at kettlebell juggling. We did a face-off there where we basically were matching one move to one move and had a whole lot of fun with that and people seemed to really like it. That was a great event.

Not too long after that, I decided to open up my own gym in Scotts Valley which is a suburb of Santa Cruz. I wasn't focused on too much on this gym because I had the online business going but in order to get clients, I decided to hold a grand opening and do a strongman show. I put

out a single press release for this and I had four different newspapers come to cover the event. Why is that? Simply because strongman is very different. My headline was something like, "At the new gym grand opening, Strongman performs death defying stunts."

That's what I did and it wasn't very complex stuff. This was the only time after that fire truck I had pulled a vehicle by my hair and I was like all psyched for it. It was actually just my truck that had people riding in it but it was nothing compared to the fire truck so it was an effortless pull. I also did a feat that I'm somewhat now famous for where I hold the wrestler's bridge, have concrete stacked on my stomach, and then someone swinging a sledgehammer to break it. In order to make this more difficult, I usually also hold two weights like two kettlebells overhead so I have more stress on the neck. It looks quite dangerous, the truth is for me holding some weight and the sledgehammer with the concrete breaking is really not that difficult at all but it looks great. It got some great press coverage and I had clients coming in from that. I told this to numerous gym openers. If you have a party, bring a strongman out. There are several for hire but you can get great press from that. If you do the press right, that will lead to clientele.

After this, I held the first workshop with Bud Jeffries, the first ever Superhuman workshop and in this we decided to cover feats of strength. What we wanted to do was basically cover all these different feats and really some of the aspects of it. So it was sort of like Dennis's workshop in a much more compressed timeframe. You can still find this. It's in our Feats of Strength DVD set. We cover all the different feats, how to do them, how to train them, how to put together shows, specialties, and all that stuff, really great information because while you can find bits and pieces of this training, nowhere was it covered in one place. That's what we were aiming to do with this.

What happened with the second Superhuman workshop is we ended up actually doing a live show where once again, we got some press for Laurel Blackburn's gym out in Tallahassee, Florida just by performing. It was cool because we brought up all the guys that had done feats of strength before and actually some that hadn't and found something that they could do. Basically, each person would do one or two feats and we had Bud, who had the most practice because he's been touring around doing strongman shows for schools, leading everyone through it. We did some new combo feats and all sorts of things so it was a whole lot of fun with that.

We also got the opportunity to do another workshop with Dennis called the Become an Old Time Strongman workshop and it was much like the one before just several years after and it had some really strong guys out there for that. That was really cool. The unfortunate thing is that probably is the last time Dennis will ever teach. Maybe in the future there will be some more. We're going to have some more not so great news coming up at the end of this podcast.

So we do have the third Superhuman workshop coming up. We're not going to be covering feats of strength like I've been talking about here but we're going to be around the strongest

guys and feats of strength always tend to happen. I don't know if we're going to have a show or anything like that. I'm still figuring out all the details but it is the place to be if you want to become really strong because we have ridiculously strong people there and it's going to be a lot of fun. Be sure to check that out at SuperhumanWorkshop.com.

Let me talk a little but about my specialties. When you're a strongman, you have the staple feats that everyone could do. You can sometimes come up with new and interesting combinations or ways to do them that make it different than other people. For instance, as far as I know Pat Povilaitis was the first one ever to ever heart a horseshoe. Normally with horseshoe bending you're pulling on it till it opens up. It's sort of an S-type shape. Pat Povilaitis decided to take it further and keep bending it around till it was in a heart. That's something of a common thing that's done with horseshoes now so it's not so much of a specialty but at the time it was definitely different. Each person really finds something that they can do uniquely and if not completely unique, at least very few people are doing.

For me of course, I have the hair pulling and it's not a fun feat at all. I don't recommend anyone else try it, not because I'm trying to keep out the competition in a way but it's painful and it's not fun to do. It's really not fun when you hear your hair ripping out so I wouldn't recommend it. I haven't done it in a long time. It's not something that I normally train in at all. I don't train my hair regularly. The truth is with that feat, it's even more a feat of neck strength because you have to hold your head so that it's not just being pulled back to do it and that is tremendous strain on the neck. When you have all the hair together, it doesn't really hurt so much. The hair is quite strong. It's really like a rope when it's bunched up like that done properly.

That is one feat I've done. Like I said, that was the big thing that I did at the Atomic Athletic event. It was one of the big drawing things for the gym grand opening. It's not something easy to set up. It definitely needs to be done outside. There are some other hair feats that can be done but that's really what I focused on. Maybe in the future, I'll do something even bigger with that. I've thought about the idea of pursuing the world record in that though it's hard to find what exactly that is. As far as I know, some guy in the UK was pulling a double-decker bus by his hair which seems pretty tough to do. That's one of them.

The kettlebell juggling is something I've used a lot. Just recently I came up with the flaming kettlebell juggling. I did that in the recent Wizards of Strength workshop as sort of our Night of Strength fun we're having there. In the future if I end up doing more strongman shows, that could be definitely something because it looks awesome and it's dangerous. Any time you have a danger element, it really sort of elevates the feat in the peoples' mind.

I should mention that your normal person can't grasp the difficulty of the feats so something that is easy may seem to them a lot better than something that is much harder. Just because something's hard, it doesn't mean it's going to come across well and the whole art of the strongman is not only doing stuff that the average person can't but making it come across in

the right way to where they could really get it.

Flaming kettlebell juggling is one that could do that. I already mentioned the wrestler's bridge and the different forms of that, usually doing the concrete break because one, it looks very dangerous again but it's also very visual. It has obviously a loud noise attached to it so that one comes across really well. Even when I'm doing just normal wrestler's bridge, some people think I'm going to break my neck. So when I add a whole bunch of weight to it and when I have concrete broken on my stomach doing it, it really looks very dangerous but of course having worked up to being able to do it, it's not that dangerous at all.

The question some people may be asking is why I haven't done more of the whole performing strongman aspect. The reason why is I've focused more on teaching this stuff and running my websites and doing that as my business rather than getting paid to do shows. As far as actually doing the feats and going further with them, it's something that I cycle in with all the other things I do.

One thing I have found is that hand balancing and doing stuff like bending just don't seem to mix too well. Overall, I'd say it's too much strain on the wrist so that is something that I have found. Being that I'm focused quite a bit on hand balancing right now, I haven't been doing a lot of the feats that I've talked about here at all which is fine. I can come back to them later.

Even then, when I do like a birthday party or something like that, I can still do 60-penny nails or grade 5 bolts without training for them, bending 12-inch spikes, decks of cards, and that sort of thing. I've built up enough of a level to where I can do the feats without having to train them. If I'd want to take them further, I need to work back up and then work on going at it further but right now, I'm focusing on other stuff.

That being said, the hand balancing itself could certainly be used in feats of strength in a strongman show. Of course they have people like the Cirque de Soleil where there are professional hand balancers but if I added just some basic stuff like a handstand and a back flip into this other stuff, it would come across really well without having to be able to do ridiculous stunts like jumping on one hand. Now if I could do that, I would certainly add it in there but I'm not quite there with those skills yet.

There really is a whole wide range of different things that you could do. A lot of the strongman is about the hand and grip strength. The main part of that is that most people don't have it so when you're displaying it, it just looks amazing and people can't translate. Even though they may have a whole bunch of power in their body and strength there, if they can't translate it through the hands which tend to be the weak link, they're not going to be able to do any of these movements. While there is technique involved, it is really about being stronger and stronger.

I hope you've enjoyed this story of how I really got started with professional strongman and

how it sort of developed into different things that I've done along the way. What I want to end with is telling you that unfortunately Dennis Rogers has decided to pull all his DVDs off the market. What we're doing is we're going to have a close out sale. After this, you will not be able to get any training information from Dennis Rogers short of hiring himself for thousands of dollars. I know most people that are interested in this subject, that are already listening already have a number of his DVDs if not all of them but now if you want them, it's the last opportunity to have them. We're going to have them at sales price in order to try to sell out all the remaining stock that we have. After this, they're pulled off the market for good.

In the future, Dennis has some plans to develop some new stuff but that could be a long time so if you're looking for how to tear phonebooks in half, there's nothing better than his *Grip that Rips* DVDs and *How to Drive a Nail Without a Hammer*. *Odd Object Bending and Breaking* is really about bending and destroying common household items. It's a strength you need for a short braced bending but it's done with things like wrenches, screw drivers, frying pans, all that sort of stuff.

There is one last one, *Basic Scrolling*. Dennis filmed this along with Eric Vining and it's really about how to get started in scrolling. With bending you have the short bending, you have braced bending, and then long bending or scrolling, and there are a bunch of varieties with that. All of these DVDs are really great. They're going to be on sale for this close out special. You can also get the package deal to get them all. This won't be around for long. It will definitely be pulled down before the end of the year. If you're looking for a Christmas present for someone who is interested in getting stronger then be sure to grab it for them while it's still available. To grab the DVDS, go to LegendaryStrength.com/closeout. That will bring you to the page where you can get the special deal on the Dennis Rogers DVD for the last time ever.

I hope you've enjoyed my strongman journey. I enjoyed talking about it and detailing all this for you. If you have any questions, be sure to let me know. Also, please rate this podcast on iTunes so other people can find it and enjoy all the great stuff we're giving out here at the Legendary Strength Podcast. Thank you very much and I'll talk to you next week.