



## Legendary Strength Podcast

### Clay Edgin

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**Logan:** Welcome everyone. This is Logan Christopher with the [Legendary Strength podcast](#). On the call with me today I have [Clay Edgin](#) and if you don't know Clay, he has been a strongman competitor, competes in grip, an all around big and strong guy so I am excited to have Clay on the call. He's also someone that I've personally met unlike many of my interviewees. Thanks for joining us today, Clay.

**Clay:** Great. Thanks for having me, Logan. Hello all you listeners in podcast land.

**Logan:** So for the people who aren't familiar with you, can you give us sort of a brief background and talk about your training in strongman grip and all that stuff?

**Clay:** Sure.

**Logan:** It doesn't have to be too brief.

**Clay:** I started training for strongman in 2003. I've always been a fan of [The World's Strongest Man](#) television show like I'm sure most of us have. I was fortunate enough to have been born pretty big but I was too big at the time. I was 6'5" and I was about 416 when I first started training. So the first of course was to get my weight under control and not be such a big, fat, you-know-what. So I got the

weight under control and started deadlifting, pressing, squatting, and looking for guys in the area to train with.

That led to a pretty strong obsession with strongman competitions for a while, which led into, kind of like a gateway drug. It led into highland games and then into grip strong and then later into [Mas wrestling](#), but it's been a great, great journey so far to travel, meet really cool people, and lift heavy things. I'm not really sure why I do it anymore. I just can't imagine life without it.

**Logan:** It's just a habit at this point, right?

**Clay:** Yeah.

**Logan:** It'd be harder to stop than to continue.

**Clay:** Yeah, you have no idea.

**Logan:** I'm definitely there. So your foundation was really just getting into the [strongman training](#). Can you tell us a little bit more about that, and doing competitions, some of the successes you've had in competing?

**Clay:** I first got into this strongman training after reading Brook Kubik's book, [Dinosaur Training](#) about kegs and axles and everything else. It was really fascinating. I guess when I was going up with some guys once a week or once every other week and I took second place in my first contest in 2003. Since then, I've done close to 30 contests now over the last 10 years. Of those, I've won 17 and had a bunch of top threes and then a few not-so-great performances. But people learn a lot more out of those bad performances than they do from the good ones.

**Logan:** And what about grip sport, you've actually competed in that?

**Clay:** Yeah, I competed once in a global grip challenge at Jedd Johnson and Jim Smith's contest in Pennsylvania in 2003 or 2004. I forget which one it was. I took second place behind Rob Vigent Jr., which isn't anything to be ashamed of because he's kind of a world class arm wrestler so I was pretty proud about that. Since then, I've done a dozen or 15 grip contests all over the state and have driven I don't even know how many miles to hang out with guys to do grip stuff. I want to assure listeners that it is as straight as I need it to be. There's no phony business going on there.

**Logan:** Now grip sport isn't as big as strongman so the competitions are fewer and farther in between. The new thing you've been, the new phrase is the Mas wrestling. Can you tell our listeners about that because definitely the scene at the strongman competition was the first time I had seen it before?

**Clay:** Yeah, it's new in the US as well. I've been competing in it for only a few months but it was first debuted in January this year at LA Fit Expo Contest and I think four or five guys doing the Mas wrestling but it originated in a small province in Northern Russia called [Yakutia](#). It's a very small, poor village, the coldest inhabited place on earth actually. It gets down to something like -70 degrees Fahrenheit so the people there, when you only have a few months of sunshine and warm weather here. They have all kinds of these tests of strength of who's the strongest man in the village or you have a dispute and you don't want to get in trouble with the elders by fighting. You find some other sporting contest where you can settle it.

So this Mas wrestling was essentially a board on the ground with a broken shovel handle. These guys were bringing it down and pulling it back and forth. It evolved into the sport where now some of these bigger contests in Russia and the Ukraine get 4,000, 5,000 or 6,000 spectators and 20 to 30 countries represented all over the world that were doing it.

**Logan:** Wow.

**Clay:** It's pretty new in the US still so we don't really know that much about it. We know some of its history. We're not sure how to train for it other than just going along, getting together, and trying out different techniques.

**Logan:** Could you describe the match for a person that's listening.

**Clay:** In Mas wrestling, there are a few ways to win. First, you start out sitting on your butt, you're facing your opponent, and between you there's a 2 x 10 board where you put your feet on. There's a stick that's just under two feet long and about an inch and a quarter in diameter and the way to win is to either pull the stick out of the other person's hand, pull the other person over on to your side, or turn the person in such a way where anything other than their feet touches the board. If you pull a person off balance and their knee hits the board, their shoulder or God forbid their head something, then that's it. That's the point. It's best two out of three and most of these things are done in a tournament fashion. The contest I just did in Russia a few weeks ago was a double elimination where if you lost the first match, you got into the group B bracket and still were able to compete a little while longer.

**Logan:** How'd you do in that competition?

**Clay:** I took 22<sup>nd</sup> place out of, I think, 36 guys. I lost against the Brazilian champion but then I beat the Armenian champion and lost a guy to again who's 180 kilos, almost 400-pound powerlifter from Cuba, just a huge, huge man.

**Logan:** I'm just curious. How have you gone about training for this, since it's not something, like you said, that most people are even aware of, especially in the US?

**Clay:** Well, making the regulation board was the first step. Some plans that sent me and I just started up in the gym if I'm alone and don't have anyone to train with. I'll set it up in the gym. There's one big beam in the middle of the gym where I often put a bunch of bands around it I've got to the stick and then just try to fight against all that band tension. It doesn't quite react the same way that a person does but it still gives you a pretty good feel for having to hang onto that stick, trying to impose your will and trying to get into the right positions.

It's very much like wrestling or jiu jitsu. It's about finding the right position, the right leverage, the right timing and there's some strategy involved. If someone's pulling against you, you can go with them or you can wait for them to stop pulling and then pull in the opposite direction. There's a lot of strategy involved. You don't quite get the same feel as when you're fighting against bands. Sometimes, in the gym there won't be anybody who is a real solid match for me so I try to con two people into grabbing the other end of the stick and just having them pull against me so it's a two on one match. That seems to give me a pretty good feel for guys like this 400-pound Cuban powerlifter who just overpowered me.

**Logan:** What does your training look like? Is it really dependent on whatever sort of competition you have coming up? How do you structure? I'm sure this changes all the time but could you give people an idea of how you like to put your training together?

**Clay:** I spent the first few years just trying to create a base, getting a decent deadlift and squatting press-up. Now in the last couple of years whenever I do a different competition, it's been just gearing all my training towards that. When I have Strongman, I'll try to hit two event training days during the week and two gym-lifting days. One of the event training days is usually for speed, to work on technical stuff or try out new things I may have read about online. The other one is usually some heavier work just to get my nervous system ready to handle these heavy loads. The gym work is usually some kind of squat and some kind of press.

I rarely ever do a deadlifting in the gym when it comes to training for Strongman. It seems like training the Strongman events, the yoke and the farmer's, seem to do a pretty good job of building my deadlift up. When I'm doing powerlifting, I just do it strict three days a week, higher volume training session. I'll just one press, one squat, and one deadlift every week. I kind of rotate them around. I did Brandon Lilly's Cube method on my last go around. I get pretty good gains with that.

**Logan:** I'm curious. For you, what is a decent squat, press and deadlift?

**Clay:** It seems to vary by a million pounds in a given day but my best squat is 570 with the belt and wraps, best deadlift is 713 and best bench is 405 but I've done 365 at a push-press.

**Logan:** Excellent. How do you fit grip into all of that? Is that really something that you focus on at a different time like if you have a competition coming up, or is that just in there to some degree? Of course, the strongmen stuff certainly takes grip to some degree but what about grip-specific stuff?

**Clay:** If I have some time during the week since I work in a gym part-time, there are some guys there who are interested in training their grip so when they get things set up I'll work with them a little bit and I'll get some of the training in. If things aren't feeling right, if my squats feel terrible and my back hurts, my knees are killing me, sometimes I'll just call it and I'll just hit the grip. So it really is catch as catch can situation with my grip training. I'm not as regular with it as I was in the beginning.

When I first started training grip, it was four, five, six days a week. I threw in as much volume as my hands could stand. I built a pretty good base so now I can just—it seems, I don't know about you, but when I don't train grip for a while and I come back and do it, my numbers are pretty close to where I left off but then they accelerate quickly again. It's like taking that time off breaks me through that plateau where I get that mind-muscle connection with my hands reestablished and just grease that groove, as Pavel says. Now my hands get even stronger and the weights get heavier.

**Logan:** Absolutely. What are some of your grip and hand strength feats that you're most proud of?

**Clay:** There are so many. I've enjoyed so many. I've closed the No. 4 gripper from IronMind but it hasn't been under special certification conditions. I've closed it a few different times and I've got this brand new one down to about a sixteenth of an inch. I've bent the red nail, the Fat Bastard stock. I was the first guy to bend the grade 5 temperate steel bolt. That's 5/16 thick and 7 inches long.

What was quite funny is that after I stepped away from [nail bending](#) and grip for a while, I came back to see what guys were doing with bending and noticed that they were calling that the Edgin bolt because I was the first guy to bend it, which is a little bit strange and a little bit humbling because now guys are saying, *"Hey, I bent a you last night"* or *"Hey, a bent a six-inch of you,"* which sounds strange.

I've deadlifted [the Inch dumbbell](#), pinched 245s, pinched 610s, pretty much all the standard grip feats that one could do. My best Rolling Thunder is 105 kilos and best double overhand axle deadlift is 200 kilos.

**Logan:** Excellent. As right now one of my goals is to bend the red nail and I'm closing in on it, what were some of the things that worked really well for you doing the short bending that you think helped make you become so successful and have a bolt named after you?

**Clay:** While I was doing a lot of nail bending several years ago, I had a lot of free time to myself. I was working evenings as a security guard for a produce plant. As you can imagine it gets pretty boring so I just bring a bunch of bending stuff with me and spend three, four, five hours a night bending until either my elbows felt like they were going to fall off or my hands blew open or until I run out of stock. Sometimes at night I'd bent 20 or 30 temperate steel bolts in a night. Sometimes it meant that I was taking 50 or 60, just as whatever I could handle as often as I could handle it.

My advice for somebody who's trying to get better at nail bending is to push the limits of what your hands and arms can do on a regular basis. You'd be really surprised what kind of potential they have. Like I mentioned before, they have the greatest mind-muscle link between anywhere else in your body and has amazing ability to recover. So if you push and then you have faith that they're going to get stronger, then you can make noticeable strength gains in nail bending or any grip stuff within a week or two. You could cut half an inch off a bolt and bend it that you only bent a week ago for the first time. So really push the volume on that. Take care of your of your lower arms. If you're feeling any pain or discomfort, you're getting tennis elbow or you can just feel those nerves throbbing, ice them and do your rehab stuff and really dedicate as much time to your recovery as you do to the training. That's going to make all the difference in the world.

**Logan:** Could you expound on doing the recovery work a little more? What worked well for you beside icing?

**Clay:** Ice was very good, Biofreeze or any of those heating/cooling agents. I went to a website, I think it was called *FingerMagic.com*. I'm not quite sure if that website's still up anymore but it was showing finger exercises, dexterity work, and lots of the things to get blood flow in the area, specifically in the extensors which we don't really work that often during grip training.

I bought these, they were like 1 1/2-inch or 2-inch solid steel balls that I wrapped in athletic tape and I spun those around in my hand, like it has the little tiny Ben Wa balls that you can spin in your hand for Zen and relaxation or whatever. I made them. I had the ones that were pretty heavy so it took a lot of effort for my fingers to move those around and I built up some dexterity. All the extra blood flow in my lower arms is what I really credit to helping speed along the recovery process. There have been times where I haven't been able to turn the key in my ignition in my truck but then a couple of days later of rehabbing, icing, stretching and taking care of it, I'm back to 100%.

**Logan:** So when you said do a whole lot of volume with bending and other grip, is this multiple days in a row or did you often take days of rest? How frequent was this sort of training?

**Clay:** It was about as often as I could stand it. I usually did my nail bending and stuff at the end of the workout because it would just kill my grip but if I had a few hours free and felt like doing some grip,

which was quite often, I'd work on something that I needed improvement on the most in the beginning of the workout and then finish with things that really killed my grip and my wrists at the end like levering and nail bending. At the very minimum when I was training grip regularly, I would train three to four times a week. Then there were times when I remember going almost a full month by training with reasonably high intensity every single day and I was making some great gains during that time. At the end of it, my elbows any wrists were pretty beat up so I took about a week off to recover. But you've got to strike when the iron's hot and if your hands are feeling good, you've got to go for it.

**Logan:** Absolutely. You've got to be careful you don't push into that line of really doing too much to injure yourself. Were there any tips besides the recovery work that helped you to not get to that point because I know myself and some other people doing bending and other grip feats, I've done too much to the point of injury?

**Clay:** Yeah, I'm in that same boat, too. I tore something in my rotator cuff or somewhere in there on the right shoulder trying to bend a big bar. You do have to listen to your body at some point and if you're not recovering, if you've taken a couple of days, you iced, you stretched and you did your high rep blood flow movements and it's still hurting, you might just need to do something else for a while, especially as you get a little bit older. I'm into my early 30's now. I just have to listen to my body more and if something's hurting, I've got to push in a different direction until that feels better and then I can get back on top of it.

**Logan:** Well, that's excellent advice. I'm definitely going to put some of that into action. I'll let you know how it goes for me. I'll really up the volume on my bending. Did you find that same thing across all different grip feats? Some people have noticed they tackled bending in a different way as other grip strength. What about you?

**Clay:** I think because bending, especially double overhand style bending relies on a lot of upper body strength, maybe the gains aren't as fast as other types of strength. If I'm working with Rolling Thunder for a few weeks in a row, I like to approach it with the same way I do the bending and just do it as often as I can with as many reps and as much time under tension as I can to build up that work capacity. Because in strongman, too, we want to carry heavy weights for a long distance and being able to have the grip strength to pick those up once is great but being able to hang onto those things for a minute if you have to is the name of the game. So trying to build up that volume in the gym by regularly hitting lots of time under tension on the grip is what I think is the best approach to the grip strength training. The nail bending is kind of the same thing except as I mentioned before, it's going to beat up your joints a little more.

**Logan:** Excellent. Good advice. Let's turn the table to talk a bit more about strongman training. What are some of the things you did that worked really well for you in approaching that?

**Clay:** I spent lots of years just training the basic movements, the squat and the press, the event training and everything like that but I don't think I made my best progress in strong man until I started doing more agility work, lots of footwork drills with the speed ladder, some plyometrics, a lot more mobility work and stretching, trying to do some similar leg isolation movements, just kind of filling in the gaps that I've been neglecting all these years. I feel like it made me more of a complete strength athlete, to be able to run shuttle drills. Just do everything that an NFL player would do but do it with 800 pounds on your shoulders.

**Logan:** So you're doing agility type stuff with the yoke?

**Clay:** Well, we do some speed work with the yoke. We'll work up to a top set and then break down the weight to about 50% and do some sprints. No shuttle drills with the yoke quite yet but we've done a lot of other loaded movements for a short burst. Some of them involve turns. Most of them are on a sprint.

**Logan:** Have you tried any sort of agility drills with lighter loads like maybe holding onto kettlebells, dumbbells or anything like that?

**Clay:** No, I haven't but I'd like to give it a try. I'm always gearing for something new in the gym. I think that's what has kept me going for so long, too. So I would maybe try some of those foot work drills with some kettlebells in my hands or something and see if I can't do it without blowing out a knee or something like that.

**Logan:** Yeah, it'd definitely have to be something you've got to approach smartly and carefully but it can be fun though. One thing I was surprised about when I just did [my first strongman competition](#)—what as that, a month ago?—with the event you put on was in some of the events that I had done similar training, other events were completely brand new things to me but really in the weight class I was at, the weights were not that heavy in the things like the deadlift for me. So it was really about the speed element, which is something I hadn't trained in that sort of way so it makes sense what you were saying, working on your agility, your foot speed and all that is going to carry over big to doing those events.

**Clay:** Yeah, and all it takes is one time of getting burned by the stopwatch. If you complete something in 15 seconds and the guy next to you does it in 14.9 seconds, that's going to leave a sour taste in your mouth and you're going to want to get faster. You did a great job on that deadlift medley and you killed a lot of those events. The weight class you were in just stacked with guys that may have trained some of the events a few times but they're all CrossFitters are light weight strongmen who really spend a lot of time working on their speed and their agility.



**Logan:** Yeah, I definitely want to compete again and I'll do some specific practice on the events I think. Then I'll have a much better chance next time at competing towards the top positions there, especially if there's not more than nine people in the class. It was pretty bit for being non—usually it's the heavyweight classes that's what strongmen's all about. You've got all the people in there but not this time.

**Clay:** Yeah, we only had 2 fat kids in the fat kid class and there were 24 or 20 lightweight men and 4 women so the big guys were really outnumbered. It was a nice change of pace, I think, because the weights for so light for the other divisions that it called some people out of the woodwork that may not have been able to try the weights otherwise.

**Logan:** Yeah, it was a lot of fun. So I'm curious when you are approaching for instance press squat deadlift, do you tend to go just really heavy and see what you can max out? Are you doing more volume with that sort of work? Are you mixing up between the two?

**Clay:** I think I've always had my best results doing heavy doubles and heavy triples. I like to max out. I like to see where I'm at but if you miss a few rep max and it does something to your head sometimes and it kind of just kills the workout, like oh man, I missed this PR attempt or even worse, I missed this attempt in the weight that I've 20 pounds heavier before. So I try to dial it back a little bit and stay within 80% and 95% of my one-rep maxes for as much I can stand. There are things like overhead press that I could use a lot of work with speed so sometimes I'll do a like 45% to 60% of my one-rep max of weight on the bar plus from bands. Then I'll do some strict overhead press. I'll tell you what, man. If you're not explosive getting those bands overhead, that bar will come back on your in a real quick heartbeat.

**Logan:** Yeah, I've never done banded presses but it does sound quite difficult.

**Clay:** I think it's maybe that fear of death that makes you do it quickly.

**Logan:** All right. Well, we're coming up on the half hour mark. Are there any final things on training we haven't talked about yet that you'd like to convey to the people listening?

**Clay:** I think the biggest gains you can make are in your mind if you commit to not having any limitations. I know we hear that all the time in motivational T-shirts, bumper stickers and everything else but if you just commit to not having limitations and trying to become legendary, as the name of your podcast implies, then I think you'll find you make really good progress and the sky is the limit. You can do anything in this life with a good, strong back and the ability to just string together some coherent sentences. To all the listeners out there who are really looking for that last little bit of advice, it's step

into the gym tomorrow or today even and commit to pushing yourself a little more and seeing what you can accomplish. You might be surprised about the results.

If I can also give a quick shout out to the tens of Mas wrestlers listening, more than that they get, check out [NorCalMasWrestling.com](http://NorCalMasWrestling.com) for the latest information on Mas wrestling tournaments in the area. We're going to have one coming up in January in Santa Cruz, one February in San Jose, and another one in February in Bakersfield. So it's going to be a real busy next few months for me.

**Logan:** Okay. Excellent, and is it M-O-S-S? Is that how you spell it?

**Clay:** It's M-A-S, like "more" in Spanish but Mas is actually Russian for stick.

**Logan:** That makes sense. So where can people go to find out more about you? Do you have a website, your Facebook profile or anything you want to point them to?

**Clay:** Yeah, you can [stalk me on Facebook](#). I always appreciate that or you can look me up on [StrongmanClay.com](http://StrongmanClay.com). It's just a little website I put together for personal training and stuff, and I've some pictures up there. Again, the Facebook talking is always welcome. I appreciate dropping a note and say hey.

**Logan:** Okay. Well, thank you very much, Clay. I had a fun time with this call and definitely picked up some tips that I'm going to put into action with the grip training.

**Clay:** Awesome. Thanks for having me, Logan. I appreciate it.

**Logan:** All right, thanks everyone for listening and stay tuned for our next call. We'll have another great interview for you.