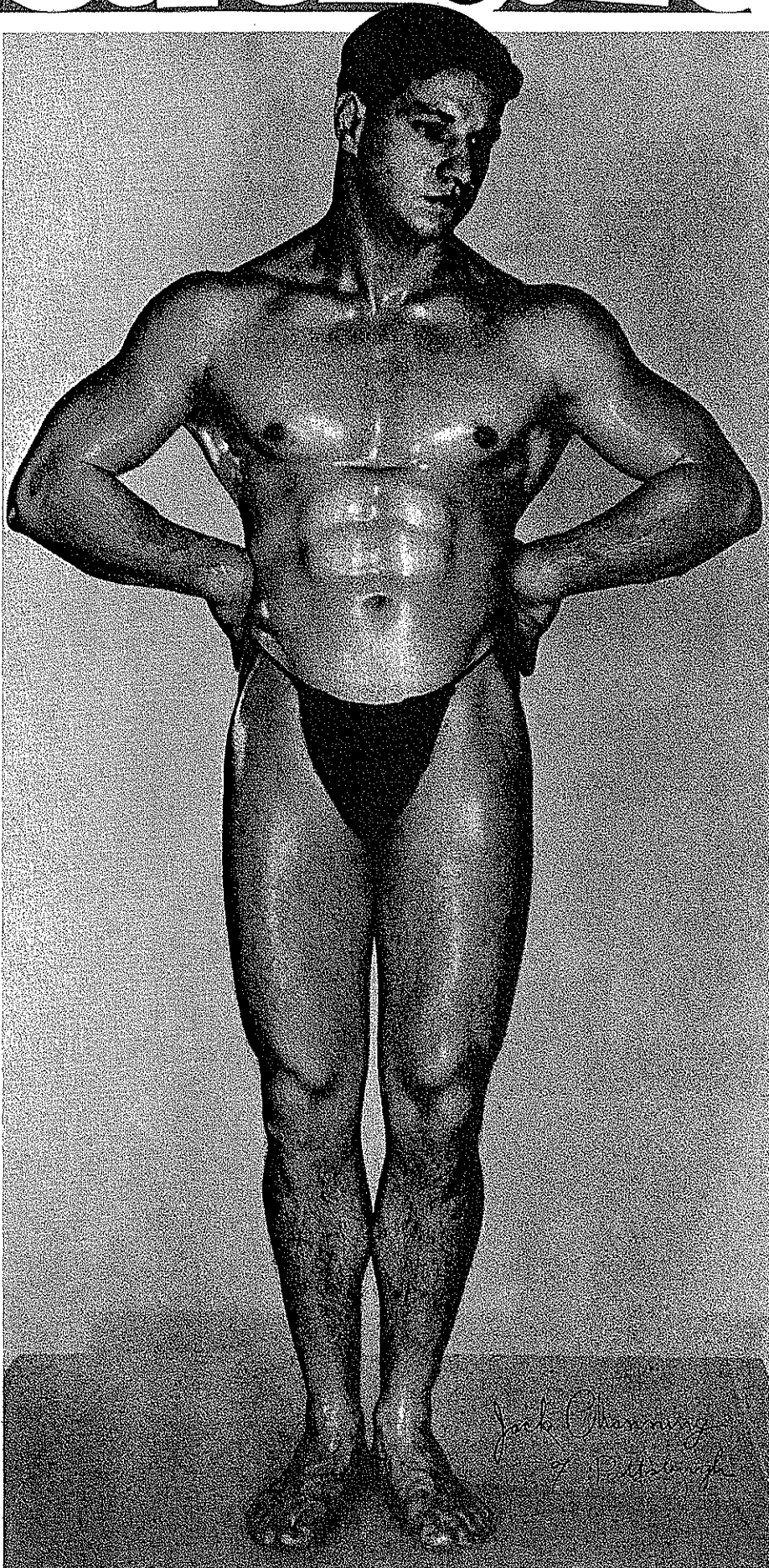


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APRIL 1939

Jack Dempsey



The Amazing Sampson

Was Sampson the world's strongest man of his time?

By CLIFFORD B. MALBON

THE name SAMSON has long been associated with great strength. This story, however, is not about SAMSON, but deals with a real old timer which you may have read about at some time or other, C. A. Sampson, "The Strongest Man on Earth," born in Metz, Lorraine, on the 16th of April, 1859. He was of a family of some means, his father being a surgeon in the French Army.

When the boy Sampson was two years old he went with his mother to Italy, as a change of climate was necessary for his mother's health. Soon after reaching Italy mother and son sailed for Australia, where they lived for five years. On the 7th of May, 1866, they took passage on the steamer *Australia* and were homeward bound again. In those days an ocean trip was not to be compared with modern travel and the steamer broke down in mid-ocean, turning the trip into a perilous and tedious eleven weeks voyage. As a result of the nervous strain and hardships of the voyage, Sampson's mother, who was already somewhat of an invalid, was taken ill with a nervous shock from which she never recovered.

Thus Sampson early in life was deprived of his mother's care. As Sampson's father could not be at home while attending to his duties in the French Army as surgeon, the boy was placed in a school at Friedrichsdorf, in Germany. This school was considered one of the best in Europe and boys from all parts of the world were sent there for their education. From all indications, traveling around the world had made a restless student out of young Sampson as he was mixed up in most of the mischief of the day and usually was the ring leader. This resulted in the boy's removal to a school in Heidelberg. At the new school things went along about the same with no alarming degree of improvement in studies.

When the Franco Prussian War broke out in 1870, Sampson took advantage of the fact that his father was away from home fulfilling his duties as surgeon in the French Army and joined the French Ambulance Corps with two other boys of his own age. It was easy to see that

his adventurous disposition was cropping out at an early age. During one of the early battles of the war, one of Sampson's friends was shot through the head by a stray bullet and killed. Later his other companion was taken sick and sent back of the lines to a hospital.

At the battle of Gravelotte, while helping the officers to supply the

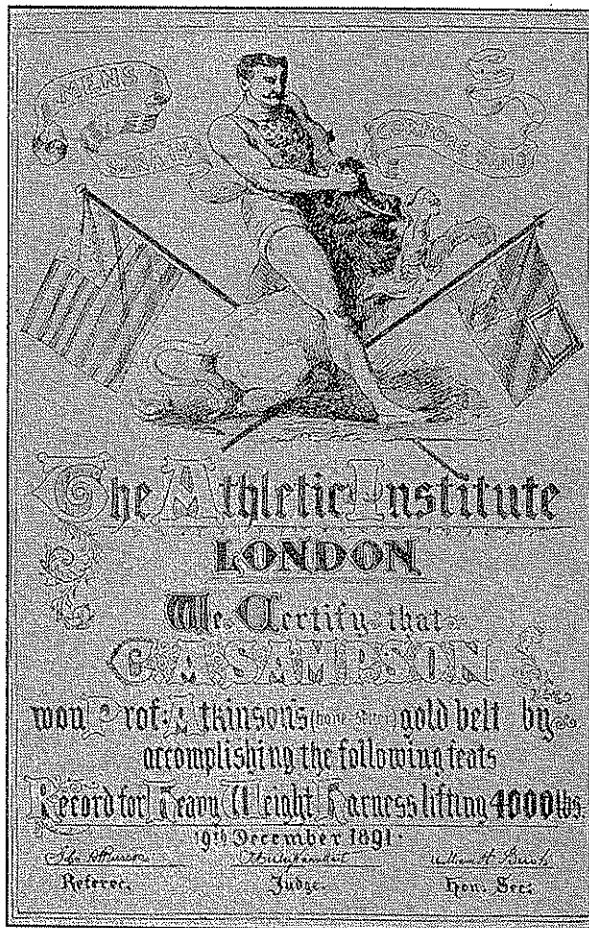
exposure to unhealthy conditions while recovering. Then to make matters worse, when he was about fourteen years of age he was struck by lightning and completely paralyzed. After seventeen days of uncertainty he had somewhat regained the power of motion, but was still partially paralyzed and practically helpless. As his father was well-to-do, no effort was spared to prolong his life and to relieve his suffering. Several doctors were consulted but always with unsatisfactory results. Nothing seemed to better the condition of young Sampson, who was later to call himself "The Strongest Man on Earth."

After being confined to bed for three months, nature began to assert itself and young Sampson was able to sit up for a few hours each day. As his strength gradually returned, two ropes with rings attached, were suspended from the ceiling above the bed, extending down within reach of his hands. These were no doubt the same as you can see in any hospital today where the patients need a support to pull themselves to a sitting position.

One day one of these ropes happened to break as he was playing with the fastening. Separating the steel ring from the rope, he playfully slipped the ring upon his wrist. From this position he forced it up over the biceps of his arm. At this position the steel ring was slowly worked up and down over the muscles. Young Sampson had no idea that this simple massaging motion would have any effect on the muscles of his arm. He made several movements with the arm, straining the biceps against the ring, and after a while a feeling

of fatigue was noticed in his arm and later over his entire body. As a result of this fatigue he fell into a deep and restful sleep and when he awoke, he felt fresher and brighter than at any time since being paralyzed by the lightning bolt. Of course Sampson did not tell any one of the massaging with the steel ring at the time. He kept repeating the exercise and as time went on, his suffering in the paralyzed limbs was relieved. Each day the lifeless muscles took on new strength. At every opportunity he would

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The certificate won in England by Sampson for his incredible harness lift of 4000 pounds.

wounded soldiers with water, Sampson was struck in the left side with a bullet and injured. Sampson's father, being a surgeon, heard of his son's misfortune and found him on the battle front. After attending to his wound and finding it impossible to send him home, his father had him sent to a hospital in Nancy for nursing and care.

From that time on, young Sampson's health began to fail, probably as a result of the wound, which was not thought serious at the time, and due to the hardships and deprivations of war, and

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for he was ambitious, and two days of more moderate training in which he did a great deal of one hand lifting and supine pressing.

His progress was rapid and very soon, surprisingly soon, he was attracting attention in midwestern weight lifting circles. That small body of his, which had not been called upon to really show what it could do, responded to progressive training in a sensational way. Constant practice with Captain Paul, three times a week these two men trained together, continuous practice on the three lifts in an endeavor to find ways and means to make commendable lifts in spite of the single thumb on one hand, caused his weight lifting records to soar.

Naturally his right arm, the uninjured arm and hand, had always been his best. He depended upon it almost entirely in wrestling. But since his advent as a weight lifter he had used his left arm continuously and now it compares favorably with his right arm in development and strength.

His best on the three Olympic lifts are 160 press, 160 snatch and 215 clean and jerk. I can remember a contest in the early days of the York team, when Dick Bachtell was national 236 pound champion, after he had one hand snatched 154 pounds to come within a pound of the world's record, when his lifts were exactly those made by Antoine. Other commendable lifts or strength feats

established are: Right arm bent press 160, left arm 110, 325 shoulder bridge. Isn't this something? For the lifter's bodyweight was just 132 pounds. It's easily the best record we know of, more than double bodyweight, a feat that our own Siegmund Klein wrote about and wondered about in an article some years ago. And here it has become not only a reality, but far more than double bodyweight. It's the best proof that this lad Vega possesses a quality of strength, the like of which to our knowledge had never before been shown throughout the world in a similar lift. In the supine press, on a box or bench he has succeeded with 210 pounds, two arm curl of nearly bodyweight, 115 pounds, 10 repetitions in the deep knee bend with 225 pounds and a single squat with 275. He one hand snatched 125 while weighing 129, just short of bodyweight.

He won second place in the featherweight class in the Chicago district, Central AAU, one of the country's most thickly populated districts where lifters of Vega's size abound.

He is a barber by profession and a good one too.

Truly a remarkable record for such a beginning. Further proof that any man, no matter what his condition may be in the beginning, can through courage and persistence overcome his handicaps making a really commendable record.

THE AMAZING SAMPSON

(Continued from Page 23)

slip the steel rings over the muscles of arms or legs and strain against the rings. To this exercise he always attributed much of his phenomenal strength in later exhibitions.

Having completely recovered by this time, young Sampson declared that he felt better than he had ever been at any time during his life. His exercise with the steel rings had continued and he soon found that he could force the steel rings out of shape with the muscles of his upper arm. Procuring stronger rings, he found that with practice he could force even these out of shape with the now powerful muscles of his upper arm. Later he was able to break chains, ropes and perform other feats of great strength. At this time he joined a circus and ran away from his father's guidance and care. His father thought that he would soon tire of earning his own living in this way and so did not object at once to the adventure.

Traveling for over a year as an all-around man with the circus gave young Sampson an opportunity to try many feats of strength and he tried hard at everything that came his way. Everything that he set his mind to do, he finally accomplished. In this way he early in life learned that to become a champion athlete, FORCE OF WILL is important to carry one to victory in strength accomplishments.

Finally his father attempted to effect his return home forcibly and used legal methods. One evening as Sampson was performing in the Hippodrome in Paris, a warrant was sworn out for his arrest, to be served on him after the show was over. The manager found out about the warrant and helped plan Sampson's escape. It was impossible to leave the Hippodrome without being seen and arrested. The accident squad was brought into play and Sampson was laid out on a stretcher and covered with blankets. The unsuspecting officers who were waiting to arrest Sampson inquired what had occurred, and were informed that an attendant had been kicked by a horse and was being carried to the hospital. A short distance from the Hippodrome, Sampson was up and away, scooting down a dark alley to a railroad station and boarded a train for Havre and from there he sailed for America.

After arriving in America, Sampson decided to earn a living by giving exhibitions of strength feats and performed in museums and places of amusement. These exhibitions brought from \$200 to \$300 per week. During the year 1878, Sampson returned to Europe and exhibited before most of the universities and crowned heads of Europe.

Sampson found other uses for his strength than on the exhibition stage as the following incident will show:

While walking through Strasburg, Alsace, one night in October, 1878, Sampson turned into Kanal Street and heard a woman's cry for help. Running in that direction, Sampson came upon a German soldier of a Uhlan regiment molesting a girl. Sampson took him by the collar and gave him a severe shaking up. The soldier drew his sword and slashed Sampson savagely across the head. The force of the blow knocked Sampson to the ground, but he was on his feet in an instant. Sampson and the young soldier were soon in a desperate fight for life. The soldier was armed with his long sword and Sampson was bleeding and dazed, and unarmed. Things were going pretty hard with Sampson when he picked up a loose paving stone and hit the Uhlan with such force that it broke his collar bone and knocked him to the ground. Then from loss of blood, Sampson fell senseless beside him and knew nothing until he woke up in the St. Charles Hospital. There he lay for five weeks, hovering between life and death. After Sampson's recovery, the soldier was tried and imprisoned for six weeks and demoted from his rank of sergeant. As a reminder of this struggle, Sampson bore a vicious sabre cut.

In 1880, to America again, with a long tour of the country and exhibitions and public appearances everywhere. Many of the old time strength heroes are more or less mythical or based on the memory of witnesses who may or may not exaggerate, but here are a few quotations from publications of the day.

This incident was reported by the Detroit Free Press, Feb. 15, 1887.

"Any one driving on Woodward, or near the City Hall, yesterday, certainly found it

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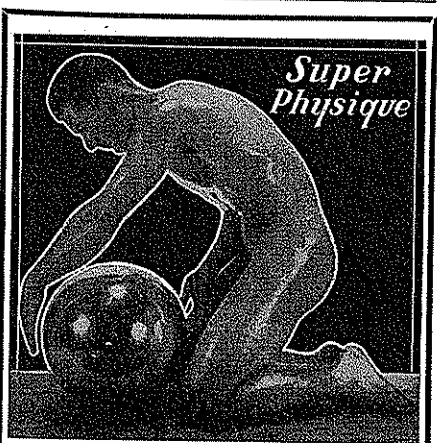
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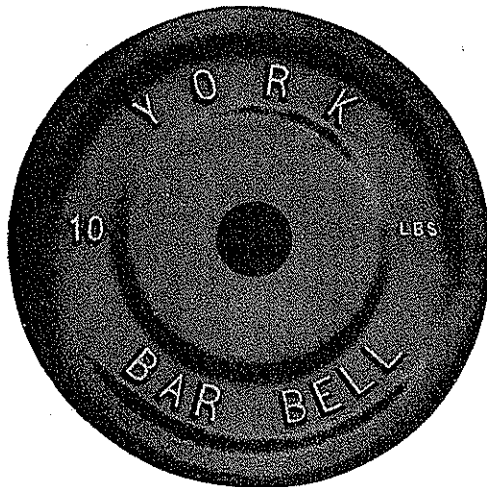
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YORK BARBELL CO.

difficult, as the vicinity of the great building was packed with spectators, watching and stretching their necks to see if Sampson the strong man was in sight. It was stated that he intended to lift one of the cannons which are placed on either side of the City Hall. This, the people said, was impossible, but, should the statement be true, they would all like to see it done; so consequently the place was jammed. At 1:30 Sampson was to perform the marvelous feat.

"At 1:20 the crowd cheered, 'Here he comes!' There were three open carriages in view (horse and buggy days); in the first one was Sampson and the proprietor of the museum, in the two following were the gentlemen with whom the strong man had made the bet. As Mr. Sampson and his escort left their carriages to go to the cannon, they had great difficulty in getting through the crowd as some would make room for them to

pass, while others in the rear would crowd to get a better view of the party. Finally they got to the appointed place. Then there was a hush, not a word was heard from the crowd. The strong man tried again and again, but without success. Then the lookers-on said, 'Oh, he can't lift it!' Others again said, 'I knew that before I came.' Then Sampson, white with rage, took off his coat, stooped, put his back underneath the tremendous cannon, lifted it out of its socket, and dropped it to the ground. Then came cheers from forty-eight to fifty thousand people, 'Hurrah for Sampson!' The crowd was so overjoyed that they almost carried Sampson to the carriage. What a job it was to have the cannon put back in the socket is beyond imagination. The officials, at least, said if they had had the idea that Sampson possessed the strength to lift anything so heavy as that, he would never have been given permission."

WHAT SORT OF A GRIP HAVE YOU?

(Continued from Page 21)

obtain additional exercise by straightening it to use again. The procedure of exercising with the strap iron is simplicity itself. First bend one end at right angles. Four to six inches will be sufficient. It's better to make this initial bend in a vise. Then place one foot on the bend in order to hold it firmly to the floor, and placing the left forearm against the iron, start bending the top half of the bar over it by pushing hard with the right hand. With a little practice you can learn to make some fancy scroll work in just a few moments time. Don't forget to practise bending the iron over both arms to assure yourself of equal development. As a strength demonstration, heavier bars may be bent by placing them on your head or in your mouth and have assistants hang on the ends to bend them down. Of course you should wrap a handkerchief around the bar to protect your teeth. Otherwise you may be faced with a large dental bill.

"In bending spikes it's usually customary to bend them slightly over the leg just above the knee, then apply your strength as is done with the Giant Crusher Grip, bending them until the ends nearly touch. With a light enough spike, you can learn to make the entire bend with your hands. It requires practice, during which a certain amount of knack is developed and of course strength. Bending spikes is always quite impressive. There is another feat which is startling to the spectators and splendid from a developing standpoint—driving spikes through a board. Start first with a soft, straight grained one inch board, sharpen the spikes with a file, wrap handkerchief carefully around the head end of the spike, extend the other between the second and third fingers; the head of the spike is of course held against the palm of the hand; clench the fist, and then strike a hard pushing blow to begin. In a comparatively short time you will acquire the ability to drive a spike repeatedly through a two inch plank. I have seen men perform spike bending, driving a spike through a board, bending irons into scroll work who could only clean and jerk 145 pounds, so it is evident that most anyone can learn to perform these feats with practice.

"Chain breaking is most impressive when broken across the chest. A leather belt is worn to which has been riveted a piece of angle iron with a slit in it. The chain is held between these irons, then with a tremendous expanding of the chest the chain is broken asunder. It's really impressive. When one considers that the lungs are a soft, spongy tissue and must become strong enough to push out the bones with such force that they break a powerful chain, it is remarkable. Eddie Polo stated that he broke two ribs the first time he tried chain breaking with one of the small sizes of Jack chains. And when I

saw three larger sizes of chains broken at the York show, it made me wonder just how strong flesh, blood and tissue can be made to be. But we were discussing building the hands.

"One of the best ways to break a chain is to fasten it to a ring in a heavy board, stand on the board, then loop it around the dumbbell or barbell bar for instance. The chain should be just long enough that the bar is slightly above the knees. Before preparing to lift, twist the chain once; this should place one link in a position to break before the rest. Chain breaking is difficult if this is not done for five or six links may stretch simultaneously. In breaking the chain with the hands it must also be twisted, then it is grasped with the left hand uppermost, the right at the other end of the chain, the left hand resists, the right applies the pressure. While I saw Bob Hoffman break the first three sizes of chains with his chest without a twist, a twist was necessary on the heaviest Jack chain. For when several links give at the same time, they are large enough that the chest expansion can not make the final break. The belt cuts into the flesh a certain amount, no matter how hard it may be, so endeavor to twist the chain so that the strain will be placed on a single link.

"While you are at the hardware store ordering the spikes, chains and the wrought iron, see if you can purchase an old fashioned iron poker. If it is made of steel it can be made to snap and there is danger of a flying part hitting a spectator. So be sure that you obtain wrought iron. You can bend this in the same style as the spike, across your knee. And by constant practise you can bend it over your leg with a single blow. Grasp the handle part of the poker and lift it overhead, bend the left leg and then bring the poker down forcibly over the fleshy part of the thigh. Commence with a light soft iron rod and then as the muscles toughen, work up to a heavier one.

"You can make your start as a strap iron, iron bar and spike bender, by training with the Giant Crusher Grip, the grip and wrist developer which is a part of your Big Ten special, or an Iron Shoe which you will find advertised in Strength and Health magazine. These devices have a direct effect upon the muscles which would be developed by the bending of iron bars, furthermore there is no replacing or straightening as from time to time when using strap iron.

"A rather impressive way of demonstrating your strength is the tearing of playing cards in halves, quarters and eighths, the latter being most difficult, I assure you, even for the strongest handed person. I have heard of tearing of cards into eighths but it has never been my pleasure to see it legitimately dem-

(Continued on Page 46)