

Doug Hepburn & Paul Anderson

Comparison & Contrast



With the recent death of Doug Hepburn (CAN) in Vancouver there is renewed interest in this man and his role in the development of our sport. Any discussion of Doug Hepburn automatically brings up the name of Paul Anderson (USA) as well. This is due to the many similarities that they had as well as the fact that their careers overlapped for the most part. Hepburn rose and fell somewhat sooner but they did compete together for several years. Hepburn remains the only man to ever hand the Dixie Derrick a defeat. Both were heroes to their countries. Both were very colourful individuals. Both were very charismatic, with Anderson more fabled but Hepburn perhaps more mysterious. They were friends who lived at opposite corners of populated North America, Hepburn in Vancouver, BC, Anderson in Vidalia, Georgia. It now seems to be a good time to compare and contrast these giants, with a view to evaluating their contributions to the iron game.

Physical dimension

DH stood 5'8 1/2" and scaled 280 to 300 pounds at his peak. DH told me that he felt good at these weights but that he noticed that PA was always huffing and puffing and needing to sit down. DH was simply a normal man who found a way to pack on many pounds of muscle. Writer David Willoughby in his "The Strength Athletes" described him as virtually a carbon copy of fin-de-siecle vaudeville professional Louis Cyr (CAN). He usually wore a moustache, which with his thick dark hair gave him the look of an old-time strongman. His withered lower right leg, caused by a clubfoot which would not allow the otherwise healthy lower leg to be exercised, was usually disguised in some way.

PA stood 5'9" and weighed around 350 pounds at his peak, although went as high as 400 and won the Olympics at "only" a lighter bodyweight 303. PA was not a normally proportioned man, it would seem. He had large bones and joints with large tendons to support the resultant large muscles. But most unusual,

he had tremendous ballistic strength in his oversize legs. He was famous for his fast sprint starts. This quality would help overcome his limited mobility.

Family background

DH had the less stable family background. His father left when he was very young. Eventually his mother remarried. The stepfather was not interested in Doug or his weightlifting so eventually kicked him out of the house. I don't believe he had any siblings. Except for a brief move to Edmonton he grew up in Vancouver. He is of Scottish extraction.

PA however had a full intact family. I'm not sure if he had any siblings but it seems to me he didn't. The only instability was the many moves Anderson Sr. had to make while working on the TVA project. It is not certain whether he was a Scottish or a Scandinavian Anderson, but being deeply rooted in the soil of Dixie one has to put his money on a Celtic past as with DH. Neither man had the recent foreign, ethnic roots so cherished by Bob Hoffman at that time.

DH was a lifelong bachelor. This would probably be due to poor social skills in his youth, poor self-image due to his handicaps, non-endearing personality traits as a self-absorbed young athlete, and uncertain financial resources later in life. PA by contrast was married (Glenda) during his 20s and had one child (Paula), although not until after his retirement. His stable family life can be attributed to his more stable personality, stable family of origin and to solid Baptist values.

Performances

The Olympic lift performances shown are their best official lifts. The others have been documented frequently but their exact veracity 45 years later may be uncertain. For example, Bob Hise II claimed to have witnessed PA jerking from the rack 600x3! This would be astounding even today. It does seem to be a bit too much to believe. But we must remember his push press of 545, done in 1957 and some believe never duplicated since. That is well documented by photos – a bar with 4x45s and 2x35s plainly loaded on each end. Some reports even say 565. That would bring the 600 jerk at least a little closer to a possibility. Three reps....I don't know.

	DH	PA
Press	381	407
Snatch	300	330
C&J	383	429
Bench	545 (wide grip)	540 (touch & go)
Squat	750	1200 (depth uncertain)
Deadlift	705	700
Press f/rack	445	500
Push Press	445	545

International Titles

Both men had short international careers, only two competitions each. But each took gold whenever they competed at this level.

DH	PA
1953 Worlds	1955 Worlds
1954 Commonwealth Games	1956 Olympic Games

Technique

DH was a splitter while PA used the squat, even in the jerk (actually a power jerk). PA was the pioneer in this style. He also pulled with his arms inside his legs in the clean. Both were as strict as anyone in the press then (except Jim Bradford), even though this was their best lift and one may have expected them to try to cheat up even more. Both had technique problems caused by their physiques. While PA's bulk necessitated the above named technical modifications DH exhibited good technique despite his leg problems. The only problem was that his leg ballistic strength seemed to suffer from the clubfoot. He could always press much more than he could clean. PA could also press more than he could clean, but the difference was far less.

Supporters

DH had a number of mentors on his way to the top. These included Mike Poppel, Joe Weider, Ed Yarrick, Charlie Smith and Al Murray. PA was most influenced by Bob Peoples, Rye Bell, Bob Hise and Bob Hoffman

Powerlifting Connections

Both men are as revered in the sport of Powerlifting as they are in Olympic lifting. It might be fair to say that if Powerlifting had been organized in their time that they might never have bothered with the Olympic three. DH, with some help from Marvin Eder, transformed the bench press from an obscure rehab exercise into the favorite exercise of all weight trainers that it is today. He showed the world what the pecc could do. He made the bench his own by specializing on it. He also did well on the squat despite his leg problems.

Conversely PA specialized on the squat and was also very good on the bench press. Prior to PA only Milo Steinborn did any specialization on the lift, doing somewhere around the 600 pound mark. It was PA that would full explore the possibilities on this lift, as DH did with the bench. He broke the unofficial record with a 660-pound effort in 1952 and moved it to anywhere from 900 to 1200, depending upon how low you wanted him to go. His performances at Muscle Beach with Dave Ashman and Chuck Ahrens did much to stimulate the coming interest in powerlifting.

Neither man seemed to like working the third lift, despite excellent performances. But small hands on both probably made this lift a chore. PA had the additional reason of not wanting to beat his friend Bob Peoples' unofficial record. He knew that with more and bigger men assailing it that it would not last for long, but at least he could avoid breaking it himself.

Professional careers

Both men had short amateur careers, sandwiched between "sandlot" training with no competitive intentions and patchwork professional careers. They each got involved in training without any goals other than to get as big and strong as possible. This was quite common in the late 40s and early 50s. Strict specialization was still in the future. Neither was in any hurry to become an Olympic champion in those days. Both were discovered by others and then steered in the right directions by them. DH had only a sporadic career as a pro strongman due to limited opportunities for such in the Canada of the 50s. PA had a little more success on the stage. He did a run in Las Vegas, squatting a special barbell using silver dollars as weight. He also appeared on Ed Sullivan and other TV shows hoping to raise money for his youth home. Both men did countless appearances wherever any audience could be found. But no decent living (or youth home funding) could be made this way. Due to the public indifference to displays of pure strength both men eventually found it necessary to embark on pro wrestling careers once they were declared professional. DH worked mainly for Whipper Watson and Frank Tunney out of Toronto while PA worked for Paul Jones of Atlanta. DH wrestled purely for the money, for his own livelihood. It is now well known that he hated the wrestling game. PA again used the activity to try to raise his profile and to raise money for his youth home. Not wanting to miss any opportunity, PA also tried boxing. Recent comments have come to light concerning the *bona fides* of his bouts. This seems credible when you consider that even at a slimmed down 260 pounds it would be difficult to box effectively for more than a few seconds with such a heavy and short body. In addition, his easygoing personality was ill suited to that sport.

Both men even tried musical careers. DH was a good singer and actually worked lounges in the 60s. PA would backlift huge loads in his stage act while playing some wind instrument. He did this while trying to get re-instated as an amateur. Hoffman would later claim, with a straight face, at a USOC eligibility hearing that PA was a musician, not a professional weightlifter. (I wonder what Jimmy Dorsey could squat?)

With both men professional "sport" raised little money but nevertheless made them ineligible for future amateur competition.

Personality

Personality type is very important in weightlifter selection and would be telling with both men. DH was a typical lifter, somewhat the loner but also very much the self-sufficient type. This is good when a lot of solitary training is required. But such personalities are prone to cynicism and to brooding depression Doug did not escape these pitfalls. They dogged him all his life. He was forever bitter about his lack of recognition.

PA by contrast was very outgoing and affable. This often goes with a strong ego. PA was able to take good advantage of his extroversion in his professional and evangelical work. But often such types get bored with training. This may be one of the reasons why PA was able to so easily leave amateur lifting so soon.

Ambitions

PA had always had a dream to open his own youth home. This idea, along with his optimistic nature kept him pushing on when others might have quit. DH was the opposite. He seemed to be very unfocused in his post weightlifting years. It seems doubtful that he would have had the same encouragement to make something of himself as Andy did. This lack of early focus undoubtedly led him to the alcoholism phase of his life. However, DH should not be counted out as a quitter. He eventually did thrive after many tough breaks. He was no stranger to adversity. He had to run his life's races with a much larger millstone around his neck than his friend ever did. He fought life all his life, eventually claiming a draw.

Health

PA we now know was plagued by Bright's disease (kidneys) his whole life. This is what forced a long layoff in the early 60s. It would always hang over his life like a suspended death sentence, which in reality it was. He was vulnerable to minor sickness, as on the Mid-East tour and at the Olympics. The man with the strongest legs in human history was forced to spend his last years in a wheelchair.

DH's health, both physical and mental, was more difficult to analyze. He was born, a forceps delivery that scarred his temples, with crossed eyes (later fixed) and a clubfoot. These difficulties would surely affect him psychologically throughout his life. Indeed I believe it was the motivation that would drive him forward. He had an above average IQ but underachieved in school. He tried to make up for his real and perceived deficiencies by trying to succeed at sports. Typical for broken home, low self esteem kids. This situation almost surely sent him in the direction of our sport to seek redemption.

Much of his future problems probably stemmed from this situation where a young man had unrealistic expectations of what his chosen redemption could deliver. Reality usually disappoints. When his sport failed him bitterness, paranoia and depression were sure to follow. After his brief wrestling career ended the illusion was finally over. It was time to pay the piper. His descent into alcoholism is not surprising with hindsight. Fortunately he did not lose too many years to this, and he eventually recovered. After this he was very diet and health conscious and generally physically healthy. But depression would sometimes get him down.

Religion

PA, as is well known by all, was a committed Southern Baptist fundamentalist. He did a lot of evangelist work both on his own and with the Billy Graham Crusade. This again would have contributed to his sense of having both feet on the ground. It was his reason for living, before, during, and after weightlifting. He was a Christian with absolutely no doubts about any faith issue.

DH, when prodded into talking about religion, always mentioned his interest in some vague form of Eastern mysticism. I'm not sure to what extent he was committed to this regime or how effective it was in his life.

Current Reputations

PA died, and remains a hero to all who ever picked up a barbell. His do-gooder youth and evangelical work only add to the esteem he is held in by his fans. He remains such a hero that some are now engaged in revisionist work, trying to sort out the fact from the myth.

DH has been more of an enigma in Canada. There has been much misunderstanding of him and his life over the years. The ongoing dialogue about drugs in sports always seems ready to accuse him of steroid use despite the time-line problems such an accusation raises. His admitted usage of LSD, even as an alcoholism treatment does little to dispel this. But in general the sport community is beginning to take a second look at his contributions. Most agree that he did not get the recognition he deserved, that he took too much ridicule for no reason. During his era sport in Canada meant hockey, football and little else. Anything else could be ridiculed as freakish. He was accused of being a muscular anachronism in a modern, push button world.

Legacy

The feats accomplished by both men were made 45 to 50 years ago now. Some iron game critics now say that we have given enough honour to these men, that we should now relegate their reputations to the past and that we should see that they remain there. After all, athletes in much lower weight categories now routinely surpass the performances of both men, glorious as they were when first made. Chinese women may even soon surpass Hepburn's relatively weak quick lifts. Time has rendered their hard won performances ordinary. And now new heroes are waiting to be honoured while the public seems caught in the past. Why then are these men still the subject of countless awe-inspired gym discussions all over the continent? Is this simply a matter of old-timers who won't give up their past? Is it because today's athletes offer no new excitement? Is it because of today's drug problem in sport that we may wish to continually revisit a more pristine past? Why?

I think the answer lies in both their significance at the time and the legacy that they have left the sport. Doug Hepburn was a new world champion when thoughtful Canadian hockey observers (yes, there were a few) could see that the one sport we could rely on to win a world title may not be so easy in future. Doug Hepburn showed that not every athlete was perfectly suited to the mainstream sports. That some might be better at something else. That it may be better to continue and excel in some obscure sport than to be chewed up and spit out by the system at age 14, never to try sport again. It would be years before the sport establishment would realize this but realize it they did. The fact that most of these new sports, as well as the old ones, would require serious weight training only adds to Hepburn's significance.

While similar things could be said about Anderson and American sport, they did have other heroes that paved the way for non-traditional sports. Andy's great contribution was in his timing. Just as Canada was losing its hockey hegemony the USA and Team Hoffman was losing theirs in our sport. Hoffman's system of developing athletes, so eloquently described in Fair's "Muscle town USA" had limitations that could not defeat the coming Red juggernaut with its massive state support, coaching systems, etc. First the smaller categories were being taken over by Soviets. No problem. America is not a land of little men, Vinci and Berger notwithstanding. But then fell the middle ones, right up to 90 kg. Just as the future was being unfolded comes a giant good-old-boy from the red clay of the Georgia piedmont. Any Hollywood scriptwriter who tried writing this story would surely be fired for being just too corny. But it was true. The WR press in Gorky Park, the State Dept trip around the world, the Munich assault on the records, the squeaker in Melbourne all pointed to one thing. That was that when Uncle Sam needed a hero just when things looked bad, one did emerge. The Soviets may indeed have great lightweights but the USA had a super that was a full 70 kilos better than his best opposition. Weightlifting is not a big sport but in the Cold War it was an important one for propaganda purposes. The Strongest Man in the World still ate grits for breakfast, not borscht.

In addition to their personal characteristics we have their legacy. We must remember what the WL world looked like then. Heavyweights were often only 200 pounds or so. Big men existed then, but they were often unathletic and very overweight good pressers perhaps but forget the quick lifts. John Davis was the perennial World Heavyweight Champion. He stood 5'8" and weighed anywhere from 200 to 225 pounds. At the latter figure he looked a little soft. But he was very explosive, even though his technique could not pass today's muster. Not a big man to be sure, but athletic enough to propel his lifts fast enough to make the first 400 CJ. The conventional wisdom was that big men should be trained in a more leisurely fashion, but seldom with a thought about gaining muscular bodyweight. It was not thought that more bodyweight would help your total. It would only make you slower. Davis would be counted as one of the greatest ever 90 kg lifters if that category existed in his time. As it was he could still rule the supers due to his talent and the fat, slow supers of that era. But then came Hepburn, who trained like a combination bodybuilder-powerlifter. This combined with his obsessive personality helped make him very strong before he ever knew what Olympic lifting was. In a time when very little information was available, and so much was still to be learned athletes had to do a lot of experimenting as to exercises, reps, sets, intensity, etc. Some went down the wrong alley; others found systems that worked, mostly by trial and error. Lots of error. But it seems that Hepburn made few errors in his experimenting. Willoughby thought that he seemed to have greater ability to progress than most trainees, but Hepburn disagreed. He told me that he was only a normal, regular man, not naturally big at all. He just trained a lot harder than most. If lifting would make him bigger and stronger, then he would lift until he was blue in the face. He knew little about cycling, need for rest, etc. But in this process he seems to have discovered that lifters could tolerate and even thrive on a greater volume and intensity. This added to his size and size added to his strength. No old fashioned lazy training for big men, just more work. He pushed back the barriers of what was considered the appropriate

amount of work. He served notice that in future years no fattened up 82er with good ballistics would ever be able to win again. You better be very big. So the year after Hepburn's Worlds win Norb Schemansky went up to super weighing 16 kg more than the previous year. In future years the once hard gaining "Ski" would gain another 20 kg to become a pressing threat after a youth famous for quick lifts only. Then in 1955 came Anderson, bigger yet, albeit with a lot of surplus. As time went on progressively heavier men attacked the bar. Technique lagged behind size, but eventually caught up. All were reminded that it was not a sin to gain muscle, and that ultimately only muscle lifts iron.

Both men speeded up the evolution of the sport. They showed what greater intensity and size would accomplish. And not only our sport benefited. Eventually football, hockey, and even boxing learned how to properly train average sized men to be big and big men to be both strong and fast. We would have discovered these secrets sooner or later. But it would have been later if our sport did not have eccentric athletes willing to experiment with new training methods. The weights they lifted they lifted clean and decades before the powerlifters today who demand a share of their glory. Can these knockers say the same?

That is the legacy of Doug Hepburn and Paul Anderson.

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