

who inspires you?

HERO IN YOU

I'm Going to Pump You Up! Doug Hepburn



Few athletes in the B. C. Sports Hall of Fame have had careers like that of weightlifter Doug Hepburn. For his was like a comet. It came out of nowhere, brilliantly illuminated the sky, then with equal speed, it burned itself out falling back to nowhere. It's a happy as well as sad story about a man born with a withered leg who through sheer determination built his body into what at one time was the strongest in the world.

However, what many of Doug Hepburn's admirers didn't realize was that behind the world-class weightlifter's strong body was an even stronger mind and will. He was born with a clubfoot and crossed eyes and as a child he had undergone operations to correct both faults. The eye operation was a success but the foot operation was not. It was permanently damaged and the ankle always weak.

At school he was continually ridiculed both for his handicap and his scrawny build. However, unlike the foot, the body could be improved and Hepburn became a weightlifting fanatic. He dropped out of school early and as his body grew in size and strength he got a job as a beer parlor bouncer. And, he ate as much as he could hold. "It seemed logical," he said years later. "I would have to eat everything I could get my hands on ... one day I gained seven pounds. From a skinny kid of 145 pounds Hepburn, through obsessive hard work, was soon tipping the scales at a granite-like 255 pounds.

However, lonely and self-taught, Hepburn knew nothing about competitive weightlifting. A little research soon taught him all he had to know about the three Olympic weightlifting discipline: the press, the clean and jerk and the snatch. Armed with new knowledge and a stronger than ever will, Hepburn entered his first competition in Vancouver where he pressed a Canadian record 300 pounds. Meet officials sent details of Hepburn's lift to the sport's headquarters in Montreal for official recognition.

That recognition never came. "Who was Doug Hepburn", the East asked? They felt the lift was not accurate and consequently the record wasn't officially recognized. Undaunted, Hepburn entered and won the U. S. Open Title in 1949. Still, he was not recognized in Canada and he was not even invited to join this country's Olympic team to the Games in Helsinki in 1952. The gold medalist in those Games was John Davis of the U. S. – the man Hepburn beat in the U. S. open!

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But while his countrymen had little knowledge or faith in his ability, a few of Hepburn's friends lent their support and raised enough money to send him to the world championships in Stockholm in 1953. He arrived in the Swedish city as an unknown and with no coach. His chief rivals, the Europeans, were well known, well coached and well equipped.

Yet, against all these odds, Hepburn won the World Title with a total lift of just over 1,030 pounds. And even though he'd won, Vancouver and Canada had been caught off guard. Suddenly there was a mad rush to make up for past neglects. In Vancouver he was welcomed home as a conquering hero – far different from his departure for Sweden – and the mayor guaranteed him \$150 a month to train for the 1954 British Empire Games in Vancouver.

He was put on the city payroll as the mayor's bodyguard (he never performed as such) to preserve his amateur status. And, he didn't disappoint his fans, taking the gold medal at the 1954 BEG. However once the Games were over, so was Doug Hepburn's career. He began to spend most of his time either in the gym or in the bar. No one raised money for him to defend his world title in Germany.

Briefly he tried pro wrestling but he hated it and he quit that with only \$800 and a new Cadillac to show for it. A venture into chain gymnasia also folded for Hepburn was no businessman. From bad Doug Hepburn went to worse until finally he hit rock bottom on skid road. The Doug Hepburn story, however, doesn't end there. Doug fought back and raised himself up again just the same way he did years ago when as a skinny Vancouver schoolboy he went to work and built himself the strongest body in the world.

Such is the stuff that champions are made of.

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