

Charles A. Smith

Tribute to a Strength Athlete—BERT ASSIRATI



Bert Assirati, one of history's greatest strength athletes and wrestlers died of cancer of the bladder on August 31, 1990 at eight o'clock in the evening. So passed a unique man, perhaps the greatest example of the old-time strongman/mat artists of this century.

I knew Bert for more than 50 years. He taught me to wrestle the hard way, breaking my nose in the process. Bert was also a fine tumbler and hand balancer, and one of the top professional wrestlers in the game. Standing about 5'7" and weighing as much as 250 pounds, Bert could turn a back flip with ease. In fact, it was his trademark after a match—which he always won—to do a back flip.

I first met Bert at the gym attached to the old Boxing and Wrestling arena—the "Ring"—in the Blackfriars Road in London, England. At that time Bert's arms measured a full 18 inches, and this was when 16 was considered big. It was in the early thirties, when El Said Noseir, the Egyptian heavyweight, held sway with a world record clean and jerk of 363, a weight Bert was said to have exceeded. At a time when the British record in the straight arm pullover was held by Alan P. Mead at 140 pounds, Bert did a straight arm pullover of 200 with ease. He could curl 200 pounds and squat for reps with 550 when a 400 pound squat was regarded as extraordinary. He also did a single-legged squat with 200 pounds.

When he saw I needed extra bodyweight to be able to wrestle more successfully, he sent me to his cousin, Joe Assirati, under whose tutelage I soon gained from 165 to 190. My meeting with Joe was a happy one for, in addition to gaining a teacher, I gained a lifelong friend and brother. Bert was *sui generis*—one of a kind—and we won't see his like again.

Goodbye, Bert.

[Ed. note: Goodbye, Charles.]