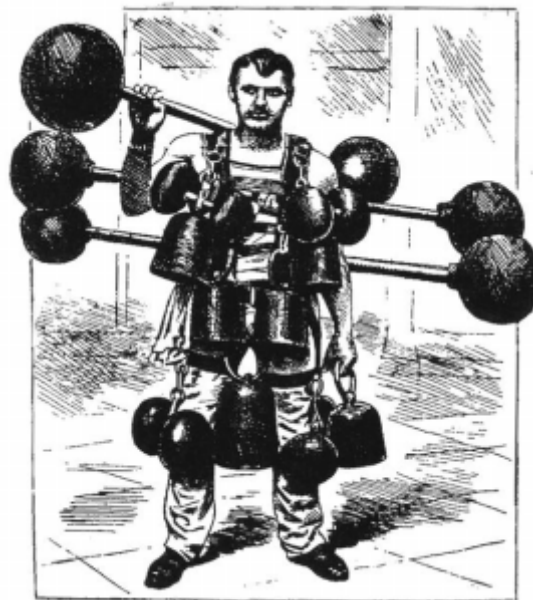


IRONCLAD

by Joe Roark

Paul Anderson's 1953 Hiplift



Editors' Note: In some circles, those who have raised questions about certain of the claimed feats of the late Paul Anderson have been criticized for having raised any questions at all. Our policy at IGH has been, and will be, to give every strength athlete his or her full measure of credit. To do less is to detract from the accomplishments of the Game's pioneers. To do more—to give them unexamined credit for questionable or exaggerated lifts, for example—is to detract from the accomplishments of those that have competed in the same events at an earlier or later date. This is not to say that we haven't made mistakes of fact, or that we will not make such mistakes in the future. This is only to say that we will do our best to give credit where credit is due. This is also not to say that Paul Anderson (or any other particular lifter) exaggerated any of his accomplishments. But many lifters have, indeed, exaggerated in recounting their lifts, just as many bodybuilders have exaggerated in listing their measurements. As historians, our loyalty must rest with the Iron Game itself and not with any given athlete.

The heyday of the professional strongman, in particular, was rife with exaggeration as most, if not all, of the professionals claimed lifts they had never done; and many claimed, simultaneously, that they were the "Strongest Man in the World." Often, of course, this claim was made in economic self-defense, but an exaggeration is an exaggeration; and it has

been up to people like David P. Willoughby, David Webster; and Joe Roark to set the record as straight as they can.

*My own opinion is that Paul Anderson, at the time of his greatest prominence (roughly 1954-1965), had more right than any other lifter to be considered the world's strongest man. I saw him lift many times, in public exhibitions and in his outdoor gym in Vidalia, and he was prodigiously strong, especially in the legs and hips. He beat the best men of his day in weightlifting, won a gold medal in the Olympics, set many world records, and did several over-900 pound squats in public—with standard bars and plates. To me, these squats were the greatest ever done when attire and technique are taken into account. What's more (even though it is neither here nor there as far as his lifting feats are concerned), Paul used his celebrity to help many youngsters have a more stable life by serving—with his wife, Glenda—as their foster parent in his youth home. Paul was an exceptionally proud man, a bit of a loner, and I'm grateful to have spent so much time in his company and to have co-authored a series of articles with him in **Muscular Development**. He was an excellent companion—witty, charming, and possessed of a full measure of Southern good humor. It was a great regret to me that his later years brought him so much grief. When I was a young lifter, he was my hero, and we always want the best for our heroes, even though the best is sometimes beyond their reach.*

Joe Roark is also a man with many admirable qualities. In my many discussions with Joe, I have never known him to play favorites. He is today's Willoughby—tireless, obsessive, bright, dedicated, idiosyncratic, fair-minded, and honest—and Jan and I are grateful that he chooses to publish the results of his research in IGH. We are proud to feature his analysis of Paul's hip-lift, and we present it in the hope that it may cause new information about that lift, or others made by Paul or anyone else, to surface.



any years ago I began to research the life and lifts of Paul Anderson and like many, if not most, of his fans I simply assumed that what had been presented as fact was fact, whether

it had come from him directly or from others. Indeed, most—if not all—of what is asserted about his publicly performed lifts can be proven. Official judges were present, audiences carefully watched as he lifted weights that had been weighed on certified scales, and data from these events prove that Paul Anderson, in his time, and in terms of overall strength, earned the right to be called the strongest man in the world. And in terms of pure hip/leg strength, his equal, particularly in the heavy squat without substantial supporting gear, may not yet have come along. Terry Todd, in fact, has stated that Paul should be considered history's greatest performer in the squat.

Over the years, however, the poundages given for some of Paul's unofficial lifts or feats of strength appear to have reached levels that fact and reason cannot support. In the coming months, some of these discrepancies will be examined as objectively as possible, and I invite readers who have information that can cast light on this matter to contact me through *Iron Game History*. One example of the need of some writers to almost deify Paul is the frequent notion that he was undefeated in weightlifting competition, or that he was only defeated once.

I began my study of Paul's career by *assuming* that some of his unofficial lifts had evidence awaiting discovery, so my motive, though journalistically unsound (i.e. assuming that something is true before doing any investigation into the facts) was not anti-Paul; nor am I now such. I am only interested in finding out, as nearly as possible, the truth about various

famous feats in our game. In this issue of *IGH*, I will deal only with Paul's early experiences with the hiplift, as those experiences and how they have been written about in the years since should illustrate some of the difficulties of separating the man from the legend.

Regarding his hiplift training in early 1953, Paul Anderson wrote: "I built a platform in the yard that allowed me to set a heavy object on the ground five feet beneath it. I would stand on the platform and squat to hook the belt to the object, then rise until I was standing upright and lifting the object off the ground."¹ Below the platform, Paul placed one object, an old manganese safe whose cavity he filled with concrete and "weights." He then welded the safe shut, added slots to which he attached his belt, and he was ready to lift what he asserted was "...thirty-five hundred pounds to struggle against."² Paul stated that at first he failed to lift the safe, but that by using isometric principles and straining against the weight he finally built enough strength to lift it.³ From that point, Paul said he, "...was spending hours alone on that five-foot wood platform, building my leg, back, and torso muscles into bulging sinews."⁴ Paul also implies that he had been performing the hiplift with other weights prior to locating the manganese safe. He stated, "I finally found something I knew would test me," referring to the safe.⁵

Now comes the problem. Paul explains in his autobiography, *A Greater Strength*, that "About a month before the tryouts for the (1953) world (weightlifting) championships in Stockholm" he injured his right leg during a hiplift workout, and was thus unable to compete in the tryouts, held in early June 1953.⁶ A careful examination of the timeline, however, reveals that time does not follow the chronological line as he unfolds it. In other words, things could not have happened in the way he says they did.

Some Early Background

Paul's first public weightlifting competition took place at the Frye Institute in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and he won the heavyweight class by pressing 275 pounds, snatching 225 pounds, and lifting 300 pounds in the clean and jerk for an 800 pound total.⁷ He was exactly 20 years two months old on that day—December 27, 1952. Paul wrote in his autobiography that in the late spring of 1953, about a month prior to the tryouts for the World Weightlifting Championships, he was injured while training the hiplift, and was thus unable to compete in those tryouts.⁸ (The Senior

National Weightlifting Championships had been scheduled for June 6-7, 1953, and would serve as the tryouts for the World Championships, which were to be held August 26-30, 1953 in Stockholm, Sweden.)

Whatever Paul was attempting to hiplift on the occasion of his injury (and a discussion of that amount will have to wait for another time), he maintained that it caused an injury to his right leg. He recalled that the weight-situated on the earth beneath a platform five feet high—had become frozen to the ground later that evening, after he had lifted it on several occasions earlier in the afternoon.⁹ The chronology, as well as the circumstances causing the injury, present problems.



During Anderson's years as a professional strongman he often did hiplifting as part of his act. Here, at the Mapes Hotel in Reno, he lifts members of the chorus and band while playing a trombone.

The Chronology

“About” a month before June 6 would have been May 6 (or May 1, to allow for conversational meaning). Paul at that time was living in Elizabethton, Tennessee, some three or so miles from Wautauga Dam, the closest weather reporting station for which records were kept in 1953. Keeping in mind that the air temperature *must* be 32 degrees or below for water to freeze, the final spring frost of 1953 was April 21, when the temperature reached 31 degrees Fahrenheit. Wayne Wendland, Illinois State Climatologist, wrote, regarding the weather conditions, “Mr. Roark: Elizabethton TN, (reports) only precip for 1953. I’ve enclosed temp data Wautauga Dam, TN (2-3 miles to the west). Last spring frost in Wautauga in 1953 was 21 April with 31F.”¹⁰ So Paul’s injury must have happened on April 21, or earlier, which puts it at least seven weeks, or more, prior to the tryouts. (The coldest night of May 1953 in that area was 44 degrees on May 9, so there were no May frosts there in 1953.)¹¹

So, reasoning that the injury occurred in April 1953, or earlier, and that Paul was injured badly enough to prevent his participation in the tryouts in early June, it would be logical to assume that he would not have lifted publicly during this period. We do know that on

March 21, 1953, precisely one month before the final freeze, Paul lifted in Atlanta, Georgia, at the Dixie Championships, and won the heavyweight class with 300-250-325 for an 875 pound total.¹² Obviously, Paul was healthy at that time. We also know that on May 17, 1953, Paul placed second to Doug Hepburn at the Junior National Weightlifting Championships in Cleveland via 300-270-370 for a 940 total, so his leg was sound three weeks before the tryouts.¹³ What’s more, on May 30 (a mere week before the tryouts) Paul squatted 714.75 pounds.¹⁴ So, when did this hiplift-induced leg injury in late spring of 1953 happen? Paul was lifting March 21 through May 30. When did this leg injury occur, and how could it have kept Paul from lifting in the Senior National Championships during the first week of June?

The Frost

Earlier on the day in which Paul suffered the injury, according to his account, he had successfully hiplifted his apparatus several times. However, after supper, he decided to hoist it again, and he was unable to do so. He reports that he applied extra effort, and ended up injuring himself. He states that the leather belt he was using stretched several inches, and that he

“stretched” the muscle in his right leg as well, causing the injury.¹⁵

According to Paul’s account, sometime between his afternoon lifting and his after-supper attempt, the apparatus had become so solidly frozen to the ground that he could not lift it. But anyone who has spent any winters in America’s northern sections knows that there is a major difference between a light frost and a solid freeze, and that as the temperature continually decreases, and time passes, the ground-depth of the freeze increases. That’s why water-carrying pipes are placed about three feet below the ground surface. Further, a simple frost will not “freeze” anything to the earth in a few hours, because the depth of the freeze would be so insignificant. Furthermore, low temperatures are almost always recorded in the early mornings, not in the 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM time when Paul would most probably have made his after-supper attempt.

For a moment, let’s digress, as have others who have written about this.

The Case of the Frozen Backlift

Judd Biasiotto offered, in *Power-lifting USA*, November 1988, a version of a frozen lift he got from York Barbell Company founder Bob Hoffman. But Bob’s version is a backlift, not a hiplift. Biasiotto recalls that Hoffman said the table had been constructed in Paul’s backyard. However, by his own account Paul did not train on the backlift when he lived in Tennessee, and only became interested it after he moved to Toccoa, Georgia in late 1953 or early 1954. Biasiotto continues Hoffman’s story by indicating that Paul finally succeeded in the frozen backlift after reducing the amount of weight on the table and by literally pulling twelve inches of earth, which had become frozen onto each table leg, out of the ground as the table broke free.¹⁶ There are some difficulties here: Paul’s famous backlift of 1957 is described by him as a platform lift off trestles, so no table legs would leave the ground. Only the platform resting upon the supports would move, and the temperature—at least as a freezing factor—becomes irrelevant in that scenario.

A Further Digression: The Frozen Barrel Lift

Paul’s brother-in-law, Julius Johnson, offers a version that was presented in a Toccoa, Georgia, newspaper tribute after Paul passed away.¹⁷ In Johnson’s version, only the date of February is offered (hardly late spring) but the apparatus changes to two fifty-five gal-

lon oil drums partially filled with concrete hanging on a steel bar, situated over a hole in the earth into which Paul would step to perform a partial squat. In this version, the lift is not successful, and Paul’s mother good-naturedly chides him for trying “to lift the whole earth” when they both realized the barrels were frozen to the ground.

But back to the safe, and a question. How could it be determined that the safe was frozen to the earth without lifting it? Did it just “look” frozen? Perhaps—and this would seem to make the most sense—Paul was tired after his hiplifts in the afternoon and the safe was “heavier” after he’d cooled off and had supper, causing him to overstrain and injure his tired quadriceps. This would explain his subsequent belief that the safe must have “frozen” to the ground, or else he would have lifted it, having lifted it on several occasions earlier in the day. Such a series of events would demonstrate that Paul was not trying to mislead anyone about the “frozen” safe, but had merely misunderstood the reason for his failure and the related injury. This explanation still does not explain how the injury could have prevented him from lifting in the Senior National Championships that year, as he lifted several times in the weeks leading up to the June meet.

In any case, to summarize these three stories:

	Johnson	Biasiotto	Anderson
Lift	Squat	Backlift	Hiplift
Time		Morning	Evening
What	55 Gallon Drum	Safe & Junk	Safe
Where		Georgia	Tennessee
Injury	No	No	Yes
Success	No	Yes	No
Witness	No	No	No

Back to the Main Story

As to the explanation offered at the time of the tryouts for the World Weightlifting Championships, when Paul did not compete, *Strength & Health* reported simply, "Paul Anderson did not make the trip to Indianapolis, and it was reported that Doug Hepburn had injured his neck while wrestling with Charlie Smith."¹⁸ I have been unable to find any other public explanation for Paul's absence. Clearly, however, since he lifted in the Junior National Championships three weeks before those June tryouts, and squatted more than 700 pounds in a public exhibition only one week before the tryouts, any injury he suffered in trying to lift the safe was not the reason for his absence from that 1953 meet.

Paul's scenario simply will not fit the time frame into which he places it. Things become even more confused by an account published a year later in *Lifting News* magazine, because the text suggests that Paul had been unable to compete in the 1954 (yes, 1954) Senior National Championships as he had injured himself attempting a heavy hiplift, which "swung on him."¹⁹ But it becomes more confusing still as the following correction is printed in the September 1954 issue of *Lifting News*: "...we find we were in error in reporting that an injury to his leg kept him from the Nationals. Other things interfered with his making the trip."²⁰ Those other things are not explained, nor does the text ascribe the leg injury as a belated explanation for the 1953 event. Perhaps the ill-fitting facts result from the effect of time on memory. Perhaps Paul injured himself while attempting a hiplift some other time, then subsequently mis-remembered the sequence of events and blamed the blameless injury for his absence from the 1953 Senior National Championships and, by extension, the 1953 World Championships.

NOTES:

1. Paul Anderson with Jerry B. Jenkins and James R. Adair, *A Greater Strength*, foreword by Tom Landry. (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 990 copyright by Paul Anderson), 32. Anderson's autobiography originally appeared as: Paul Anderson & Jerry B. Jenkins, *Paul Anderson: World's Strongest Man* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1975). The story of the hiplift appears on pages 43-46 of this edition.

2. Anderson, *Greater Strength*, 32.

3. *Ibid.*, 33.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 32.

6. *Ibid.*, 33 & 34.

7. Paul lost in the following competitions: 1) May 17, 1953, Junior Nationals to Doug Hepburn who won with a 1015 total to Paul's 945; 2) September 5, 1953, All Dixie Championships, failed all his clean and jerks; and 3) Jan 16, 1954, Middle Atlantic Open in Philadelphia because he broke his wrist while lifting in the competition.

8. Anderson, *Greater Strength*, 33.

9. *Ibid.*, 35.

10. Personal communique from Wayne M. Wendland, State Climatologist, Illinois State Water Survey, and Professor of Geography, University of Illinois.

11. *Ibid.*

12. "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* (July 1952): 23.

13. "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* (September 1953): 62. At that meet Paul made 300-270-370-940 to Doug Hepburn's 365-290-360-1015.

14. "Reader's Roundup," *Ironman* (September 1953): 39.

15. Anderson, *Greater Strength*, 35.

16. Judd Biasiotto and Arny Ferrando, "The Greatest Athlete of All," *Powerlifting USA* (November 1988): 33.

17. The *Toccoa Record* published: "A Tribute to Paul Anderson," on Thursday, 6 October 1994. Supplement C includes 22 remembrances of Anderson. Mr. Johnson's reminiscence, written 20 August 1994, is Number 9 in the order.

18. Bob Hoffman, "The 1953 National AAU Championships," *Strength & Health* (September 1953): 37.

19. "Lifting News," *Iron Man* (July 1954): 11.

20. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* (September 1954): 6.

