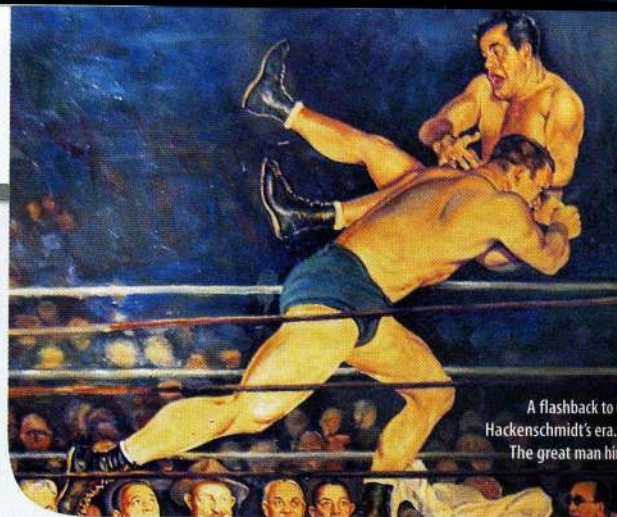




King Georg

If you love your weight training, chances are you're carrying on the legacy of strongman Georg Hackenschmidt without even knowing it.



A flashback to Hackenschmidt's era. The great man himself.

BACK IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY, when wrestling – apart from exhibitions – was unscripted, and bodybuilding and weightlifting were steroid-free, Georg Hackenschmidt was well ahead of his time. In fact, there's never been anyone like him since.

When Hackenschmidt was the world's premier strongman and inventor of the wrestling move now commonly known as the bearhug, he was labelled "The Russian Lion". He was, in fact, Estonian, of German-Swedish descent.

Let's begin with the bearhug. In

the 1960s and '70s, it was common to see extremely strong men put their hands around the midriff of opponents and crush the life out of them. The problem was that, by then, the outcome was pre-determined.

Hackenschmidt was the first wrestler to execute the move with confidence and gain submissions – from men much bigger than himself. Under the guidance of fellow Estonian Georg Lurich, he won the European Greco-Roman wrestling championship in 1902, thus becoming unofficial world heavyweight champion. Hackenschmidt took

the newly-created title of world professional heavyweight champion when he defeated his American equivalent, Tom Jenkins, in 1905. Georg took on all comers, holding the title for three years before losing it under controversial circumstances to America's Frank Gotch in 1908.

Hackenschmidt's style of fighting came to be respected by oriental martial artists, especially Japanese masters of the "grappling" arts, such as jujitsu, judo and, later, aikido. He was aggressive, fast, knew how to bring a man down swiftly, seize opportunities to apply a hold and take advantage of every movement with a pythonic counter move until his opponent was "locked".

Travelling the world, staging all comers tournaments and fighting men of all martial persuasions, including savate (kickboxing) and jujitsu exponents, wrestlers, boxers and assorted strongmen and tough guys, Hackenschmidt won over 3000 bouts without defeat between 1889, when he was only 11, and 1908, when he lost the heavyweight title. Many of these men were

monsters compared to the 175cm Georg. The only problem with such spectacles was the speed with which he would bring these behemoths down. He often was forced to "carry" opponents. In those days, fighting pursuits

grew mainly out of slums, ghettos and poorer industrial towns, and ornery types took them up. But Hackenschmidt was always serene, focused and respectful. Never did he see physical victory over another man as evidence of his superiority as a human being.

A philosopher and voracious reader of any text on the human body, Hackenschmidt also made his mark in strength sports. He invented the now disused "Hack squat", executed with hands behind the back, the weight held behind the knees. He popularised the idea of using weights while laying supine, mastering the bench press. Georg also excelled

at gymnastics, swimming, cycling and athletics, could raise over 90kg over his head with one hand as a teenager, and beat famous strongman Eugen Sandow with a one-armed lift of 116kg. Later he increased this to 122kg, winning a bet for a pair of trousers. Barely out of his teens, he also executed a single-handed deadlift of a stone weighing 299kg.

Hackenschmidt was a habitual innovator, always seeking ways to revolutionise training. He pioneered the "overload" technique, developing explosive power, walking around with almost 408kg on his shoulders in the form of sacks of cement with a 102kg training partner perched on them.

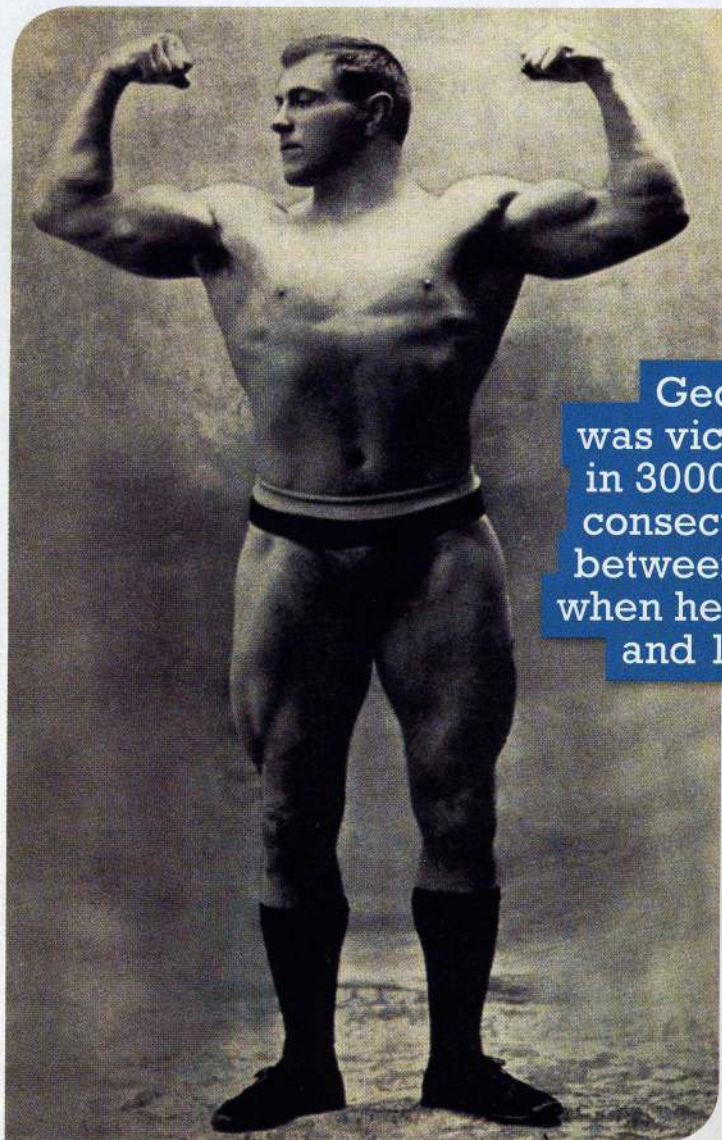
His emphasis on leg power and speed meant he was able to execute 100 standing jumps over a table. His mental powers were such that he was able to hold out 40kg dumbbells sideways, at arm's length, for as long as he liked. His unprecedented consumption of fruit, nuts and raw vegetables, at different times of day, gave him great strength. No wonder he was admired from afar by those Eastern sages who spent their lives mastering these disciplines.

A speaker of several languages, Hackenschmidt, always happy to share his vast knowledge and experience, published books on philosophy and physical culture with daunting titles: *Fitness and Your Self*; *Consciousness and Character: True Definitions of Entity, Individuality, Personality, Nonentity*; *The Way To Live In Health and Physical Fitness*; *The Three Memories and Forgetfulness: What They Are and What Their True Significance is in Human Life*. These influenced many a sporting philosopher coach, including Australia's own Percy Cerutti.

But Georg remained a humble man: "I have never bothered as to whether I was a champion or not a champion; The only title I have desired to be known by is simply my name – Georg Hackenschmidt."

Georg died in 1968 at 90, and at the time of his death, he was still able to bench press 68kg several times a week, and leap chairs with a single, standing bound.

– Robert Drane



Georg was victorious in 3000 bouts consecutively between 1889, when he was 11, and 1908.