

The 2024 USAWA Grip Champs contest was a lot of fun. It was nice seeing a bunch of familiar faces and a few new ones. My write-up lists everyone in alphabetical order. Except for me, I'll mention myself last. My wife Carrie and daughter Josie came to the contest and stayed around for the first two events and then drove into Abilene to get in some shopping and sight-seeing. Josie told me she wants to compete in next year's Grip Champs. I'm excited about that!

-LANCE FOSTER

I hadn't seen Lance since the last Grip Champs I attended in 2020. I knew he was much lighter in bodyweight, but seeing the difference in person is a lot different than seeing pictures. Very impressive, because he seemed at least as strong at his lighter bodyweight and possibly even stronger on a few of the lifts. Lift that most impressed me: his 170lb Index Fingers Deadlift.

-DAVE GLASGOW

The last time I saw Dave was also at the 2020 Grip Champs. I always enjoy talking with him about various topics. I teased him about how much he hates the finger lifts. He may or may not have copped a feel on my backside right before the group photo. At my age, beggars can't be choosers. Lift that most impressed me: 120lb Index Fingers Deadlift. Because he HATES the finger lifts.

-SANJIV GUPTA

It was nice to finally meet Sanjiv in person. He exuded great energy all day at the contest. He also had some big PRs. Lift that most impressed me: 253lb Fulton Bar Ciavattone Grip. It was very smooth and looked like he had quite a bit more in him.

-LAVERNE MYERS

It's always a pleasure to spend time with LaVerne! I missed seeing Al and I hope he's doing much better. LaVerne was on fire even more than usual. He did some huge lifts and locked up 1st place rather handily (pun intended). Lift that most impressed me: 263lb Fulton Bar Ciavattone Grip. Looked like he had more in the tank.

-JASON PAYNE

Jason and I go way back. He is just an all around great guy. His son Jared has also competed in the past, and is now a titanic college football player. Also a great kid. Jason won the first event, Strict Pinch. He wasn't in top form due to still recovering from an illness. But I don't think anybody noticed, because he looked very strong as usual. Lift that most impressed me: 253lb Fulton Bar Ciavattone Grip. He also looked like he had more in the tank.

-RANDY SMITH

I think the last time I saw Randy was back in 2009 at the USAWA Nationals at The Dino Gym. We had a good time chatting throughout the day. He had very balanced lifts and scored 2nd place. Lift that most impressed me: 273lb Fulton Bar Ciavattone Grip. Very smooth lift that was 73lbs over his bodyweight.

-CHRIS TODD

Last time I saw Chris was at the 2019 Lift For Leroy Record Breaker at Eric Todd's training facility. Chris did some strong lifting. Lift that most impressed me: 180lb 1" Vertical Bar. If I remember right, he failed on this weight and then came back to make a strong lift on it. I believe he dialed in his hook grip and the rest was history.

-STACY TODD

There was a comical exchange between Stacy and me during the 1" vertical bar event. I walked over to her (without thinking how my question was going to sound when spoken out loud) and asked her, "Are you a hooker?" Which I immediately realized sounded pretty rude. But of course she knew I was talking about hook gripping. And yes, she IS a hook gripper. She hit some HUGE lifts throughout the contest. But I was most impressed with her 200lb 1" Vertical Bar. She is a vertical bar wiz and I appreciate the thought that goes into a perfect set up on the vertical bar event.

-CHAD ULLOM

I last saw Chad at the 2020 Grip Champs. We are usually pretty close to each other in total poundage on the grip lifts. This year he ran away from me in the total poundage by 60lbs. He beat me in every event except the 1" vertical bar. And that was only because he dialed in his hook after his attempts were over. Otherwise he lifted 230lbs with ease, and I failed to pause it at lockout on my final attempt. Lift that most impressed me: 323lb Fulton Bar Ciavattone Grip. I know he has had shoulder surgery and to recover from that and pull good numbers on the FBCG is a good thing.

-ME

First off, I'm delighted that my back held up. I felt a slight twinge a few times during the contest, and each time I shut my further attempts down to stay uninjured. Five months ago I had a slipped disc in my lower back. It was very bad and I thought at the time it would probably take surgery to fix it. But I lucked out, and time and rest was all I needed. A week before my back injury, I did a contest-legal 360lbs Fulton Bar, Ciavattone Grip deadlift in my garage. I didn't know this was going to be part of the contest, but I had been working on it at that point again for a few months. At the contest I only pulled 283lbs. I had a lot more left in the hands, but didn't want to stress my back. I'll go over the events one by one.

Strict Pinch. Ugh. This was the worst pinch result by far that I've ever had. I'm notorious for having a weak pinch already. Luckily, I lowered my first call by 20lbs. I only got 100lbs for a legal lift. 120lbs went up twice, but not high enough, and not paused. I only made my opener in this event.

1" Vertical Bar. Oh how time takes its toll on us all. In 2009 I did 315lbs lefty at Bill Clark's gym. And held it (no joke) for probably 5 seconds at lockout. No hook. I got the top lift at this contest with 225lbs and then missed 230lbs because I couldn't pause it at lockout. If I work on my hook grip, I'd gain around 100lbs on this lift. But hooking on this hurts my hand from multiple work-related (mostly) hand injuries over the 18 years I spent working in the jail. I trained this maybe a half dozen times in my garage leading up to the contest. The bar I used is the IronMind standard loading pin. Not ideal, but the texture felt

about the same and the max poundage I pulled turned out to be exactly the same as in training. I opened at 205lbs. Then went to 225lbs. Then missed 230lbs.

Index Fingers Deadlift. I trained this a few times in my garage before the contest. I believe that nobody really gets “stronger” when training the finger lifts. But you do develop a bit more pain tolerance over a few sessions. I pulled 205lbs in the contest as an opener. It went up easily, but lightly tore a bunch of skin on my fingers. So I set aside my goal of at least 225lbs and declined both remaining attempts. 205lbs is exactly what I ended up with in my training in the garage. The bar we used at the Grip Champs was so much sharper and grippier, and I do kick myself a bit for not going heavier.

Deadlift Fulton Bar Ciavattone Grip. I have already mentioned that I hit a much higher number about 5 months ago on this lift. I still consider it a win that I didn’t injure my back again at the contest. So, pulling 80lbs less is not disappointing when framed like that. I opened at 268lbs. Went to 283lbs. And passed on 300lbs. I haven’t touched the Fulton Bar since hurting my back. Don’t plan to ever train it again, to be honest.

Rim Lift. I only pulled 250lbs in this lift. My back really did not like the upright narrow stance. I tried a split stance in the warmups and that was just too weird with the narrow plate setup for me to get over. I didn’t train for this event, but I did expect to lift about 50lbs more. I think I opened at 200lbs. Then went to 250lbs. Then missed 260lbs.