



## WEEKLY MUSCLE BUILDING EXPERT *Interview Series*



### **Mike Westerdal of CriticalBench.com Interviews Jedd Johnson**

**MW:** Hey everybody, this is Mike Westerdal from CriticalBench.com with your weekly muscle building expert interview of the week. We've got Jedd Johnson of Diesel Crew on the line with us today. And I want to welcome him to the call. He's one of the biggest grip strength training experts in the world. And I want to welcome him. Hi, Jedd. How's it going? Why don't you introduce yourself to everybody?

**JJ:** Hey, Mike, thanks a lot buddy. Yeah, this is Jedd Johnson from Diesel Crew and we're going to talk about grip strength today. It's an up and coming sport. It's still in development, but we're working real hard on getting the awareness of the sport out there and looking forward to talking about it today.

**MW:** Cool, man. Well, just to start things off, how did you get interested in [grip training](#) and then eventually the sport?

JJ: Yeah, sure. The funny thing is, I had absolutely no interest in the sport whatsoever when I first learned about it, because I thought it made no sense at all to put any time towards training like 5% of your body. But, what I found out later on is that when you have a strong grip, pretty much all of your other strength goes up. All your other lifts go up and it really benefits you to have a strong grip.

I found out about it in November of 2002 on a strength forum called DoctorSquat.com, and a guy that's become one of my really good friends, Rick Walker, was talking about holding a grip competition. And really, like I said, it made no sense to me whatsoever to dedicate any time to such a small portion of your body. But, I kind of got interested in just learning [how to tear a deck of playing cards](#). I thought that was a pretty cool feat. I'd seen somebody do it on TV when I was a kid, or something like that. So, I thought it was pretty interesting.

He was talking about that and I kind of just wanted to pick his brain about how I could learn to tear a deck of cards. And as he and I were communicating back and forth, I found out more about grip and I kept training and learned that you could actually get certified for closing really heavy grippers and I found out all this other stuff. And I thought, man, this is actually pretty cool.

So, I was also getting into Strongman at the time and I figured you know what, grip is going to be important for the farmers and axel dead lifts and stuff like that. So, I put that all together and ended up being pretty successful.

MW: Cool. Did you do Strongman first and then grip training? Or, you started them both around the same time?

JJ: I actually started both of them right around the same time. But, the plan was for mainly just to do Strongman. My friend, Jim Smith, "Smitty", I'm sure a lot of people are aware of him. He and I were planning on training for an upcoming Strongman competition in 2003. And we hadn't done anything like this before, and we found out how grip intensive it was after just one workout.

So, we realized how important it was going to be to get our grips up. Because, up until that point, I used to use like grip wraps on almost every pulling lift. Like pull-downs, seated rows, side rows, I mean, I used to...when I'd go to a gym, my wraps would be right on my belt and they were the first thing I'd put on right before I put on my belt. I would just walk around the gym with wraps on my wrist the whole entire time. So, it's kind of weird how things have changed over the years that I almost don't use them at all anymore.

MW: Well, better than weight lifting gloves, right?

JJ: Yeah. Well, you know what, dude? I used to walk around with an old set of batting gloves with the fingers cut off, because I didn't want to buy the new set of gloves with the fingers already taken off. I just cut the fingertips off of my gloves. So, I was that guy, too, unfortunately.

MW: Yeah, I was, too, a long time ago. But, let's define grip. Is that just hand strength or does that include the whole forearm? Like, what muscles and what part of the arm's involved with the grip?

JJ: Yeah, good point. Really, what's funny is, everybody thinks it's just hand strength. But really, when you think of grip, especially grip competitions, you have to understand that grip involves everything pretty much from the elbow down. Because, a lot of the muscles that go into your hands are actually crossing and originate from up near your elbow.

So, a lot of the musculature starts there, runs all the way down to your fingers. So, you have to take all that stuff into consideration. You also have to think about the back of your forearm, because if you do grip training and you do too much flexion, which is the action of bending your wrist in and also closing your hand into a fist, that's flexion. If you do too much of that and not enough extension, then what you're going to end up doing is getting like an imbalance and you could potentially put yourself at risk for an injury. And it also holds your strength development back. So, you have to think about all that stuff at the same time.

MW: So, what are the opposites of...you said that was the flexion with the closed hand?

JJ: Yeah.

MW: What's the opposite? How do you do extension type exercises?

JJ: The most basic way to think about it is like if you put a rubber band around the outside of your fingers on your thumb, and then open your fingers up against the resistance of the rubber band. This is working your extensor muscles of your fingers and on the back of your hand and the back of your wrist.

MW: What about if you're gripping around a dumbbell and picking that up from like the hex side of the dumbbell. Your fingers are all spread out real wide, but you're also squeezing it. Is that a little of both?

JJ: Well, really, the extensors are always going to be involved to a point, because they're going to help stabilize the wrist and they're going to help stabilize all the joints in the fingers. But, you're not hitting them with any kind of intensity when you're doing that, because the force is actually going towards the dumbbell.

So, what you'd want to do is work the opposite movement pattern so that you do accentuate the extensors from time to time. And what I usually tell people is at least once or twice a week, if not every workout, you should do some form of extensors because it keeps them stimulated and it enables your body to continue to increase the flexion strength.

MW: Well, that's really interesting to me, because I've got this killer tendinitis right now. I think it's from benching, something to do with the forearm muscle. But, I've been doing some of those extensor type exercises and it really is making it feel a lot better.

JJ: That doesn't surprise me at all, because a lot of times what that's coming from is just strictly an imbalance. And what's going on is the muscles are extremely strong on the flexion side, but they tend to get tight. And what can also happen is you get like...the bones can be misaligned ever so slightly, and what that does is that just creates more tension in the lower arm and leads to things like your tendinitis and epicondylitis and there's other things that they talk about with these conditions of these connective tissues.

So, it doesn't surprise me one bit if you're seeing some relief of that by doing the extensors. Because, that's what a lot of people say. In fact, that's what a lot of therapists actually have people do is the extensor stuff.

MW: That's cool. So, that's another advantage to grip training. People that build up injuries without any grip training, doing some of these exercises can help get rid of some other conditions and imbalances as well.

JJ: Oh, yeah, no doubt about it. I'll tell you two other ones because I guarantee you there's a lot of people listening that have problems with their lower arms, especially up near the elbow and the back side of the elbow. There's one that saved me a couple of times, and you just take a sledgehammer and you hold the sledgehammer somewhere near like the middle of the handle and maybe up even towards the head of the hammer. It doesn't have to be a real heavy hammer. Like a six or an eight pound hammer is perfect.

But, what you do is you just rotate your forearm back and forth through supination and pronation. That rotation stimulates those muscles that create that movement. And what it also does is it stretches them and it gets more blood into those areas and that helps heal the area as well.

MW: You can do that with a sledgehammer?

JJ: Yeah, I do that with a sledgehammer. You can do it with just a pipe, like a heavy pipe or something like that. One of the things I used recently because it's a little bigger

is one of the Olympic style loadable dumbbells. Like, the ones that you put quarters on and then do rows and stuff with. Those work really good, too, because all you have to do is put like a 2 ½ or a 5 on one of the loading areas and then just choke it down with a collar or a pony clamp or something like that. But, you just weight in on one end and then you grab the other end and you rotate it like that. So, that gets pretty intense pretty quick.

MW: That's cool. I'm definitely going to try that.

JJ: Yeah, try it out. If you're having any issues, I would try that out for sure. I mean, you can do some other stuff. I really like deep tissue massage and some of the more aggressive styles of massage where they really get down in there and really stimulate the area. I really like those. That helps me out quite a bit.

And this thing here, which probably a lot of people haven't thought about. But, this thing kept me good for years, is working on the speed bag, like the small punching bag deal.

MW: Yeah.

JJ: Yep. And what I did is I saw some people on YouTube hitting the bag from different angles, like especially from hitting it not just from the front and working forward, but from the back of the bag and working back towards you. I did that for years. In fact, I still do it. But, it kept me in perfect shape for years. And I think it's just...what it is, is you're just able to rotate your forearm and move it around at your elbow in so many different angles under very, very light tension. It just flushes the area with blood, keeps it full of nutrients and really helps promote healing and stability there.

MW: That's awesome. That's a good tip. You going to put that in your gym you're building?

JJ: It's down right now, but I have my homemade gym and it's just...it's just sitting on the floor right now. I had to move it because we put a bathroom in downstairs and the bathroom door, you couldn't open it all the way because it was smashing into the platform for my speed bag. So, what it is, is I have a transitional area from the living space downstairs into the garage gym that I built. And it's an unfinished area, the basement. So, there isn't any sheet rock or drop ceiling or anything up above your head. So, the rafters are all exposed. So, I built a platform in connection with those rafters.

And what's cool about it is like if you buy a speed bag platform from Wal-Mart or sporting goods stores or something like that, a lot of time they're really, really weak and they move and they shift and they vibrate and stuff like that and you can't get any good

stings going on a speed bag platform like that if they shake and wobble all over the place. So, we build our own out of really heavy wood and plywood and it works great. There's not vibration at all and you can just kill it. You can just destroy the bag, hit it really fast, get a lot of good continuous reps going and really, really good for you.

MW: That's cool, man. What about this other exercise I've done before? You take a five pound empty jug of protein powder, but you fill it up with some sand and then you stick your hand into it and you open your hand up and you just kind of keep your hand opened up, holding it for as long as you can, maybe for sets of 30 to 60 seconds.

JJ: Yeah, definitely. That's awesome. I call that extensor bucket. I actually just shot a video using one of those probably an hour and a half ago, no kidding. But, what I use, I mean, the protein powder is great. Those containers are great especially if you have hands that are a little bit on the smaller side. I have huge hands, so what I use is an old container, it used to have cheese balls in it. You can get them with like pretzels and stuff in there.

I know you probably don't eat that stuff, man, because I know how disciplined you are. Back in the day, you know, back in the day like five years ago, I had to get a snack in me. so, I bought one of those big like two gallon containers of cheese balls and just happened to keep that thing sitting around for a while. And what I did was I threw...I do a lot of nail bending, steeling bending in different feats of strength. So, what I did is for close to a year, I threw all the bent nails into this container. It looks just like a protein container, but it's clear.

MW: Just a bigger opening and it's clear?

JJ: Yep, and the opening's bigger. So, it's perfect for me because if I use a protein container, I can't open my hand very much.

MW: Yeah, you get your hand stuck.

JJ: Yeah, pretty much. So, with the cheese ball container, I can get a really good workout with that. So, yeah, it's really good. For a variation on that, if you get bored just holding it off the ground, what you can do is lighten the load slightly, like maybe put half of the sand in there that you have already. You lift it up and you stand there, but then you also begin to move the container around. You move like through a figure eight or you can draw the alphabet in the air, or whatever you want to do.

And what that does, that not only works the extensors statically by holding the container there, but it also work the other musculature in the back of the forearm, moving and changing the angle of the wrist around. So, that's a real good variation, too.

MW: Okay, cool. You could even do the pronation and supination in there, too, right?

JJ: Oh, yeah, no doubt about it, man. No doubt about it. You could do all kinds of stuff with that. It's really, really good. I mean, there's a lot of stuff that you can do for your hands using just stuff you have sitting around the house, for sure.

MW: So, do your hands get muscular? This is a kind of weird question. But, some of the power lifters I meet, like some of the really strong dudes, the guys that are winning the whole meets and stuff, you go and you shake hands with them and their hands are just like a big ball of muscle. So like, it feels funny shaking their hands sometimes. Like, you just get the outer part of their fingers because their hands are like just a big muscle. Have you noticed like your hand getting bigger and stuff, too? Or, like what happens to the muscles when you're getting stronger? Do they always get bigger, or not necessarily?

JJ: Yeah, they definitely do. Like, for sure the pinky pad is something that's going to put on a lot of muscle. And I can't think right now what that...I used to know what all the muscles were called when I was in college.

MW: Yeah, I don't know if anyone cares.

JJ: Yeah, yeah. The pinky pad will definitely put on muscle and the thumb pad puts on size quite a bit. I can tell this for sure because in college, I played baseball. I pitched for two years and I still have the gloves that I used back in the day. And my hand used to slide right up inside of that glove perfectly, and you could barely see any of my hand. And these days, my hand doesn't quite fit inside that glove anymore. So, it just kind of shows you.

I mean, I got out of college in 2001 and I started doing this grip in 2003. So, over the course of a few years, you know, I could tell right away that my hand had grown. You can't really see it because you're looking at your own hands all the time. But, other people will probably be able to tell. Like, if you go to your family reunion or whatever after a couple of years and they shake your hand, they're going to see, they're going to tell that you've been working your grip, for sure.

MW: Yeah, like even watches and stuff, like your whole wrist must get bigger, so you got to get a bigger watch and get some more notches put on there.

JJ: Right, and that gets expensive when you're wearing the solid gold Rolex and stuff like that, like I am....naw. I'm just kidding. No, but yeah, all the musculature is going to grow somewhat, for sure, especially the forearms. Even if you don't do any like direct forearm work. I never hit wrist curls. I don't do that stuff. I do so much flexion in my gripper work, my two hand pinch work and things like that, that the muscle hypertrophies anyway. So, it's really a matter of that tension on the muscle and these eccentrics and stuff like that that's going to put the size on your forearms. You don't

necessarily have to go out and say, okay, I'm going to go hit all these wrist curls, endless sets of wrist curls. You can do the other stuff and still get the results.

MW: Right. I mean, a lot of people, the weakest link, they say that can be your grip. And then you can't lift more weight in anything else because your grip isn't strong enough to hold on, unless you use those straps like we were talking about. Then, you can lift more weight. But, you've got to work that weakest link, for a lot of people. Is the grip. When you get that grip stronger, now you're able to lift more weight on everything else you're doing. And then, there's got to be some kind of carryover on that, getting stronger and getting bigger in the rest of your body because you can handle more weight with your grip now. I mean, almost every exercise involved the grip.

JJ: Right, right, and it's not always just the muscular strength either. Sometimes it's just the mental side. Because, when you're taking the bar off of the rack in the bench press, it feels better in your hand because your hand's stronger, your wrist is stronger, your forearm's stronger, everything is more stable. You're more confident, you're going to control the bar better. You're not shaking as much when you're going for a PR lift. So, the benefits are really two fold in that regard.

MW: Yeah, I mean, that's a big tip for benching, is to squeeze the bar as hard as you can. You can see a huge difference. I mean, that's why I don't get why people do that thumbless grip sometimes. I mean, guys [benching a ton of weight](#), but imagine how much more they could do if they were just squeezing that bar as hard as they could instead of just resting the bar on their palm.

JJ: Unfortunately it's just that misinformation. It's just misinformation, everybody gets their information from the wrong sources, the bad muscle building magazines and stuff like that. They see these big dudes doing it and they think they're supposed to do that, and unfortunately it's not the case.

MW: Yeah, that's just a photo shoot with the fake weights on it and stuff like that. That's the pictures you see.

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

MW: You played baseball in college?

JJ: Yeah, man, I played as a kid, I played in high school, and really, the only reason I went to college was to play baseball. I was always good in school, so I got good grades in college anyway. I didn't really have to work for it, but I wanted to go and play baseball and I thought I would have a real good chance of playing first base where I went to school. Didn't end up playing there. The team already had a senior and a junior or something at first base. So, I was put on the mound as a pitcher. And I



pitched in high school and I was pretty good for my league, but our league didn't really have a lot of heavy competition in it.

So, I went from being a big fish in a really, really small pond to being a really small fish in a big pond. I mean, it was just personified with my situation. And I really had no business being on the mound and ended up getting some injuries and after a couple of years I was like, man, this just isn't looking good. And I just got out of it.

MW: How do you think grip training, if you knew about it back then, since you're gotten into it now, how do you think that transfers over to sports like baseball? How important is grip and how does it make you a better player?

JJ: Well, I think if I had any strength at all, I would have been a much better baseball player, because I look back and I was actually very, very weak. If I would have adapted more of a steady training program I would have been in better shape. But, with the grip stuff... I remember taking batting practice and my hands were just always tired-out. My senior year I got this really bad bruise on my thumb. I took a ball really close-in on the handle off a pitching machine and my hands, I mean, I kid you not. They looked like old lady's hands.

They were so skinny you could almost see the bones in my hands when you looked at my hands. I've got pictures from when we were doing stuff in the hallway at school and stuff like that, and my hands were like little, dainty, old lady's hands, or something like that. And they were just so weak. And I think they got stronger when I went to college, because then I started lifting and things like that. And then, I got like strong hands once I was fully developed. But, in high school, it was just a joke.

So, yeah, for sure, I think... I mean, I used to hit homeruns in high school. I put a few balls over the fence in high school. But, it wasn't anywhere near where I could have been had I known what I know now. Because, I wasn't strong enough to pull the bat through the zone with a faster pitcher. I just reached kind of like a plateau and the only way I was going to get through that plateau was to get stronger.

But, you know, back then people weren't telling you to lift weights to get strong. They were saying, okay, yeah, go lift weights so you have better endurance.

MW: And they were putting you on sports specific stuff for baseball and things.

JJ: Right, exactly.

MW: And telling you not to lift sometimes, and do all these like weird band and stability ball things.

JJ: Yeah, dude. I mean, I used to do like crunches for like an hour. It was just ridiculous. The information was just not there. And a grip workout, back in the day, I mean, maybe I would do wrist roller like once or twice. But, I was like, why am I doing this? All of the power is coming from your legs and your core anyway. That's what everybody would tell you. But, yeah, that's true, but you should at least have a strong legs and core. But, I just had no guidance in high school and I surely didn't research anything. I was pretty lazy back then and didn't put a lot of effort into it. So, off the field I didn't really do much.

MW: Even in the pros, I mean, I know a couple of strength and conditioning coaches and it's not very grueling workouts they put the baseball players through. But, the guys that do get really good and get really strong, they're doing stuff on their own.

JJ: Yeah, exactly.

MW: A lot of baseball players actually don't even like working out, it seems like. Or, you think it's just a sport about skill. But, strength does come into play.

JJ: Yeah. So much baseball is based around power and speed and the foundation of all that is strength. So, yeah, I think there are a lot of people in the major leagues that really aren't that strong. They're extremely well gifted. They were given the gift of being able to play baseball, but they could be a lot better if they were able to work on other aspects like their grip.

MW: Yeah. Well, I played football in college and I mean, I would say grip is huge. Being on defense you had to like grab offensive linemen, keep them off your body and try to shed blocks by throwing people. I mean, there were guys that had crazy strong grips, like would just grab inside your jersey and they just had like grips of steel. You couldn't even get their hands off you. You're like clubbing their arms trying to get them off you and it's just ridiculous. I mean, it's freaking huge. And you focus on a lot of running and conditioning for football, too, but especially for the interior linemen and linebackers and stuff, having a strong grip definitely helps.

JJ: Yeah, and it's also in how you train. Like I kind of alluded to earlier, sometimes coaches put their athletes on programs that are like strictly wrist curls, wrist roller and then maybe they'll have them jam their hand down into sand and work their way to the bottom or something like that. But, a lot of that is just flexion. It's all finger flexion, wrist flexion and forearm flexion, and what you end up having is limitations because you don't have any balance and also injuries. So, it's just misinformation. It just gets passed on from generation to generation to generation.

But, I think with the internet now, I think this is starting to change. You know what I mean? Because, the process to actually get information out there back in the

'80s and even the '90s, it was so much slower. But now, with the information superhighway, I mean.

MW: Oh, it's awesome, but at the same time, you get overwhelmed and you get confused. You've got to find sites like Diesel Crew and CritialBench.com where you can trust the information. You go and do a Google search and you're going to find like 20 pages of everybody disagreeing with each other. And you just wind up being more confused than when you started.

JJ: Oh, yeah, that's definitely. I fully agree, man, fully agree.

MW: What other sports do you think a good grip will help you in the sport? I mean, obviously any strength sports, but other mainstream sports.

JJ: Another one, I don't know if you call this mainstream or not, but definitely lacrosse has a lot of hand activity going on. I've never played lacrosse, but they tell me, that athletes tell me that their hands are very, very tired afterwards because they have to constantly be manipulating whatever that stick is that they use. I don't know what they call it.

MW: I don't know either.

JJ: Real good story here. But anyway, there's stuff that you can do for that in order to give your hands better endurance as well so that they're not tired-out at the end of the game. So, that's another one.

MW: Martial arts, like grappling and MMA.

JJ: Oh, yeah, definitely, for sure, because you've got to be able to maintain control over your opponent. It's not always about like squeezing your hand so that you're turning someone's wrist into a pulp. It's mainly just about maintaining a grasp over someone's slippery, wet wrist or their forearm or whatever it is you're grabbing at that point, their ankle. Yeah, that plays a big part. I mean, arm wrestling is huge.

MW: That's a whole other sport. Is that almost all grip training leading into arm wrestling? They've got to have leverage with the shoulder and some different things. But, that's got to be what, 80% of their training is grip training for arm wrestlers?

JJ: You know what? I've talked to a lot...well, I've talked to a handful of arm wrestlers lately and they say a lot of their training for arm wrestling is more arm wrestling.

MW: They actually just arm wrestle?

JJ: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you look at it, if you go with grip training from the elbow down your finger tips, yeah, it's all grip training because you have to take into account what the movement patterns are for arm wrestling. And, you have to train those movement patterns for both strength and power so that you can flash somebody at the table and get their hand down on the table. Or, it's just stability, end point strength, because you can get into some pretty crazy positions on the arm wrestling table. So, you need to be prepared for those positions as well because you don't want to break your arm or rip a tendon off the bone. And then, it's also stamina, being able to maintain a grasp on a sweaty hand for a long time. Because, a lot of those arm wrestling matches go for a few minutes. I mean, they get really tired-out. So, you have to look at it from a lot of different angle.

MW: You never thought about competing in arm wrestling? I'm surprised you haven't done that.

JJ: You know, I thought about it. I thought about it quite a bit. But, at the time when I had the opportunity to do some competitions, I was so much into grip and Strongman already that I was like, you know what... Because, I actually thought I had kind of a chance to progress pretty far in Strongman in like 2004 and 2005, because I was winning a lot of the mass competitions that I was attending. If I wasn't winning, I was coming in like 2<sup>nd</sup> to some dude that was probably outweighing me or something like that.

MW: Were you a heavyweight?

JJ: Yeah, I was in the 265 class and below.

MW; Okay.

JJ: But, I only weighed like 250.

MW: How tall are you?

JJ: 6'2"

MW: It gives you a good advantage on like stone loading and stuff.

JJ: Oh, yeah, yeah, definitely. Plus, I mean, it was just having a whole group of people that were training together, we were able to really learn the techniques for stone lifting really well. That's the benefit of having a whole crew that you're lifting with. The guys that are all by themselves for these technical lifts, they really...

MW: Don't figure it out as fast.

JJ: Yeah, exactly. Unless you're doing like video analysis and having somebody coach you over the internet or something like that, I mean, it's really, really tough. But, yeah. Back in '04 and '05, I was really good in Strongman and winning these contest and I was like, you know what? I'll just wait on the arm wrestling. So, I've never really gotten into it.

MW: Yeah. I mean, you see it at all the expos now, like you go to the Arnold and the Olympia and those Europa ones where they have all the different events going on. I mean, they've always got arm wrestling and stuff. I haven't seen too many...myself, I don't think I've been to a grip competition. What's that like? Can you tell us about some of the events and stuff?

JJ: Yeah, sure, definitely. That would be awesome. Grip is actually very, very similar to Strongman. If any of the listeners have gone to Strongman competitions, they'll...

MW: Or watched it on ESPN.

JJ: Yeah, definitely. It's gotten the exposure that they've been able to see that. So, there's like five events and each event within the Strongman competition is scored separately. And then, the total score is all added up at the end. That's exactly how a grip competition works. Only, we don't use the conventional Strongman scoring.

So, for instance, in some Strongman competitions if you finish first place, you get one point and then you want to have low points at the end. Or, sometimes they'll reverse it, where if you finish first you get 10 points, or whatever the case may be. In a lot of the grip competitions, the way the scoring works is based off of the best performance of the day.

So, let me just use some examples here. Generally the first event of the grip contest is grippers. You have to squeeze the heavy grippers so that the handles touch together, and then that's a legal close. So, what you generally do is you get the points equal to the poundage that it takes to shut that gripper. And what has been developed over the years is an apparatus that you hang the gripper in and then you're able to hang weight off the handle in order to touch it down. So, you can measure the strength of the spring of that gripper, because all the grippers, all the grippers are different. They all vary. It doesn't matter what company you get them from. You'll probably never find two grippers that are exactly the same. They're always going to be a few ounces off. So, what we do is prior to the contest, we measure the grippers so that we know the strength.

People are probably pretty familiar with the Ironmind Captains of Crush grippers. They get a lot of exposure around. So, the number three, I think... What do they say,

that that's equal to like 260 pounds of pressure or something like that on the box? Like the number escapes me right now. But actually, most number three grippers are like between 140 and 155 pounds. And that's with this rating system.

Now, if you squeeze it with some other measuring system, it might come out different. But, we all use the same system of hanging the weights off. So, you get a pretty consistent number.

So, let's say I squeeze the number three and it's 150. Well, then I get 150 points for that gripper close. Okay? And then, if someone else closes like a gripper that is maybe a Super Elite from the Beef Builder variety, then maybe that's 170 pounds. So, the way that it's scored is my score is 150 divided by 170. So, I get whatever. Can you do that in your head? Are you good with math, Mike?

MW: No, I'm not good at math. It's like .8 or something. I don't know.

JJ: Okay. So, I might get like eight points. The guy that closes the 170, he gets ten points. So, that's how the points are figured. So, you end up getting like a factor of 10, but it's based off of all the percentages or all the performances that take place on the day.

MW: Do they change the order? Like is that always the first event, or that could be anytime?

JJ: That's almost always the first event. Not every single time, because really, the promoter that's organizing contests, they can put the events in any order that they want to.

MW: Do they surprise you like they do in Strongman?

JJ: No, usually it's all announced ahead of time, because you want to be able to prepare. You know what I mean? Naw, we don't usually have a bunch of curveballs thrown at the grip contest like they do Strongman.

MW: Yeah, I see Strongman guys train and they don't know what they're doing or training for. I'm like, "Are you going to have that in the show?" And they're like, "We don't know." I'm like, "Oh, man, if you only knew, you could skip this for a while and work on the other stuff."

JJ: Yeah, got to be ready for anything. Yeah, it's funny. No, but the grippers are usually done first because that's like the most dynamic thing. So, you need the most strength for the dynamic lifts. Kind of like, if you're setting up a weight training routine for an athlete, you're going to have the person do like the overhead work first before he

does the other stuff, because that takes the most energy in order to do. So, the gripper event generally takes the most energy. So, that's usually first.

And then, they usually do the two hands pinch next.

MW: Is that where they pinch plates?

JJ: Yeah. What they use is... Well, you can either use plates that are just positioned smooth side out, and then you run a pipe through the center hole and add weight onto the pipe. But, what's actually started here the last few years, probably like five years now, is there's an adjustable pinch apparatus that's being used. It comes from Europe. It's called the Euro Pinch. And what it is, is a series of discs, you and put them in or take them out so that they're thicker.

So, the outside two discs are six millimeter plates. It comes from Europe, so it's millimeters. So, the outside plates are six millimeter and they're made out of steel. And then, you have a series of six and ten millimeter rubber plates that are inserted between the plates in order to adjust the width of the apparatus.

Like if you get like a couple 45 pound plates and you put them together, they might be two inches thick. You find another set, they might be two and a half inches thick. So, it's very difficult to control the thickness of the plates using just 45 pound plates.

With the Euro Pinch, because it's adjustable, you can set it up to almost within a couple of millimeters, whatever width you want to. The competitor is free to try out the implement before the event, figure out which width they want. And then, they're able to use the width of the apparatus that compliments their hand size the best.

So, to give you an idea, I use...

MW: You have the world record in this though, right?

JJ: Yes. Yep, I do. I hold the world record for the two hands pinch on the adjustable apparatus. It's 256 pounds. Yeah, thanks man. I set that in December of last year and I'd been chasing it since like 2005. So, yeah.

MW: How long did you pinch it for? Is it just picking it up, or how does it work? Is it a hold or is it just getting it off the ground?

JJ: Yeah, that's actually a real good question. What it is, like I said, there's a pipe running through the center of the apparatus, and what you do is you take the double overhand grip so that your thumbs are on one side and then your fingers on the other. Then, you have to pick the weight up and hold it, but you don't have to hold it for time.

What I'm trying to say is, you pick it up and you have to touch the pipe against a stick, like a measuring point.

MW: To make sure you have control of it?

JJ: Yes. You have to pick it up and then touch it and then set it down under control.

MW: How far is that up? Kind of like a straight arm? You don't have to lift it like past your knee?

JJ: No, it's right about your knee. It's sixteen and a half inches high, and for most people, that is not picking it up to lockout. It's a little bit short of lockout. But, mainly what it is, it's just showing you that you are picking the apparatus up and you are maintaining control over it.

MW: Can you drop it after you touch?

JJ: No, you have to set it down under control.

MW: Kind of like a dead lift?

JJ: Yes, exactly. Like, you can't just drop it. Because, the problem is, you could potentially damage the equipment, and then that would render the whole event done. Plus, these pieces of equipment are very, very expensive because they have to come from Europe. So, there's a lot of investment in there. So, you have to take care of the apparatus.

That's my favorite event. The pinch has always been my favorite event, ever since I first started lifting. So, I have thumbs that are extraordinarily long compared to most other people. They usually call them dick thumbs when people see my thumbs, because of how they're shaped. So, I use that to my advantage for the pinch, I guess.

MW: So, just at a regular gym, can you pinch two 45's and just pick that up no problem? Like, that's easy, right?

JJ: Most of the time, yeah.

MW: I don't know if I've met anyone that can really do that. We've had everybody at your gym just try it, messing around. I think a few guys got to 35's. I don't think I've seen anyone get to 45's.

JJ: Well, I can tell you that 35's, I can pretty much pinch any set of 35's. The 45's it kind of depends on just how slick they are. Like, if you get like a brand new pair of 45's from the sporting goods place and they've never been touched and they still have that



sheen of newness on them, I might not be able to pinch those. But, if they're not too awful wide and they've got some texture to them, I can usually pinch them.

MW: Cool.

JJ: I mean, that's a great feat of strength. I mean, if someone listening can do that, you have to understand that that is a world class feat of strength. Like, people don't just walk around, bending over, picking up two 45's the first time they try it. Most people have to train for years for that.

MW: Right. Yeah, that explains why I haven't seen it.

JJ: Yeah, I mean, it's pretty elite. I mean, it took me like a year and a half in order to be able to do it, I'd say. And that was pretty frequent training, because I enjoyed pinch so much that I did that quite often. I don't know, there's just something about it. It was a really, really tough feat for me to be able to accomplish.

MW: So, for your grip workout when you're training for this kind of competition, do you train grip every single day and you're still training the rest of your body? Or, are you focusing just on grip?

JJ: Nope, you know, I've found that if I neglect the rest of my body, my grip strength goes down. I think because I love lifting so much, that if I don't get that stimulus, that full body stimulus, it almost like kind of brings me down. You know what I mean? Because, I miss it. It's like you miss your best friend. You know?

So, I don't neglect the full body any more at all. I always maintain a consistent full body workout. And for a while, I would train my grip five or six days a week. And it worked out really well for me. But, I kind of like didn't get the results anymore after a while. So, I've actually cut it down to maybe three or four grip workouts a week. And I usually do it on the same day that I train, because actually, I try to train every day now in some way. But, the in between days are usually only like ten minutes of either some kettlebell snatching or kettlebell pressing or maybe some of the TacFit stuff, the bodyweight stuff. Because, I'm in kind of a mode to trim down body fat. So, I'm doing a lot of like higher level cardio mixed with strength, kind of like the hybrid stuff, that you guys work with.

MW: Yeah, I'm kind of doing some of that right now, too. I just had a bunch of injuries just from power lifting. So, I figured that would be a good time to cut back on some fat while I'm rehabbing anyway.

JJ: Yeah, for sure. And that's always a good thing.

MW: Yeah. Do you use kettlebells and things like that? Like, you've got the program, Ultimate Forearm Book program. How many days a week is that and what kind of stuff do people need to have? Do they have to build all kinds of different forearm things, or is it things you can typically find at the gym?

JJ: Well, it's everything. I mean, there's a bunch of equipment you can build yourself for cheap. I mean, using stuff like boards and stuff like that. I mean, I've got equipment that I made out of boards just by drilling some holes and using some other scrap stuff that I had sitting around. I mean, you can do grip training with just about every piece of equipment that's out there.

I do kettlebells. For years and years I had one kettlebell. It was a 95 pound kettlebell that we got at a contest. Big, thick handle on it, and what I used to do with that is just juggling, just doing like forward and backward flips with the kettlebell and side flips and things like that. And the handle's just so big that it's a real good stimulus for your grip.

But, I also do stuff with like homemade stuff. Like, we were talking about that protein container lift and stuff like that. I have tons of different homemade gadgets down there, stuff where I've taken and modified pony clamps and baseballs and softballs, things like that. And I actually...the ebook that I just release, [Ultimate Forearm Training for Baseball](#), has a ton of that stuff in there.

[The Ultimate Forearm Training for Baseball](#) is like 400 pages and it's packed with exercises, homemade equipment. I go over like the specialty grip equipment that's out on the market. See, a lot of this stuff, there are a lot of good grip strength training equipment out there that I think a lot of people would like. But, they don't know about it because it doesn't get the exposure.

So, what I've done is I've kind of put together this manual that, even though it's titled [Ultimate Forearm Training for Baseball](#), I mean, this stuff is applicable to just about anybody that wants to do well in any sport, and even for people who just want to get strong. Your normal strength enthusiast can benefit from this information. And it really is...it's the go-to source. I mean, I worked on this thing for months.

Like I said, it's packed with information. It's got tons of exercises, illustrations and stuff like that. Because, when I write products, I put together a few products, but I like to really sit down and just put together a killer product. Like, I don't finish my products in a few weeks like some other people. Not that there's anything wrong with that, it's just I like to really just devour the whole entire subject matter and put it all together right into a manual for the customer.

MW: Now, is it a plug-in style? Let's say I'm doing a different program. Can I take things from it and just add into my workouts? Or, is it a whole plan that you should follow?

JJ: No, it's actually very, very flexible. There's 200 pages worth of exercises. But, what I did is I put together 20 workouts of sample workouts and what they do is they draw from all the different aspects of grip so that you're training your hands, fingers, thumbs, wrist, forearms. I put them all together. So, what I did is I designed these workouts so that you could take the workout and you could do just a grip workout. Or, you could take off layers of the workout, depending on what your current program was and how much time you had to dedicate to your grip training.

So, if you want to put in an extra workout in there and have some fun, you go ahead and go do workout number four, which is like repetition mayhem or something like that. I named all the workouts, because I'm funny like that.

But, you can go and do all of workout number four and it might take you an hour to do workout number four. You don't have an hour? Then you just take off like the first group of exercises and you do the rest of the program, and it might take you 45 minutes. You just want to add it to the end of your program? Then just do like the pairing that I put together. And that will be like a back-to-back circuit training type of stuff for grip strength.

So, whatever it is that you're working on, this program fits right into your routine. You're able to cut it up, take it apart and spit it back out however you want to, and make it work for you. Because, what I've found out is that everybody is different. And for someone to try to say this is the definitive program and you need to do it this way, that's just not going to work out for all people. For some people, that might work. But, for other people, you can't...you just never know.

MW: Cookie cutter.

JJ: Yeah. Cookie cutter just doesn't work. I mean, some people have injuries, they're not up to the same level that you are, or whatever. It's just not going to work. So, that's what's great about the workouts I put together in this program.

MW: Yeah, that sounds awesome. And you show how to do all the different exercises and stuff. So, I've gotten programs before where you just see the name of the exercise and you're just supposed to know what to do.

JJ: No, nope. I have, too, and it's real disappointing when you open that up. I'd say 99% of the movements have a dedicated sequence of images, and they're all high resolution images. The only ones that I didn't demonstrate...like grippers. Like one is

you're closing for reps and one is you close it and hold it for time. I didn't want to put the same picture in there twice because it's the same deal. So, things like that that you don't even have to describe, I didn't put the picture in there. Everything else has a picture.

MW: Where can people grab this book?

JJ: You go to [AdvancedBaseballTraining.com](http://AdvancedBaseballTraining.com), because what I'm doing is I'm working on a new site because I want to help the baseball players out. So, [AdvancedBaseballTraining.com/ForearmTrainingForBaseball](http://AdvancedBaseballTraining.com/ForearmTrainingForBaseball). It's like one of the longest URLs in history.

MW: Can you get to it from that homepage, too? Like, click on something?

JJ: Yeah, for sure.

MW: I'll put a link for you guys on here that got the PDF version of the interview, too, put a link to it if you guys want to go check that out. Where else can people find out about you? You're at DieselCrew.com. Do you got your own blog going and I mean, you have a lot of other great grip strength and strength training products as well. Where else can people learn more about you?

JJ: Yeah, I'm all over the place, man. I'm on YouTube, I've got a channel on YouTube. DieselCrew.com is my main blog. I have an old blog that I don't really update anymore, so I don't even want to send anybody out there. But, you can also go to [TheGripAuthority.com](http://TheGripAuthority.com). That is a site that I put together, and if anybody's interested in having like a monthly workout program, I design a monthly workout program for the people. I go over feats of strength. I go over a monthly video feature on how to just build strength, how to build your own equipment and things like that.

I also have [CardTearing.com](http://CardTearing.com). if anybody's interested in learning how to tear a deck of cards, I've definitely got the best resource available on how to do that. And, I also have a nail bending ebook. So, if you go to [TheGripAuthority.com/Bending.htm](http://TheGripAuthority.com/Bending.htm), right there is the nail bending ebook. So, what's cool is the card tearing ebook and the nail bending ebook are packed full of grip exercise as well. So, if you're looking for some resources in how to strengthen up your hands, your forearms, your wrists and things like that, I've got everything that you need.

MW: Awesome. It sounds like a lot of these feats of strength, they all include grip and forearm stuff. I mean, do you know the history of this? Like, I think I've seen like some old videos of guys ripping phone books and bending nails and I think I have a couple like old VHS tapes with some of this stuff on it. But, how did this stuff start? Was it like

just demonstrations for crowds? How did it start out and what kind of stuff did they do back in the old days?

JJ: Yeah. Back in the day, back in the early 1900's and things like that, we didn't have televisions and radios and things like that back in the day. So, we didn't have things to naturally take up our time. So, things like the circus and the carnival, they were much more famous back then. And when the carnival came to town, heck, the whole town went to the carnival because they wanted to see all the attractions. And a lot of times back then, the carnivals would have a strong man or maybe strong men that would do feats of strength in order to entertain the crowds.

So, generally what the strong men would do, in order to set themselves apart from other strong men, is they would have their own maneuver, if you will, their own strength feat that would define them.

MW: Like their signature move?

JJ: Yeah, like their signature move.

MW: Like, each wrestler has something, like a wrestler has like a pile-driver and somebody else has like a DDT. Everybody had their own thing?

JJ: Exactly. Yeah, dude, exactly. Like, some of them would have a manager that would cheat for them and stuff like that. I'm going to piss some people off right now, but some of the strong men back in the day, they cheated.

MW: Really?

JJ: Yeah, they had cards that were doctored, they had phone books that weren't quite legitimate. And there's information out there about that, and I don't need to drag anybody down. But, strong men, being a strong man back in the day, you were famous, you were a celebrity. So, you wanted to make the impression on the crowds. And sometimes, the strong men performers would invite the people from the crowd up onto the stage and have them try to lift their challenge dumbbell or they would try to have them rip a deck of cards or something like that. So, that's kind of how the lore got started. And sometimes, the stories would get stretched because you know how it is. The crowd at the carnival, some of them had been drinking.

MW: And then they tell their friends and then they tell their friends and five years later the weight's like twice as much.

JJ: Yeah, yeah. It's like the older it gets the stronger they get or whatever, the story just keeps on evolving. So, that's just natural. That's how it is.

MW: Yeah, it's like that with everything in life.

JJ: Yeah, man, fishing and hunting and things like that.

I shot a buck one time up here in Pennsylvania; it had one antler. And I swear, by the time I'm like 90 years old that things going to be a trophy. It's hanging on my wall with like 16 points on it.

MW: That's funny. Hey, I just thought of another question, probably should have been one of the first ones. But, isn't there like three different kinds of grip? Or, am I getting that wrong? I think it read one of your articles, like there's pinch...what are the other kinds?

JJ: There's actually lots of kinds, and generally, they're limited. You'll see a lot of articles around that are limited to crushing, which is where you're trying to make a fist and that's also like where you're closing grippers, so crushing. There's pinching, which is your thumb strength. So, it's your thumb opposing your fingers. Then, there's also supporting, which is where your fingers are wrapped around something and they're bearing the load, but there isn't a lot of dynamic movement to the movement. So, the dead lift for instance. When you pick something up, that's support grip.

But, there's also clamping. Okay? So, crush is where you're making a fist. Clamping is where you're trying to pin your fingertips down towards you palm. That's really important to understand, because a lot of sporting endeavors, like using a glove in baseball, you're not trying to make a fist around the ball when you catch it. So, there's actually some other stuff that goes on.

There's clamping, there's crimping. Like, the feat of tearing a deck of cards, all you're doing is you're putting your fingertips over the edge of the deck and you're pushing your fingertips in, kind of against the callous line of your hand, and that's called crimping. That's kind of similar to like the grip used in climbing, like mountain climbing and things like that. So, that's real important to understand, too.

And then, there's different degrees of pinch. It's probably best called open hand strength, because you're not wrapping your hand completely around an object. And I go over some of these ideas in the manual as well. So, it's just, you know, when all you think about every day is grip strength, you come up with these ideas. You know what I mean?

MW: Yeah. We could probably talk about this like all day.

JJ: Yeah, exactly. I mean, I've got ideas that I haven't even had a chance to write an article about. But, probably nobody wants to read those articles anyway.

MW: People would read them, man. I got your articles going up on the site as we speak. People love this kind of stuff.

JJ: That's cool, man. I don't know if on your site if it allows comments or not, but if anybody ever has a question on any of my articles, either leave a comment on the site or send me an email. I always like interacting with the people that read the articles. And it helps me out, too, because it tells me how well I'm writing the articles, and it tells me if there's any more information that I'm leaving out. So, definitely contact me.

MW: Yeah, cool. So, DieselCrew.com or you got an email or something, too? Or, is the best place just to go to Diesel Crew?

JJ: Yeah, just go to DieselCrew.com and up at the top there's like a contact button. Or, maybe it might be hit Team Diesel or something like that.

MW: Plus, your Facebook and everything's on there, too.

JJ: Yep, yep. I'm on Facebook, Twitter, I mean, I'm pretty social, man. I like to talk to people. So, if anybody has any questions, don't be afraid to ask.

MW: All right, man, thanks a lot for all the education today, it's awesome talking about this and I'm definitely going to check out your book and try out some of these exercises. I'm excited about it, man.

JJ: Awesome, man. Yeah, look at the Recovery and Therapy section, because there's a lot of stuff in there that we didn't cover. And there's some stuff in there that you can make out of stuff that's laying around your house. It's really, really good for tendon repair and muscle health and things like that. So, go ahead and check that out, man. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today, and wish you well with all that.

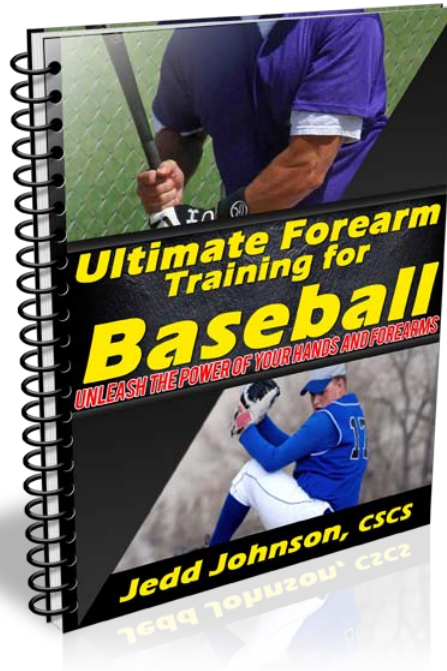
MW: Thanks, man, you too. I'll talk to you real soon.

JJ: All right, thanks. Take care.



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