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WORLD RECORD

Once in jail, Puebloan now in record books

Stay-at-home father uses time to work on chin-ups

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Twelve years ago, an alcohol-addicted Frank Sagona found himself in the Pueblo County jail following an assault conviction.

Today, he's in Guinness World Records for not one but three extraordinary athletic feats.

Although he needed just 14 hours to set the mark, the compactly muscled Sagona, 39, holds the record for most chin-ups, 5,094, over a 24-hour period.

The previous mark was 5,050, set by a Finnish athlete.

Sagona also set records for the most chin-ups in both 8 (3,751) and 12 hours (4,649).

The litany of chin-ups — a challenging maneuver in which a palms inward, underhand grip is used to pull oneself up to a bar — was accomplished last October at REPS Union Avenue Sports Gym and only recently certified by Guinness.

"I feel grateful," Sagona said of inclusion in the esteemed world record directory. "But I feel incomplete. I'm only halfway through the mission."

Sagona said he next plans to establish global marks for push-ups, first for the most in 1 hour and in a second session, over the span of 8 and 12 hours.

"If you gave me an hour today, I could break the push-up record," Sagona said. "The current record is 2,682 push-ups. Last Friday, I did 3,061. I want to set a new standard for humanity and stake my claim as pound-for-pound, the strongest and highest endurance man in history."

A former wrestler at Colorado State University-Pueblo, Sagona said he always has been athletically inclined, inspired by his father's workouts in the basement of the family home.

He also was hopelessly



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/CHRIS MCLEAN

Frank Sagona shows off his world-record form at the REPS gym on Union Avenue on Wednesday, where last October he completed 5,094 chin-ups over a 24-hour period.

addicted to alcohol from age 15-26.

"It was kind of fun going to keggers in the prairies," Sagona said. "Drinking and being the life of the party. And then it turned into an everyday thing."

"It turned me into a nightmare for myself, my family and my community."

Sagona's perilous attachment to alcohol cast a dark shroud over his life, leading to erratic, unpredictable behavior, several failed rehab attempts and most troubling, two separate one-year stretches in the county jail.

But little did Sagona realize it would be those cell bars that would inspire him to reach for a bar much more elevating in nature.

"It was during my last stint in jail that I started doing push-ups and pull-ups," Sagona said. "Everyone in jail talks the talk, saying they can do an outrageous number of push-ups and pull-ups — everybody trying to one up everyone else."

"But I quietly thought to myself, 'I'm going to outwork their mouths



Maybe someone who is teetering on the edge will see what I've done and take the right track.

FRANK SAGONA

and their lies.' "

And so began the transformation, however humble, from alcoholic criminal to world-record holder.

On the outside, Sagona strived to remain sober and keep up with his new-found training regimen. He found anchors in marriage and fatherhood, but became lax about physical training.

"I was living clean and thinking right, but I was out of shape," Sagona said. "I was too involved with work and the baby."

This time, it was a bet on a construction job site and not the boasts of jail mates that inspired Sagona, once and for all, to become as dedicated to training as he once was to alcohol

and destruction.

"I was working a construction job in San Luis when a hulking figure named Marc Bregar bet me \$5 I couldn't do 40 push-ups."

"I stopped at 39 because I didn't want to take his money. But I woke up the next day and my entire upper body was sore. And it made me remember back to when I was doing it in jail. So at work, I started each day with 300 push-ups."

With a criminal record, Sagona found his job prospects to be limited. His wife, however, has a college degree and it was decided that she would work while he stayed at home with the couple's three children.

For the past eight years, Sagona has been fanatically committed to a rigorous, six-day-a-week in-home routine — combining, pull-ups, chin-ups and push-ups. All in between his children's nap times.

"I go as absolutely hard as I can, so it's incredibly hard on every single tendon," Sagona said. "It really puts them through hell. But I figure it's much better to be killing myself this way than through drugs and alcohol."

It was, however, only through that darkness that Sagona stumbled upon the light.

"If I didn't go through those mishaps in life, where would I be at now?" he said. "Ultimately, it took me 22 years after using to get my mind right. That's why my ultimate goal is keeping other young people from putting in that much time toward failure, toward damaging their life and family."

"Maybe someone who is teetering on the

edge will see what I've done and take the right track."

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