

Chris Bradshaw

Competition Lumberjack

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There once was a woodchopper working on the bank of a river. One day the woodchopper's axe accidentally fell into the river and quickly sank out of sight. Without an axe in hand the woodchopper was unable to carry out his appointed tasks, so he became despondent. As he quietly wept at the loss, Hermes took pity on him. The emissary and messenger of the Greek gods swept down from Mount Olympus and retrieved a golden axe from the river. When offered a golden axe, the woodchopper declined saying that was not his property. Hermes dived a second time into the river and produced a silver axe that he presented to the woodsman. Again, the woodchopper indicated that was not his axe either. Hermes once again plunged into the water and retrieved the axe lost earlier by the woodchopper. This time the woodchopper said, "Yes, that is the axe that I lost."



Chris chopped through this log in a matter of minutes demonstrating his competitive skills.

Impressed with the woodcutter's honesty, Hermes presented him with all three axes. The honest woodchopper, you see, was not interested in the material rewards of the two



Facing page, left: Chris demonstrates “the UNDERHAND” chopping event. The log is cut in two from both sides while standing on top.

Photos above show the “STANDING BLOCK” event and also supports the woodcutter’s term of “Let the chips fall where they may.”

precious metal axes, only the one that brought him the joy of an honest day’s work.

Aesop’s woodcutter’s fable has been told for centuries and always seems to find a contemporary application. Like the woodcutter of old, Chris Bradshaw from Mineral County, West Virginia finds peace of mind cutting wood with his hand sharpened axe. He does not compete for gold or silver, but rather for love of the sport. Unlike Aesop’s character, however, Chris is one giant woodchopper whose story can be fully told and even observed throughout the competitive season.

Chris is no stranger to the forest. As a youngster, he spent time with his uncles and father cutting and hauling wood. It was not until attending West Virginia University, however, that he was introduced to lumberjack sports. “While working out in the weight room, I saw a guy swinging an axe handle between sets. I later learned he was part of a woodsmen’s team. One of the members invited me to

a practice, and I was hooked,” recalled Chris. Also influencing Chris was the timbersport competitions broadcast on ESPN. “I knew that timbersports is how I wanted to compete.”

Chris was influenced by woodcutting champions who later became friends, and under their guidance, he became more proficient in the competitive sport. And like all sports, wood cutting demands dedication, strength, and perfection of technique. Chris’ schedule requires weight training at Bodyshapers, his local gym, three to four times per week and practice at chopping logs twice per week. The rigorous workout schedule is supplemental to his day job of purchasing logs for Blue Triangle Hardwoods in Everett, Pennsylvania.

Competition among lumberjacks is based on traditional logging skills. The hotsaw, bowsaw, cross cut saw, single buck, springboard chop, standing block chop, stock saw, and underhand chop are the events offered at major



Photo above: Custom-made hot saw.

Photos at left, top to bottom: Chris demonstrates the competitive chain saw procedure. The clock starts with the saw sitting on the ground (not running) and both hands on top of the 19" diameter log. At the sound of the bell he reaches down, pulls the cord to start the chain saw and makes his first cut. The 60 pound saw goes through the log in seconds; then Chris makes an up-cut and finally another down cut. All three cuts are within a 6" measure. In a flash three precise slices are completed.

competitions. Lumberjacks from around the world compete but most are from the United States, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. ESPN broadcasts (now shown on the Outdoor Channel) of the professional series sponsored by Stihl Timbersports draws 20 million viewers from 62 countries.

Lumberjacks often participate in local and regional events, but the highest level of competition is offered by Stihl Timbersports, a competitive series started in 1985 by the outdoor power equipment manufacturer. Event winners from five regions compete in the United States Championship, and national winners advance to the World Championship event held in Europe.

One of the most spectacular demonstrations of cutting wood is one Aesop's wood cutter would not recognize—an 80 horsepower motorcycle engine modified to the specifications of a woodcutter's chainsaw cutting through logs at unbelievable speeds. While there are different classes of hot saws, all competitors must hand wind a rope around the motor shaft and pull-start the motor. Competitors are timed for a process that requires the woodcutter to make three precise cuts within 6 inches on a 19 inch diameter log. The diameter of logs may vary depending on the event, but regardless of log size, the race takes less than seven seconds to complete. Handling the 60 pound chain saw and making precise cuts under

competitive pressures requires strength, stamina, and mental concentration.

Traditional hollow ground axes are also specially fashioned. Chris notes, “My axe is carefully ground in a certain pattern. The final edge is polished by hand. I do not sharpen my own axe because it is a specialized skill, and the difference between a good axe versus a bad axe means first to last place.” When competing with the axe, Chris strives to get one hit per second on the log.

Dedication to the sport has paid rewards for Chris as he continues to win awards including four championships in the two man cross cut during 2005, 2007, 2010, and 2011. Chris also won the underhand competition in 2011 at the Mountain State Forest Festival at Elkins, West Virginia.

Chris is quick to credit mentors for his success, particularly Arden Cogar Sr., a 55 time world champion and the “Father of Woodchopping in North America” and his son Arden Cogar Jr. (currently The U.S. Stihl Timbersport’s Champion), Melvin Lentz, the most decorated American axeman, and Paul and Bill Cogar (cousins to Arden Sr.) have also been supportive.

Competition and love of the sport is what drives Chris to maintain his practice and competition regimen. “I do this for the love of the sport and the people who go along with the sport. We are a close group and often travel long distances just to practice together. Money is not what drives us.”

Aesop would be proud!

For more information on locations of wood timbering events visit www.lumberjackplanet.com or www.stihl-timbersports.us/



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