



# DIESEL CREW

THE DIESEL CREW - LEADERS IN GRIP STRENGTH - ACHIEVING BEYOND POTENTIAL

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## **Exclusive Interview: Jim “Smitty” Smith**

I've been following the Diesel Crew guys for a few years, but it wasn't until the past year or so that I had the opportunity to start interacting with Jim “Smitty” Smith regularly. In the short time that I've known him, Smitty has really impressed me; he is without a doubt one of the most knowledgeable and innovative guys in the “biz.” The interview below is just a small sample of the tremendous amount Smitty has to offer; enjoy!

**EC: Okay, Smitty, I know quite a bit about you, but that's not to say that our readers can be sure that you're not a complete poser. Tell us about yourself.**

JS: I've been involved in strength training since 1995 and a strength coach since 2001. I have gotten a few certifications over the years, but have most of my knowledge from years of self study, competing in sports and strongman competitions.

I co-founded the Diesel Crew, along with Jedd Johnson, in late 2001 and have been developing the Diesel Method since then. We've been utilizing powerlifting, odd objects, kettlebells, weightlifting, and Grip strength protocols to build athletes to their greatest potential.

I believe we have a solid reputation for being innovators and hopefully provide strength coaches and fitness professionals with new ideas to improve their strength programs.

**EC: You're about as creative a person in this industry as I've met. You're like MacGyver; you could train a blind man with no arms and legs with just a book of matches, some Blue Heat, and a burrito. How did you get so creative? Do you sniff glue or something?**

JS: What have you heard? Let's not talk about college.

Seriously, when people first see our products, I am sure they say to themselves, “Damn, I would have never thought of that exercise.” I take a lot of pride in that.

When Jedd and I first started, we had no money and no equipment. All we had was a great desire to succeed. If we had an idea for an exercise, but we didn't have the equipment, we had to make it or improvise.

For instance, in the [EliteFTS Q&A Exercise Index](#), you'll see one unique way to train atlas stones right in a commercial gym *without* atlas stones and even a cool way to train farmer's walks *without* farmer's walk implements. These are just two quick examples.

But it is much more than being creative with equipment when you are poor.

If athletes or coaches are participating in or training with powerlifting components, they typically only use powerlifting techniques. If people are utilizing odd objects in their training, they also typically only use these techniques and exercises.

But, we saw great potential benefit trying to **combine** techniques from each protocol into one system. We called it the **Diesel Method**.

One example would be to take typical keg lifting (odd object) and perform beyond the range (powerlifting) bear hug good mornings. This BTR hip extension has huge carryover for gluteal firing and neutral lumbar stability endurance.

**EC: You and Jedd are the go-to guys when it comes to grip training. What are the most common mistakes you're seeing people make with their grip training?**

JS: Grip training is not only about getting your hands stronger; it is also about preventing imbalances, training specificity (General, General Specific) for your sport and finally learning how to channel the power generated by your body through your hands. The body works in integration and everything is connected. Grip is typically the weakest link in this coordinated kinetic chain. Strength programs focus on developing limit strength, rate of force development, power, speed, agility and so on – but we still must be able to express this strength through our hands to play any sport! That is why Grip strength is so important.

For example, if you're a boxer whose hands, wrists, and elbows are weak or beat up from tons of sparring, you are very quickly going to:

- become injured from impact – cannot provide adequate contraction of musculature
- become injured from too much tendon and soft tissue trauma - poor restoration
- become limited in your ability to generate a powerful punch – poor neural expression

To determine how to implement Grip protocols into your training, check the *Needs Analysis* for the sport and go from there.

**EC: I know you're got a pretty good corrective training background; have you been able to apply some of this grip work in that capacity to prevent/rehabilitate injuries to the elbows, forearms, and wrists?**

JS: Eric, you know we need to create balance in our movements. If we have balance in movements, improved soft-tissue quality, neural grooving of firing - then we'll have proper functioning. The same goes for Grip.

You used the example in your Sturdy Shoulder seminar of people who sit in flexion, type in flexion, watch TV in flexion, play video games in flexion all day long. These people **MUST** do extension, mobility, and soft tissue work.

Similarly, a comprehensive grip protocol would include; flexion (fingers, wrists), extension (fingers, wrists), supination, pronation (radial/ulnar), ulnar / radial deviation (wrist), internal / external rotation (humerus), adduction / abduction (fingers) – everything from the fingertips to the shoulders. Remember, everything is connected.

Now, once these movements, imbalances, and injuries have been addressed, we move to Level II, where we start to learn how to express power through the hands. That is where irradiation or co-contraction comes into play.

The lower arm musculature is part of the whole kinetic chain. You'll immediately see this when you move into finger into extension against a rubber band or sand (bucket), and the musculature that crosses your elbow contracts. Why is that? Because we know that if a muscle crosses a joint it affects that joint. That is why when you clench your fist as hard as you can, your forearm, biceps, triceps, deltoid, and lat contract as well. That is how the kinetic chain works, and we can utilize this to our benefit in our training.

### **EC: Let's talk about the Jim Smith library. What are your top five resources?**

JS:

1. All the standards:

-[Essentials of Strength and Conditioning](#), by Baechle and Earle

-[Supertraining](#), by Siff

-[Science and Practice of Strength Training: 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.](#), by Zatsiorsky and Kraemer

-[Designing Resistance Training Programs](#), by Kraemer and Fleck

2. [The Ultimate Off-Season Training Manual](#), by Cressey

3. [Starting Strength](#), by Ripplettoe and Kilgore

4. [Afterburn I & II](#), by Cosgrove

5. James Smith's [Manuals](#)

6. [The Coach's Strength Training Playbook](#), by Kenn

7. Chu's [Plyometric books](#)

The list goes on and on. Some I reread regularly, some I use as a reference.

I would recommend that your subscribers also do the following:

1. Print out articles and categorize them by topic: nutrition, periodization, sport, protocol, etc. Now, take these articles and get a bunch of 3-ring binders and create a binder for each category.

2. Make a goal for yourself that each day you will: read one article, read one blog post, add one article to your binder(s), email someone on a question you have, start or create an article yourself.

3. With the idea of always trying to improve yourself, attend every seminar, clinic,

and/or conference you can. I've spent thousands this year in the never-ending pursuit of knowledge.

**EC: Back when you interviewed me in June, you played the rapid-fire game with me. Now, it's my chance to turn the tables on you. First thing that comes to mind when I say the following:**



I dropped the loading pin curls on you at the *Sturdy Shoulder* seminar,

Here's another one, though.

### **Kettlebell Radial Deviations**



*This is excerpted from my *Advanced Kettlebell Techniques I* e-book.*

**The neutral hand position and thick grip makes this one a great finisher –**

**and gives you another option for your kettlebells.**

**AJ Roberts' snoring habits:**

Imagine this. Set up a bed in the forest at the base of a giant Redwood. Now, get rolling into a deep REM. Next, have some lumberjack start cutting down that same tree that you are sleeping under with one of those 10-foot chainsaws, right next to your head. Next, imagine that whole set-up inside of a closed 15'x15' room. Next, put that sound coming out of a hole approximately 3" in diameter (as you can imagine, the sound would be amplified.)

The funny part is actually me making bird calls and yelping noises trying to wake him up.

**Mike Robertson:**

One of the nicest guys out there. I really appreciate his thoughtfulness toward others. I also think that he has yet to show his true potential. I can't wait to see him provide the industry with more great products in 2007.

**Todd Hamer:**

Hilarious

**EC: You've got a new manual: "Building the Ultimate MMA Athlete." Fill us in a bit on it.**

JS: I've been a huge MMA for years and coming from a wrestling background, I have been formulating ideas for years to put in this manual, specifically training the functional movement patterns for combat athletics. It started as a small project and ended up being an eight-month project ending with a 300-page manual.

I have gotten an overwhelmingly great response to the book because it is not your standard deadlifts, pull-ups, and cleans type of manual. Of course, those exercises form the foundation of the program and are in there, but I wanted to go above and beyond that standard school of thought. I used every implement known to man and took the three functional positions; Standing/Clinch, the Guard, and the Mount, and built the programs and exercises around them.

My next manual, *Chaos Training*, is also going to open a lot of eyes and minds on what "functional" training really is.

**EC: Cool stuff; thanks a ton for taking the time, Smitty. How can our readers contact you?**

JS: The best bet is to go through our websites;

[www.DieselCrew.com](http://www.DieselCrew.com)

[www.TheGripAuthority.com](http://www.TheGripAuthority.com)

Email: [james.smith@dieselcrew.com](mailto:james.smith@dieselcrew.com)

Thanks Eric!

Until next week, train hard and have fun!

All the Best,

Eric Cressey – [EricCressey.com](http://EricCressey.com)