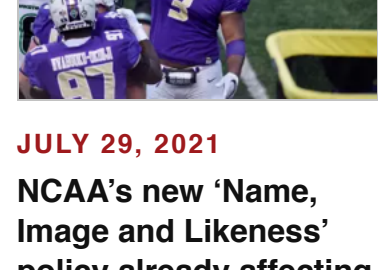


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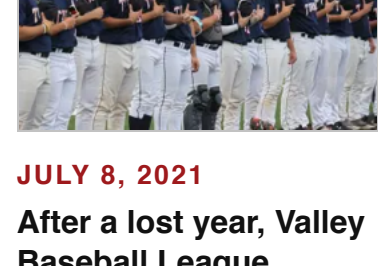
## The Iron Kings go mano a mano

By Mike Tripp, Contributor  
Posted in Sports

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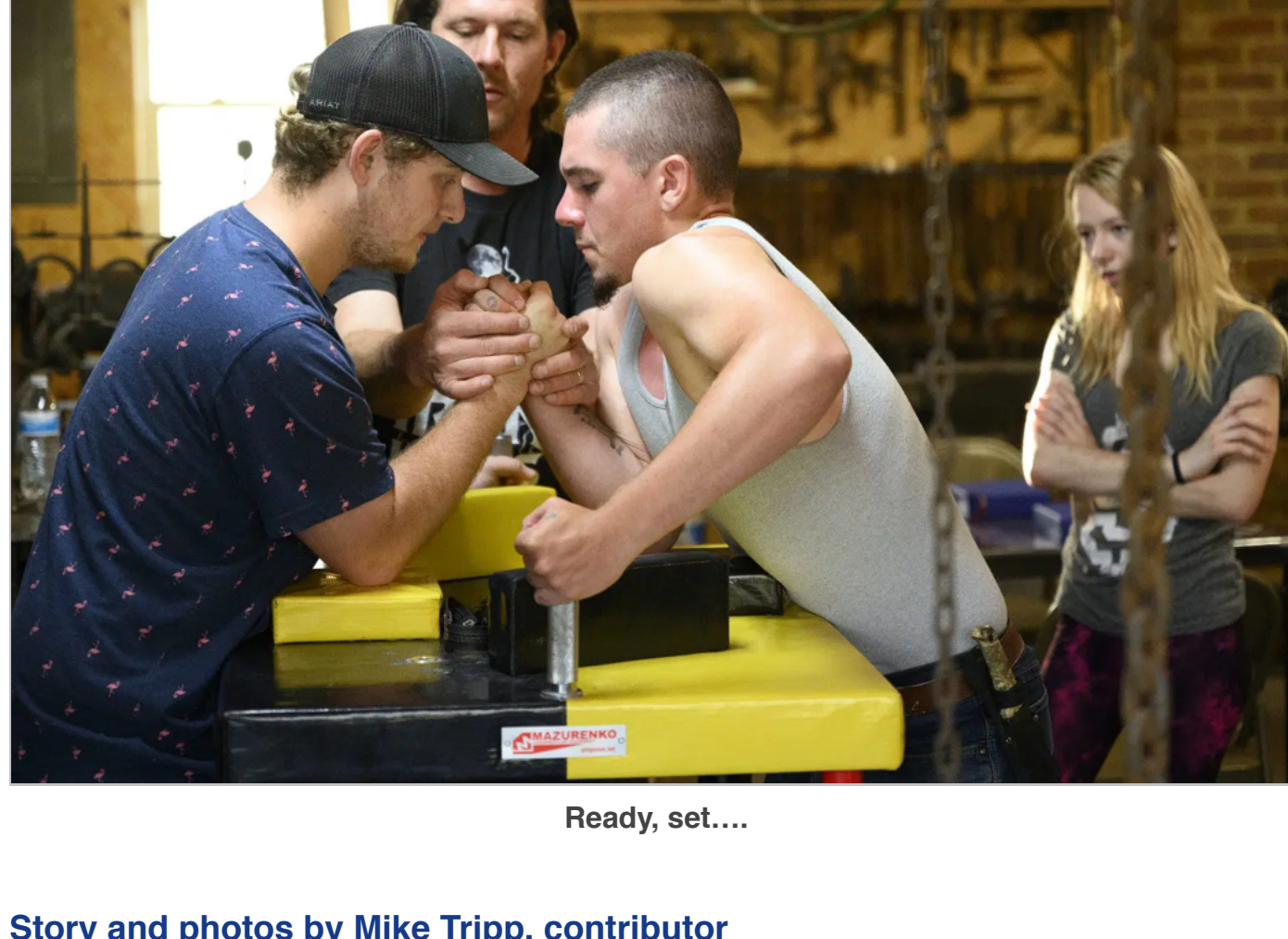
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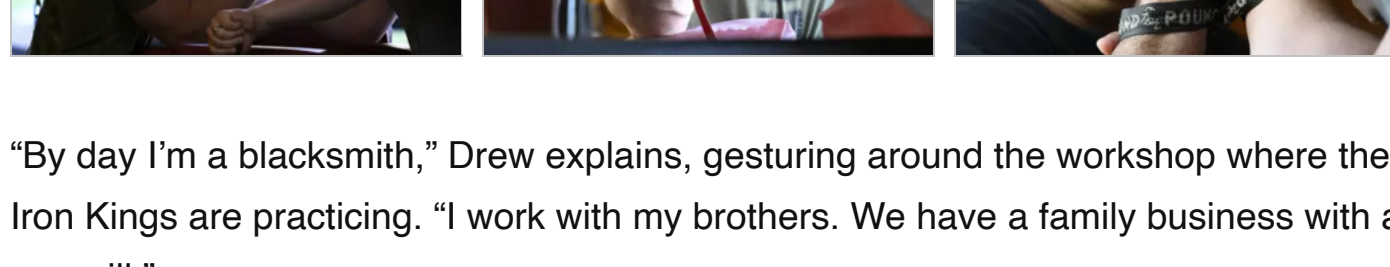
Ready, set....

Story and photos by Mike Tripp, contributor

Facing off on opposite sides of a specially designed table, Landon Smith, of Timberville, and Marvin Byler, of New Market, await Drew Alexander's signal. After checking their hand position and grip, Alexander gives the word. Game on.

Smith and Byler strain against each other, each trying to force the other's arm down to the dreaded touch pad that would signal defeat.

Standing back, Drew observes the pair and offers advice on technique when needed.



"By day I'm a blacksmith," Drew explains, gesturing around the workshop where the Iron Kings are practicing. "I work with my brothers. We have a family business with a sawmill."

After hours, this is his passion.

"I heard about some guys practicing in Grottoes and thought I'd check it out, he says. "And haven't stopped since."

That was April two years ago. Since that October, the group has been practicing several times a month.



Drew Alexander founded the club, which practices in his blacksmith workshop in Broadway



Dixie Ritchie eyes her grip as Drew Alexander explains some strategy and technique.



Gary Brown (left) vs. Kurt Allen

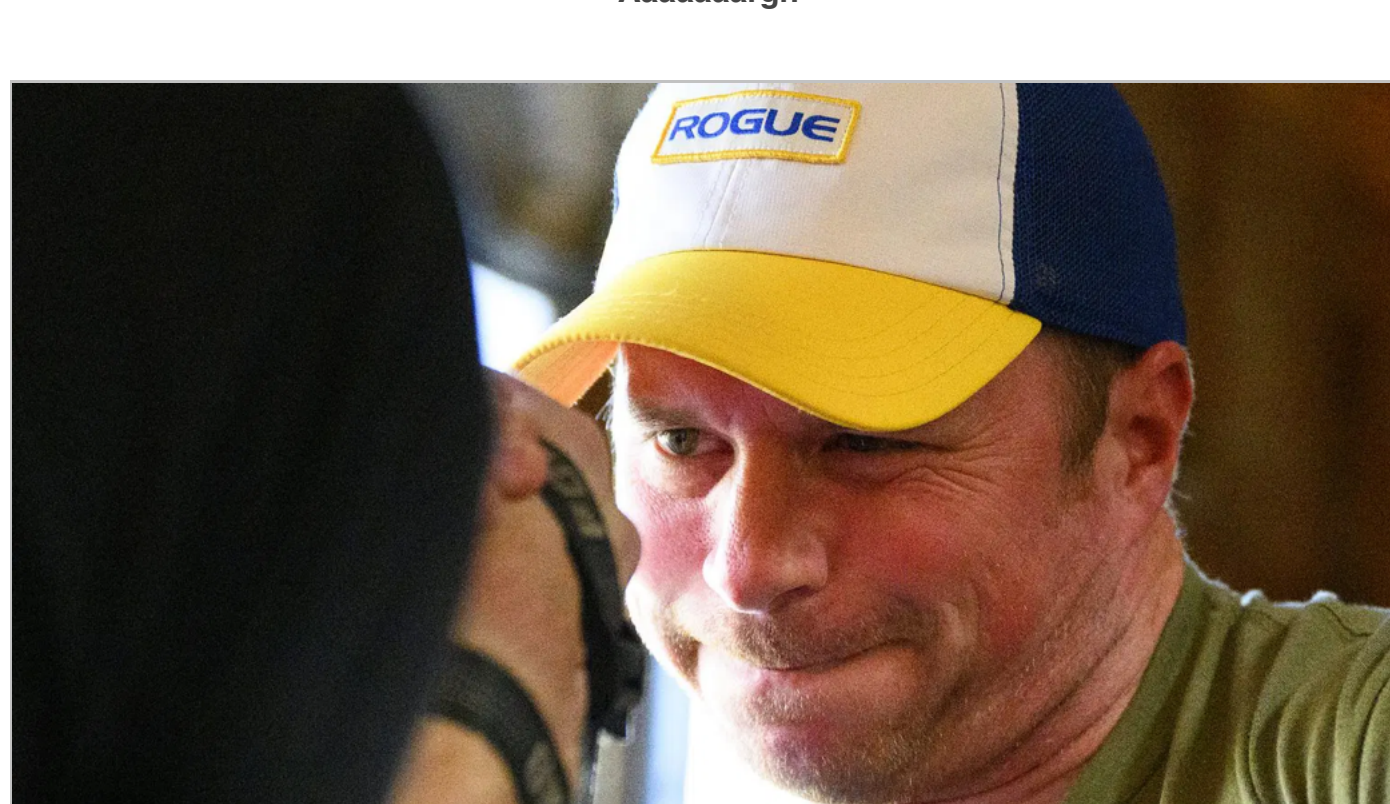
"We try to hit up as many tournaments on the East Coast as we can," Alexander says. "I'll go to Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, New Jersey, Virginia Beach. ... Most of the tournaments are held in Pennsylvania."

Today, nine people occupy the room, spread among the three arm wrestling tables in the shop. Club membership now stands at 24; a few times a year, other clubs make the trek to the Broadway workshop for a "big practice."

"I think we've had as many as 40 guys here at once," Alexander adds.



Aaaaaaargh



Urrrrrrrrgh



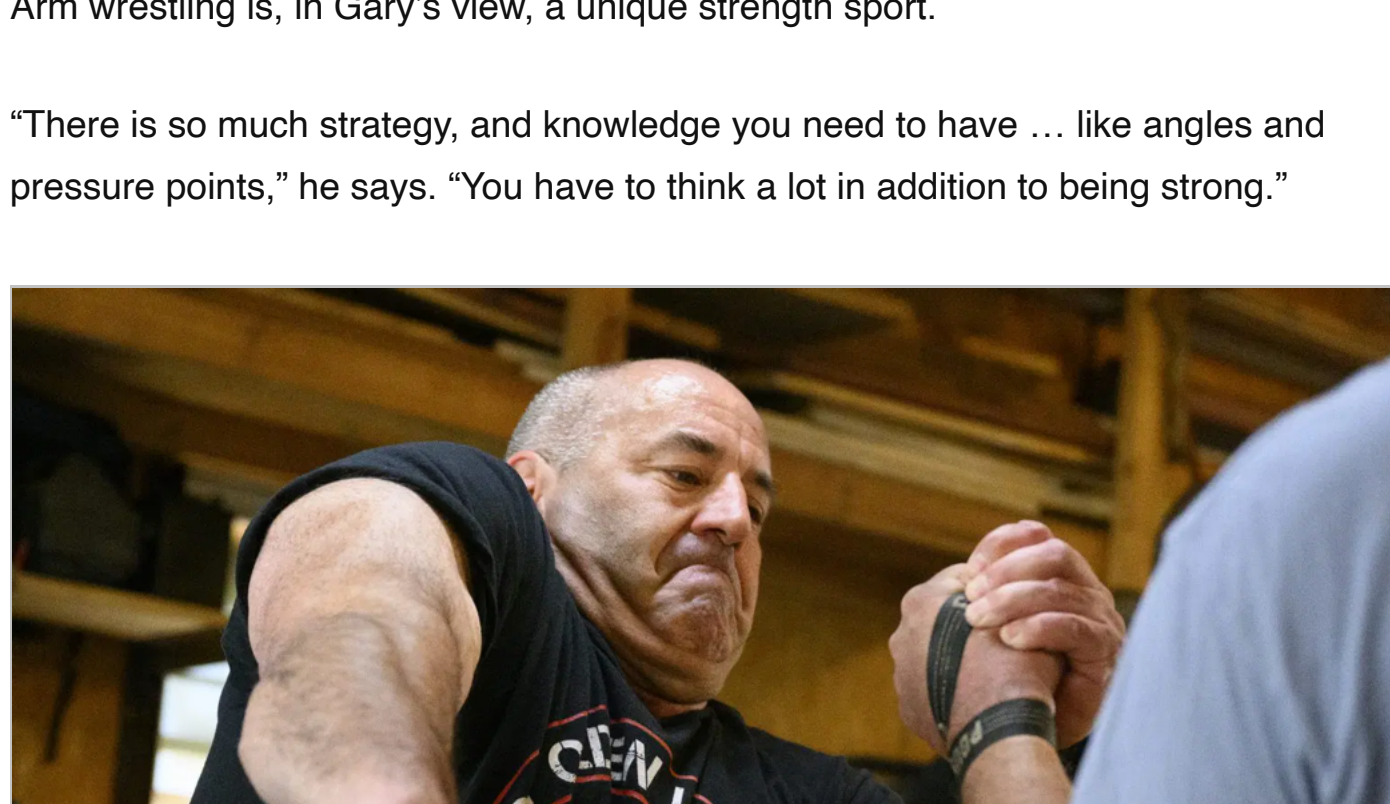
Shhhhhhhhhhhrrgh

Stepping back from a table, massaging a tired arm, Gary Brown of Shenandoah says he used to practice in Northern Virginia, until the two-hour drive became too much.

"Then when I found out about this local club, I started arm wrestling again about a year ago," he says. "I love the competition. I love measuring my growth in the sport by how I do at tournaments."

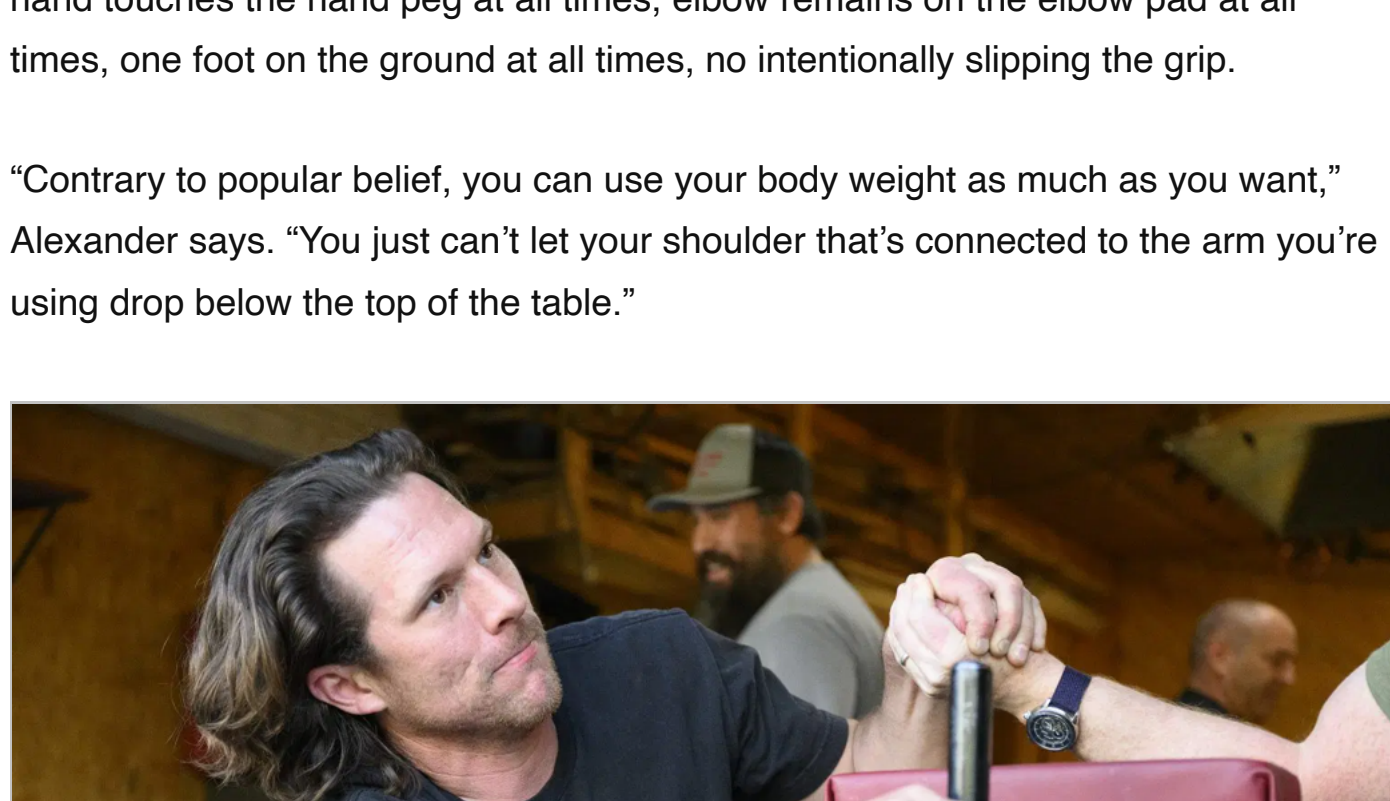
Arm wrestling is, in Gary's view, a unique strength sport.

"There is so much strategy, and knowledge you need to have ... like angles and pressure points," he says. "You have to think a lot in addition to being strong."



Rules can vary by league or tournament, some similarities generally apply: one hand touches the hand peg at all times, elbow remains on the elbow pad at all times, one foot on the ground at all times, no intentionally slipping the grip.

"Alexandry says. "You just can't let your shoulder that's connected to the arm you're using drop below the top of the table."



A legal use of body weight and leverage, with the business shoulder above the table and contact with the hand peg maintained.

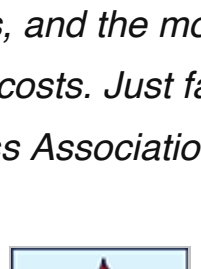
Also forbidden: touching the back of your hand with your shoulder or pushing with your shoulder.

A basic match is usually a one-off or best of five affair. Bracket-style tournaments involve one-off bouts. "You win or you lose," Alexander says.

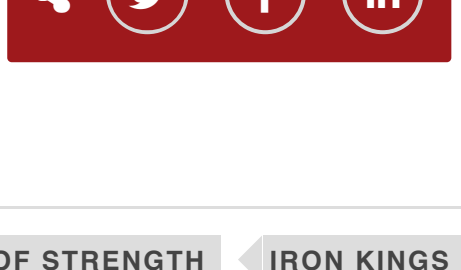
Then there are super matches, for which competitors may prepare for weeks or months to face a particular opponent.

Anyone interested in practicing with the Iron Kings can email Drew Alexander at [drewtimothyalexander@gmail.com](mailto:drewtimothyalexander@gmail.com).

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**Mike Tripp, Contributor**

Mike Tripp is a freelance reporter based in Staunton. He has worked as a photojournalist in the Shenandoah Valley for more than 25 years. Starting as a freelance photographer with the News Gazette in Lexington, Tripp's first staff position was with the Staunton News Leader back in the '90s. He later worked as a photographer with the Daily News-Record in Harrisonburg before moving back to the News Leader where he was Chief of Photography and Multimedia for more than 15 years. In 2019, he struck out on his own and started his own business, Mike Tripp Media LLC, which specializes in the art of storytelling through images and multimedia. Tripp is a huge fan of Star Trek and science fiction, and he's something of a history nut. He "commands" the U.S.S. Maelstrom — a local chapter of an international Star Trek club named Fleet 31.

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