Bert Assirati, one of history’s greatest strength athletes and wrestlers died of cancer of the bladder on August 31, 1990 at eight o’clock in the evening. So passed a unique man, perhaps the greatest example of the old-time strongman/mat artists of this century.

I knew Bert for more than 50 years. He taught me to wrestle the hard way, breaking my nose in the process. Bert was also a fine tumbler and hand balancer, and one of the top professional wrestlers in the game. Standing about 5’7” and weighing as much as 250 pounds, Bert could turn a back flip with ease. In fact, it was his trademark after a match—which he always won—to do a back flip.

I first met Bert at the gym attached to the old Boxing and Wrestling arena—the “Ring”—in the Blackfriars Road in London, England. At that time Bert’s arms measured a full 18 inches, and this was when 16 was considered big. It was in the early thirties, when El Said Noseir, the Egyptian heavyweight, held sway with a world record clean and jerk of 363, a weight Bert was said to have exceeded. At a time when the British record in the straight arm pullover was held by Alan P. Mead at 140 pounds, Bert did a straight arm pullover of 200 with ease. He could curl 200 pounds and squat for reps with 550 when a 400 pound squat was regarded as extraordinary. He also did a single-legged squat with 200 pounds.

When he saw I needed extra bodyweight to be able to wrestle more successfully, he sent me to his cousin, Joe Assirati, under whose tutelage I soon gained from 165 to 190. My meeting with Joe was a happy one for, in addition to gaining a teacher, I gained a lifelong friend and brother.

Bert was sui generis—one of a kind—and we won’t see his like again.

Goodbye, Bert.

[Ed. note: Goodbye, Charles.]