



The Great Denmark Cookie Caper

By Royce Alger

If someone had told me that I would be writing for a national wrestling magazine about a cookie, of all things, I would say they were crazy! Well, if my life has proven anything to me, nothing is out of bounds for the ol' Royce man. I have told this story many times and never been denied a favorable response.

The story begins in an airport in New York. Terry Brands and I were to attend a major tournament in the newly divided Soviet Union. This particular trip in 1994 was no different than any other Soviet excursion. We all knew that the facilities at the tournament site would be less than conducive for weight cutting. I think the Soviets secretly like to keep their facilities cold, dark, and dank for us visiting Americans. You see, the Russians seldom cut weight for their expectant weight classes. The Americans always pull an average of five to ten pounds more than any other country. I didn't just come up with that number arbitrarily; it was conducted after many a weigh-in on the international circuit. Not to say they don't suck weight, it's just been my contention that they don't pull out the ol' plastics like our American fellas. I will say one thing for our Soviet counter parts. The ol' adage of hotter than a Russian sauna is not just a figure of speech. Their saunas are very hot and for the most part twice as big. I have talked to Dan Gable many times about my Russian sauna experiences. You see, Gable is a saunaholic. He uses saunas for medicinal reasons and also, as weird as it might sound, leisure. Many times I have talked to him after an appointed trip. He would always comment on the saunas and facilities of the host site. He would lament on how some saunas would come equipped with tea leaves and freezing stone baths. You see, a lot of times the Russians would immerse themselves in a freezing pool of water, and then climb into the top tier of a blazing sauna. A lot of the Russian saunas would have four or five levels. Only the real twisted guys would be able to sit on the top level and pat themselves with the

leaves. As we all know, heat rises. I have literally scalded my eyeballs in some of these forbiddable rooms. The tough part is that outside the sauna, it was freezing because they always kept the buildings somewhat cold. I would start my sweat going in the sauna, then when I couldn't stand it, go jump rope in a frigid locker or wrestling room. It was a vicious cycle!

Well anyway, we boarded the plane in New York en route for Moscow. Terry and I were sucking a considerable amount of weight. (Both about twelve pounds over.) We had a brief stop in Copenhagen, Denmark, before the final trek behind the defunked Iron Curtain. Copenhagen was our last westernized stop before our emersion in the less than comfortable eastern swing. At any rate, Terry bought a package of chocolate covered graham cookies at one of the duty free stops. They were sensibly priced. I think he probably paid as much as he would spend on a dinner out with his entire family. But hey! When you know your next stop is Moscow, money is not an object. The story unravels in a Denmark airport. Let me present the players. Terry Brands, myself, and an auspicious gentleman garbed in a tattered jean jacket, mopy hair, and chrome sunglasses. The kind of guy you would see carrying a "Free Love" sign. (The granola type guy.) I was lying on the floor listening to a country mix tape. Terry was sitting next to a little table. He had placed his package of cookies on the table and was ingulfing himself in a European version of *USA Today*. No doubt, reading news from the past week. Across from Terry sat Mr. Granola. After several minutes, the gentleman leaned forward and opened the package. He carefully pulled a cookie from the package and ate it, needless to say: Game on!

Terry Brands looked up and slowly leaned forward to ascertain the facts. I could see the steam slowly streaming out of his ears. He leaned forward and grabbed two of the cookies. He then sat back and pulled the newspaper up to conceal his anguish. It was then when things got even

more interesting. Mr. "Free Love" leaned forward and grabbed two cookies. After a short pause, Terry indignantly leaned forward and grabbed a couple. He then pulled the newspaper back up. Well, you guessed it. This stranger repeated his former action. They traded cookies until there was one lone cookie. I often described that this banter was not unlike watching the dueling banjo scene from the movie "Deliverance", except these guys had teeth! Just when I thought I had seen it all! Mr. Granola leaned forward, broke the cookie in half, and popped it in his mouth as he walked away. When the man was out of sight, time started again. Terry emitted a three-minute emotional dissertation on how people of the civilized world had lost it. We laughed, screamed, and both concurred people were most certainly losing their grip on reality.

After I calmed Terry down we headed for our assigned gate. It was all I could do to try and talk him out of finding this guy and giving him an ol' Iowa butt kicking. The line to the plane seemed to take for ever. When it came our time to present our tickets and passports, things got even more interesting. When Terry reached into his backpack to present his ticket, he found more than he bargained for. You see, Terry pulled out a freshly bought, unwrapped package of chocolate covered cookies. It was that day that my perception of events will be forever altered. That dude shared his entire package of cookies with Terry and didn't squirm a bit. The dude even broke one in half!

The trip was not exactly a success. Terry and I both went 5-1 in the tourney. He placed 2nd and I 3rd. But I'm here to tell you that incident made my trip an eventful one. It also altered my perception of mankind. If life has taught me anything, it's that there are many good people out there. Maybe we should all split a package of cookies with complete strangers. Maybe we all need to take a good introspective look at ourselves.

I am Royce Alger and I am out of here.

