

By Katherine Reasons-Pyles

Photos courtesy of the
STIHL® TIMBERSPORTS® Series



The STRENGTH Within

Tests of strength in the courtroom and in the forest are all in a day's work for West Virginia attorney and internationally recognized woodsman Arden J. Cogar Jr.

Arden Cogar Jr. has been a civil defense trial attorney with MacCorkle, Lavender, Casey & Sweeney PLLC in Charleston for more than 10 years. He has conducted several hundred depositions and focuses his practice in the areas of products liability, insurance defense and general commercial litigation. He is admitted to practice law in all West Virginia state courts, as well as U.S. district courts for the Northern and Southern Districts of West Virginia.

But that's not how most people recognize him.

Recognizing Arden Cogar usually means catching him on ESPN, wielding a heavy saw and participating in lumberjack competitions all over the world. The internationally recognized powerhouse has been competing in lumberjack sports for the past 32 years.

"I ran my first chainsaw in competition at the age of 8," Cogar said, "but woodchopping was a part of my life even before I was born. My family has been involved in logging and various facets of lumberjack sports for four generations now."

Cogar grew up in Webster Springs, where the Webster County Woodchopping Festival has been a part of the town's history for almost 50 years. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather – and several other extended family members – were woodsmen both professionally and recreationally. Cogar's father is a multiple-time world champion lumberjack, and at 60 years old he was named a finalist of the STIHL® TIMBERSPORTS® Series, the competition shown annually in 62 countries around the world.

It all began for Cogar at 4 years old, when he started carrying wood for his father's firewood business.

"My dad told me, 'If you want to come to work with me, you're going to work. You're not going to play.' So, I worked," Cogar said. "People always wonder how I got such a strong back – well, that's how. My father worked me when I was boy."

Throughout his teen years, Cogar continued helping his father and relatives in the lumber industry and competing in area woodchopping competitions. For the Cogar family, woodchopping is more than a



Arden Cogar Jr. began participating in the STIHL® TIMBERSPORTS® Series at the age of 17 and today is the captain of STIHL's United States National Lumberjack Team. In the above photo, he is shown competing in the single buck contest, in which competitors must make a single cut through 19 inches of white pine using a single man cross-cut saw.

livelihood. It's also a source of fun, entertainment and friendly competition.

"It's really a bonding thing," Cogar said, noting that more than 20 members of the Cogar family are currently participating in lumberjack sports of some kind. "Anytime that we had a Cogar family reunion, we always brought out the axes and saws. That's just what the Cogars do."

At the age of 17, Cogar started competing in the STIHL® TIMBERSPORTS® Series. He continues to compete in the series today and has been named a finalist 14 times. Last year, he was named the U.S. champion, placing 6th at the 2011 World Championship held in Holland, and he is currently recognized as North America's top-ranked lumberjack sports competitor. Cogar has received numerous other accolades: he is a multi-time Carhartt Chopping Champion, the 2006 Standing Block World Champion, the captain of STIHL's United States National Lumberjack Team and winner of 45 individual world titles, including the 2007 All-Around World Title at the Webster County Woodchopping Festival.

Clearly, lumberjack sports came naturally to Cogar. However, his decision to practice law came about more gradually. His first inspiration came when he witnessed an abuse of the justice system as a young boy.

"When I was about 5, my father was training for the world championships, and I was at work with him during the summer," Cogar recalled. "He had a little chopping stand nearby that he'd use to train for the championships while the dozer was out. A conservation officer came up and started talking to Dad, and he told him he wanted to watch him cut one of the logs. In the process, a chip flew into a nearby stream, and when my dad got through sawing the conservation officer handed him a \$500 ticket for polluting the stream. It really angered my father. He hired a lawyer, and he always said he paid \$2,500 to beat a \$500 ticket. That's what inspired me to become a lawyer. I just thought that whole incident was wrong."

Part of Cogar's success in lumberjack sports lies in the fact that once he puts his mind to something, he tends to find a way to make it happen. Hard work and perseverance were engrained in him early on,

and as he embarked on a legal career, he brought with him the numerous lessons in strength that he learned from his father in the woods. Cogar graduated summa cum laude from WVU with two bachelor's degrees, and the following year he graduated magna cum laude with an M.B.A., also from WVU. He earned his J.D. from the WVU College of Law in 1997. Now a member attorney at MacCorkle, Lavender, Casey & Sweeney, Cogar said his continued dedication to lumberjack sports has benefited his practice – and not just as an interesting conversation-starter in the courtroom.

“You know, I look more like a bouncer than I do a lawyer,” Cogar laughed. “When people see me in the courtroom, they think, ‘There’s got to be something this guy’s doing on the weekends. Something is keeping him pushing the waistline on those pants.’ So I’d say people in the legal field are not as surprised to find out that I’m a lumberjack as people in the timber-sports world are when they find out I’m a lawyer.”

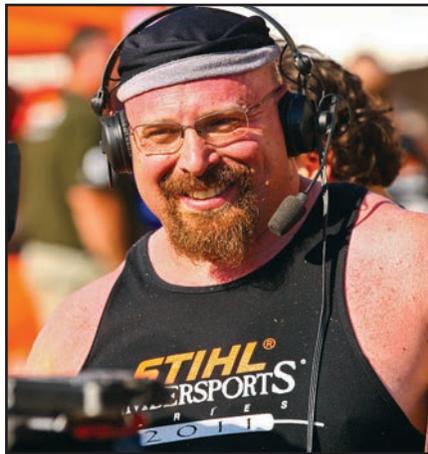
Cogar said the way the worlds truly collide, however, is on a much more personal level, when he is preparing for either a competition or a case.

“I approach them both the same,” he said. “What am I going to do to get myself ready? How much time, energy and effort will I need to contribute? I figure out what has to be done to meet that ultimate goal, whether it’s trying a specific case or competing in a contest.”

According to Cogar, maintaining both profession and passion is extremely important.

“Being an attorney can be very stressful mentally,” Cogar said. “For me, if I don’t get a couple of hours of physical activity a day, I get really cranky. And after 10 or 12 hours of writing and arguing, there’s nothing better than hitting something that can’t hit me back. It allows me to go to sleep at night with a clear mind.”

He said lawyers, especially those just starting their careers, should also have something outside of the office that keeps them grounded. Of course, not everyone’s out-of-office activity will involve the



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hot saw, single buck, springboard chop, standing block chop, stock saw and underhand chop.

“Being well-rounded has a direct impact on how you’re able to present a case, and at the end of the day there’s more to life than your profession,” Cogar said. “Plus, it gets you out amongst the people who could be your potential jurors.”

In spite of having one day job as a lawyer and another as a competing woodsman, Cogar still finds time to give back to his community, including giving woodchopping demonstrations to area children.

“Arden has done several woodchopping exhibitions for the Cub Scout and Boy Scout troops I work with, just at my request,” said State Bar Executive Director Anita Casey, a 15-year Scouting volunteer. “He’s a great guy and is wonderful with kids. During his

exhibitions, he emphasizes the need to stay in school and work hard, both physically and academically. When thinking about the many interesting lawyers throughout our state who should be in the spotlight, who better to spotlight than someone who is an inspiration to both adults and children?”

Cogar enjoys spending time with his wife Kristy and daughters Kiara and Carmen, all of whom are active in timber sports. Kristy is a member of the United States National Lumberjill Team and won a world title after just four years of competing, and Cogar loves any opportunity to celebrate the achievements of his daughters. Cogar may not be humble in stature – but he certainly is in spirit.

“My proudest moments have all come with the milestones achieved by my daughters and my wife,” Cogar said. “Truly, all of my efforts and accolades pale in comparison to the things they and others have been able to accomplish.” **WVU**

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