

RECORD-BREAKING GYM KING SHOWS HE'S STILL UP FOR A CHALLENGE

FIGHTING FIT: Brian still looks good at 73. Now he's trying to inspire kids

The Big Dipper



THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW



BRIAN JACKS SUPERSTARS MEGASTAR

IT may sound a bit disrespectful of me, asking a 73-year-old man how many arm dips he can do in 60 seconds.

Especially considering he's got a dodgy back and an imminent appointment with a heart surgeon.

But Brian Jacks doesn't mind a bit. He's been known to pump out more than 100, albeit 40-odd years ago.

"If you wanted me to, I could get back up and do a decent number," he assures me. "I'd just need a couple of weeks to train for it."

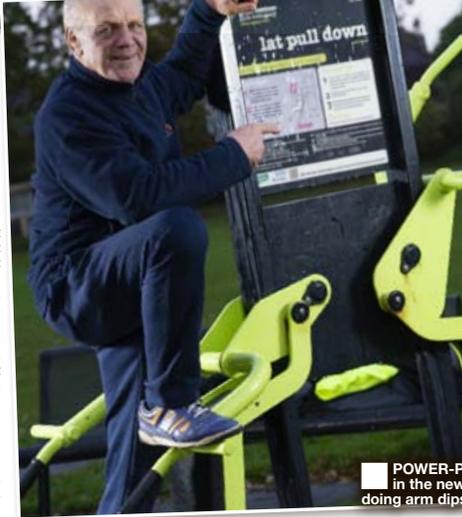
It was back in the early 80s that East Ender Brian, a multiple-medal-winner in the judo world but still not a big name beyond it, wowed millions of TV viewers with that record-smashing feat.

Mobbed

This was on BBC One's sports challenge Superstars, one of the top rating shows of the time, where star athletes had to prove themselves as all-rounders.

Competing alongside household names of that era, such as football legend Kevin Keegan, boxing hero John Conteh and F1 maverick James Hunt, Brian had joined the show as a relative unknown.

But that was to change in next to no time. "I remember stopping off at a McDonald's one evening, about an hour after my first appearance on the show had gone out, and I more or less



POWER-PACKED: Brian with equipment in the new zone for youngsters and, right, doing arm dips on the BBC show Superstars

got mobbed in there. Beforehand, hardly anyone had known who I was.

"Nine months later I was coming equal first with Kevin Keegan for Sportsman Of The Year on Noel Edmonds' Swap Shop."

Brian's big wish these days is to inspire others, especially schoolkids, maybe not to become national superstars themselves ("I used to get people turning up on my doorstep at 6 o'clock in the morning, wanting to take pictures. I had to hop over my garden fence.") but at least to get a buzz out of tackling physical challenges.

Next year's UK Martial Arts Show, taking place in Doncaster on May 2

and 3, will include its own Brian Jacks Zone, where children can turn up and test their own grit and stamina - not just with arm dips but squat thrusts, push-ups, sit-ups, you name it.

Other big names from the Superstars days are also expected to drop by. So is Brian Blessed. Yes, seriously. The two Brians have been pals for decades, ever since the actor enrolled as a beginner at a London judo club.

If Brian Jacks has his way, this idea of his could ultimately go nationwide.

He's worried there's no longer enough competition in school sports ("It's gone a bit soft. They don't even

want you winning any more, do they..?") and he's keen to do his bit to change that.

"I'd like to put this out to schools all over Britain, get the kids interested in doing these challenges and raising money for charity.

"I'd also love to get them interested in self-defence judo-type courses. Learning judo could help stop some of this terrible knife crime."

For Brian, it seems all roads ultimately lead back to judo, a sport to which his dad Albert, a London cabbie, introduced him.

"He'd taken it up to lose weight and for self-defence," Brian recalls. "But he'd actually done it on the quiet. By

the time I found out, he was already a brown belt!" Years later, it was also Albert who spurred Brian on to break that Superstars dips record - by setting him a daily training goal of 400 a day. That, plus 400 squat thrusts.

"I couldn't believe he was serious," chuckles Brian.

"I'd never even done one! But eventually I thought: 'F*** you', - excuse my language - but if you don't think I can do it, I'm going to prove you wrong.

"He always had that knack about him, my dad - that brilliant way of motivating me. I was very lucky."

● **To learn more about the UK Martial Arts Show, go to theukmas.co.uk**

Picture: HUMPHREY NEMAR