

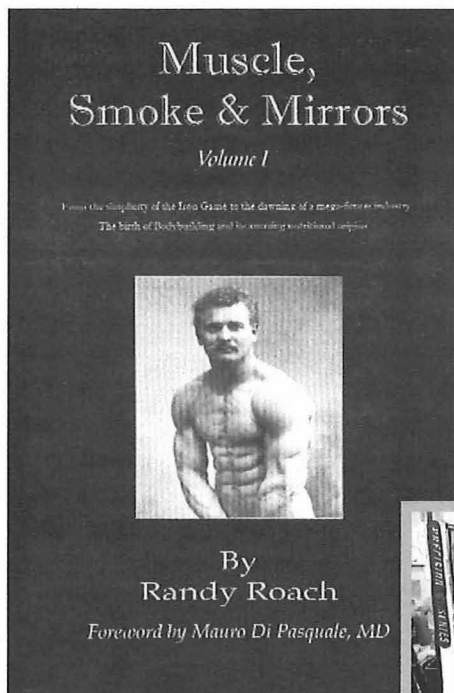
Randy Roach

Muscle, Smoke & Mirrors, Vol. 1

(Bloomington, Indiana, AuthorHouse, 2008), pp. 527.

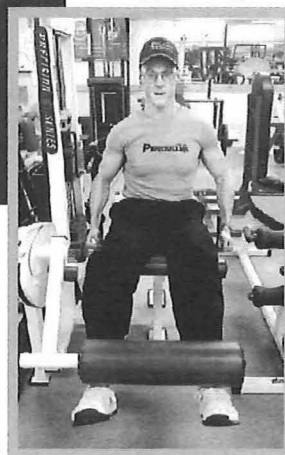
Book review by John Fair
Georgia College and State University

Randy Roach has written a remarkable book that provides a new dimension to our understanding of the history of physical culture by focusing on nutrition. Though it sprang to life outside of normal academic channels, *Muscle, Smoke & Mirrors* (in 527 pages and notes) exhibits some of the most important qualities of scholarship—extensive research, comprehensive coverage, ample contextualization, and sound judgments. It is also intelligently written with an engaging conversational tone. Most amazingly, this account was generated despite the almost total loss of the author's eyesight. How he was able to do it owes much to the assistance of a sympathetic editor and some close associates. The account also draws largely on the previous research endeavors of a considerable cadre of physical culture scholars, all of whom Randy graciously acknowledges throughout the text. But by far the most important ingredient to this Iron Game *tour de force* is the author's passion for the subject. It strongly reminds one of other selfless iron game enterprises over the years, most notably Osmo Kiiha's *Iron Master*, Denis Reno's *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, and the late Gary Cleveland's *Avian Movement Advocate*—as coming straight from the heart.



***Muscle, Smoke and Mirrors*, according to John Fair, is “a remarkable book,” written by an even more remarkable man. The author, Randy Roach, shown training at right, lost his vision about midway through the project.**

In seeking to explain the development of modern bodybuilding, Roach shows how it evolved from an emphasis on “health, inner balance, and harmony” in ancient times to the “win at all cost” agenda that emerged by the late twentieth century (p. 6). Such familiar Iron Game icons as Hippolyte Triat, Eugen Sandow, Professor Attila (Louis Durlacher), and Bernarr Macfadden figure prominently in the early portions of this story. Even at this stage, however, the author displays a preference for pioneers, underdogs, and unsung heroes of the game—the “die-hards” of “decades past” who “trudged for miles to remote, dingy, and often hard-to-find gyms” (p. xiii), for homeopathic over allopathic medicine, and for practitioners who displayed integrity rather than avarice. Few current bodybuilders have heard of Weston Price or Francis Pottenger or the amazing Hunza of Northern India, “a people unsurpassed in physique, endurance, health, and athletic ability” (p. 60),



but they are voices from the past whose ideas are no less relevant to the construction of our current views on nutrition. The story Roach reveals, from the simplicity of the Greeks to the advent of the mega-fitness industry, is full of fits and starts and “smoke and mirrors,” but the author remains hopeful that eventually some of the more destructive behaviors in the sport, which in some cases

are deep and systemic, will eventually be eradicated.

A notable feature of this account is the attention paid to dietary regimens and their relation to the development strategies of successive physical culturists. Roach distinguishes between the Heavy Protein Fat (HPF) model utilized by many early strongmen and the Lacto-Vegetarian (LV) template applied by Macfadden and the Hunza. So for their daily breakfast the three relatively normal-sized but powerful Saxon brothers reportedly consumed 24 eggs, 3 pounds of bacon, porridge with cream and honey, and tea with plenty of sugar, while a generation later the slim and shapely Tony Sansone moderated the HPF model by having just fresh fruit, a serving of whole grain cereal with cream and sugar, 2 eggs, 2 pieces of whole grain buttered toast, and a glass of milk. Armand Tanny never followed a set meal plan, but included raw fish, meat, clams, nuts, and vegetables, to which he attributed the major physique titles that he won in the late 1940s and early 1950s. When I interviewed him in 2005, Tanny was still experimenting with raw chicken! John Grimek, arguably the greatest bodybuilder of the twentieth century, had no special diet and allegedly ate anything his wife Angela placed in front of him. Dubbed by Angela as the "hog," John could not only consume large quantities of food while remaining trim and muscular but could drastically alter his bodyweight at will. Roach could also note Rick Wayne's observation that three-time Mr. Olympia Sergio Oliva, one of the strongest and most muscular bodybuilders of all time, was notorious for "his penchant for pizza and Coke" (*Muscle Wars*, p. 226), leading one to speculate on the relative importance of genetics vis-a-vis nutrition.

Another *leitmotif* is food supplements, especially milk which, as "nature's most perfect food," receives 99 index entries in 24 categories (from alpha-lactalbumin to whey), more than either Bob Hoffman or the Weider brothers. Roach cites the cow as "the bodybuilder's best friend," noting that "this domesticated and docile animal has contributed everything from beef, blood, glands, milk, kefir, whey, yogurt, cheese, buttermilk, butter, ghee, cream, colostrums, milk protein powders, and even leather lifting straps, gloves, and belts" (p. 178). Roach devotes much attention to the virtues of raw milk and the pioneering efforts of nutritionist Irvin Johnson (Rheo Blair). The depth of this coverage is most evident in his discussion of the development in 1966 of

Mother's Milk, a non-commercial protein blend that supposedly duplicated the biological content of human breast milk. Even Johnson's commercial milk and egg product was regarded by "the vast majority of bodybuilders . . . as the best, both in taste and effectiveness. Whether they endorsed other products through advertisements or sold their own, they would use Blair's supplements in their personal regimens. . . . While the majority of the bigger players were primarily merchandising, Blair was constantly pushing to produce legitimate supplements that really worked" (pp. 414-15). Like Paul Bragg, another progenitor, Johnson represented a lay scientific practitioner with integrity.

A more indiscriminate example of the utilization of milk is the extreme weight gain/loss record of bodybuilder Bruce Randall who, in a matter of two and a half years, increased his bodyweight from 203 to 401, then in just seven months dropped to 183, a loss of 218 pounds. In addition to a restrictive diet, Randall adopted a Spartan training routine during which he once worked out 81 hours in one week and did 5,000 sit-ups daily for fifteen days. His extreme pre-contest training and eating regimen enabled him to claim the 1959 NABBA Mr. Universe title at a bodyweight of 222. Critical to Randall's bulking up routine was the "good morning" exercise, in which he eventually hoisted 685 pounds, and his consumption of large quantities of milk. He averaged over two gallons of milk per day. It was "not uncommon for him to drink 2 quarts (1.82L) of milk for breakfast, along with 28 fried eggs and a loaf and a half of bread" (pp. 306-7). Randall once drank 19 quarts of milk in a day. Milk products also served as the basis for John McCallum's "Get Big Drink," immortalized in his highly popular "Keys to Progress" series that appeared in *Strength & Health* from 1965 to 1972. He shared with Hoffman and *Iron Man* editor Peary Rader the philosophy that bodybuilders should not only look strong, but be strong. Like Rader, but contrary to the ideas of Blair and California trainer Vince Gironda, McCallum also believed in the efficacy of the squat, especially the breathing squat (the brainchild of J. C. Hise, an eccentric strongman from the 1930s who believed that high repetition squats done while taking several breaths between each rep would produce quick bodyweight gains), as a natural complement to milk. The importance of milk was underscored by the late Reg Park, winner of multiple Mr. Universe contests, when I asked him at a recent Arnold Clas-

sic how he developed such a muscular physique in early 1950s when Britain was still under rationing. He replied that he grew up on a farm in Yorkshire and there was always plenty of milk.

Subjects that deserve more extensive coverage are relatively few, but they would include the effects of alcohol and tobacco on health, fitness, and nutrition. While such notables as Mark Berry, Sieg Klein, and Jim Park figure prominently in other contexts, no mention is made of their smoking, a popular indulgence for most of the twentieth century, and there is little on Bob Hoffman's lifelong crusade against it. Alcohol use, of course, was likely more widespread among bodybuilders. Though Jack LaLanne was and is a social drinker, alcohol nearly took the life of Dave Draper and no doubt contributed to the early deaths of Gord Venables, Harry Paschall, and Dave Sheppard. Roach speculates that it also fueled the destructive anger of Vince Gironda, which counteracted his otherwise heroic contributions to the game. The murky issue of recreational drugs and their impact on bodybuilders, which suddenly surfaced in the 1960s, receives no more than passing mention. Major physical culturists deserving more attention include Charles Atlas (Angelo Siciliano) and his erstwhile publicist Dr. Frederick Tilney. The extent to which the former adhered to a special diet or employed weights in his training regimen remains unaddressed as does the precise nature of the latter's involvement in the development of dynamic tension and the Atlas courses. Tilney, like his English compatriot George F. Jowett, was a self-made physical culturist who was regarded by some as a phony, but he played an important role in the success of some of bodybuilding's greatest promoters. Regrettably, upon his death in Florida in 1977, no one had the foresight or opportunity to retrieve his personal papers. Thus Fred Tilney, despite a 1968 autobiography, remains one of the mysterious behind-the-scenes figures of the Iron Game.

Another influential figure of the same ilk was Emmanuel Orlick, who had bona fide academic credentials and receives longer shrift in Roach's account. He left no memoir, but Orlick's personal papers, which filled his Brandywine, Maryland, farmhouse and several adjacent tobacco barns, were so voluminous that Terry Todd once estimated that it would take the University of Texas powerlifting team a week to dislodge and haul them to the archives in Austin. They were eventually retrieved by Reuben Weaver who spent five weekends

sorting through them and transporting the exercise-related items to his home in Strasburg, Virginia. These materials constitute a record of Orlick's long career in physical culture, especially as a scholar who was intimately involved with the Weider organization. Randy Roach is the first researcher to take advantage of this resource. The most important revelations concern the origins of the International Federation of Body Builders (IFBB) in which Orlick claims to have played the original guiding role. In a letter to Jowett in March 1948, when the IFBB was in its embryonic state, Orlick states that he had "suggested such an organization to Joe" several years earlier when Weider was starting to have trouble with the Hoffman-dominated Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) in Canada. "Eventually Joe came back to me with HIS sensational idea of the International Body Builders Club or some such thing" (pp. 162-63). Roach shares Dan Lurie's story (also revealed in his 2009 autobiography *Heart of Steel*) of his intimate association with the Weiders which, if true, provides a much-needed corrective to the impression conveyed by the Weiders in *Brothers of Iron* (2008) of Lurie's unimportance and how he served merely as a nuisance and foil to their ambitions. One can only wonder how many more sources about the Weiders remain to be tapped from other early Iron Game figures, such as Barton Horvath, another Weider editor.

A no less significant Iron Game insider source revealed by Roach is the oral testimony of Ray Markunas, who was assisting Irvin Johnson at his Chicago health studio as early as 1948. Though best known for his later work with elite bodybuilders, many of Johnson's early clients were neurasthenic adolescents for whom he provided "a total nutritional makeover. . . . Markunas recalls the gym being a hub of activity at times, with various health care practitioners dropping in on a regular basis," primarily from the alternative medical field (pp. 296-97). Use of weights seemed almost irrelevant to Johnson's focus on what was going on *inside* the human body. Markunas speculates that by the time Johnson relocated to the West Coast in 1958, his internalization approach had led to some experimentation with the anabolic steroid Nilevar. Markunas's recollections roughly coincide with the testimony of four-time Mr. Universe Bill Pearl (at least in the 1986 edition of *Getting Stronger*) that he had experimented with Nilevar in 1958 and had experienced quick gains. Roach concludes that while it would not be fair to accuse Johnson of "bringing drugs to West Coast bodybuilding," it

would be “reasonable to suggest that he definitely expanded the steroid context upon his arrival” (p. 418). Whether this statement is an overreach cannot be determined, but it is based solely on Markunas’s recollections of long-ago events. Furthermore, it leads the author to conclude, in the face of the well-documented evidence relating to the uncontrolled experiments of Dr. John Ziegler on York Barbell athletes with testosterone in 1954 and steroids by 1960, that by the early 1960s “Ziegler and York may have been running a little behind the pack” and that he “did not single-handedly usher drugs into the arena of athletics” (p. 391). Whether it was the east coast weightlifters or the west coast bodybuilders who were most instrumental in introducing steroids to strength athletes remains uncertain, but we can be grateful to Roach for reopening the discussion and introducing new evidence. (Ed. Note: At this point, until considerably more evidence comes to light in support of the pre-1960 use by west coast bodybuilders of anabolic/androgenic steroids such as Testosterone, Dianabol, or Nilevar, it would seem prudent to conclude that the Ziegler/York connection had an earlier and more influential effect on the use in the Iron Game of these drugs than did the west coast bodybuilding culture. It should not be forgotten, of course, that Dr. Ziegler was following the lead of the U.S.S.R.)

His account is equally forthright in addressing the subject of race, including the controversial victories of Vern Weaver over Harold Poole and Bob Gajda over Sergio Oliva respectively in the 1963 and 1966 AAU Mr. America contests. But racial tensions paled in comparison to the homophobia of this era. Roach contends that the photographs in Irvin Johnson’s little magazine, *Tomorrow’s Man*, “shifted the emphasis or focus of physical aesthetics and athleticism to sexuality and eroticism” (p. 272). But Joe Weider also targeted this market with *Adonis*, *Body Beautiful*, *Demi-Gods*, and *Young Physique*, all of which allegedly outsold his three mainstream bodybuilding magazines. Indeed Hoffman’s bulldog, anti-Semitic editor Harry Paschall capitalized on this vulnerability with devastating attacks on the image and lifestyle conveyed by the Weider publications. Although Peary Rader took the moral high ground and never confronted Weider directly, his homophobia was even more deeply rooted for being ideological rather than commercial. He possessed a spirituality that was driven by his active Christian commitment which represented the feelings of the majority of Americans in the

1950s. Roach concludes that the subject of athletes and promoters “prostituting themselves for money or favour” has been “a taboo subject” and “most prefer to ignore it. Nevertheless, it has been a reality in the sport of bodybuilding from its inception.” But he lets Dan Lurie have the last word: “It’s the truth and that’s simply the way it was” (pp. 278-79).

With regard to insights, there is so much to savor in this account that it is impossible to do them full justice. A few examples, however, should suffice. The first relates to the early impact of the industrial and societal changes that were ushered in during the age of Sandow. Notwithstanding revelations by physical culturists on soil, diet, and disease, prevention was quickly taking a back seat to medication and surgery. The essential feature of this “new medical paradigm” which virtually eliminated “alternative health care options” for the public was marketing potential. “Large sums of philanthropic money played a huge role in the reformation of health care into a symptom-treating protocol using drugs only. This channeled money had ties to the manufacturing of these drugs.” At the same time agriculture, owing to the growing empowerment of the food processing industry, was “taking a chemical over nature route,” further jeopardizing the well-being of an innocent and uninformed citizenry. (p. 69) The early advocacy by Bernarr Macfadden and other physical culturists of a healthy diet and exercise, including weight training and muscle building, as well as their strictures against the American Medical Association came to seem increasingly out of step.

This new medical structure eventually, along with the general education and coaching fields, would come to see increased muscle mass as a threat to health and physical performance and would emphasize abstinence for the majority of the century. This of course would leave the burgeoning sport of bodybuilding in a precarious status amongst the educational and medical power structures. (p. 70)

Dietary and medical prejudices, thanks in part to the efforts of Hoffman, the Weiders, Jack LaLanne, Kenneth Cooper, and others, diminished somewhat in the late twentieth century. That they still remain is evidenced by the warnings of some football coaches, now convinced

of the efficacy of weight training, that their players should nevertheless safeguard their knees by avoiding full squats. Such warnings are of course ironic since football itself is responsible for almost all of the sport's knee injuries.

Another residual prejudice remains in the public view of competitive bodybuilders who, despite the general acceptance of resistance training as the best way to become fit and buff, are still regarded as freaks (Ed. Note: Today, when pop culture icons like Sylvester Stallone, Brad Pitt, 50 Cent, Hugh Jackman, the trimmed-down Arnold of his Terminator days, and any number of pro football players and mixed martial artists have bodies which could have won some pre-1960 bodybuilding contests—and are certainly larger and more muscularly developed than many men who, although they don't compete, still consider themselves as, and are, bodybuilders—the average North American under 40 would only view elite bodybuilders as “freaks”). That this perception should persist into the twenty-first century owes much not only to muscle-building drugs but also to the departure from traditional AAU standards, set largely by Hoffman and Rader for the Mr. America Contest in the 1950s, that bodybuilders should be judged not just on their muscularity but their athleticism, character, education, morality, and public demeanor. In other words, the criteria for choosing a Mr. America, as an “All American Boy,” should resemble those for selecting a Miss America as an “All American Girl.” But as the sport entered the 1960s it was becoming obvious that bodybuilding fans, encouraged by the Weiders, were more interested in “muscles simply for appearance sake.” To Rader, as Roach notes, “the voice of the times was demanding victory for the most muscular physique regardless of whether it could lift, run, jump, walk, or talk” (p. 248). This approach coincided with demands for racial equality, commercial aspirations, the professionalization of the sport, and an ego-driven desire of bodybuilders to get big and win at any price. (Ed. Note: Other main players with media outlets also had an eye on the bottom line, or they wouldn't have used as consistently as they did photos of the top physiques.)

By surrendering their traditional, idealistic judging standards in order to fall in line with the new growing orthodoxy of competitive professional bodybuilding, the AAU was basically signaling an

acknowledgement of the end of their dominant reign. Changing rules now had them playing catch-up to the competition and it was their stringent rules that helped protect bodybuilding from Hoffman and Rader's greatest fears. The Mr. America would become simply just another pure physique show, unbridled, ripe, and open to the growing chemical invasion already on the horizon. (p. 264)

The days of Greek-inspired amateur idealism were numbered, according to Roach, as bodybuilding faced an uncertain future. Ironically, the president of the IFBB, Ben Weider, until his dying day (which arrived on October 17, 2008) harbored the notion that bodybuilding, despite its subjectivity, lack of athleticism, saturation with drugs, and negative public perception, would eventually become an Olympic sport.

A final insight drawn by Roach relates to the manner in which Iron Game history shifted from a “Golden Age of Weightlifting” under the tutelage of Bob Hoffman on the east coast to a “Golden Era of Bodybuilding” symbolized by Joe Weider on the west coast. The groundwork for this transition was already laid, however, by the spontaneous gatherings in the 1930s and 1940s of free-spirited physical culturists, including such notables as George Eiferman, Armand Tanny, Russ Saunders, Harold Zinkin, Bert Goodrich, Steve Reeves, and Les and Pudgy Stockton, at a Santa Monica playground called “Muscle Beach.” Its closing in 1959, allegedly because it was also attracting undesirable characters, symbolized, according to Roach, a “changing of the guard” which coincided with the start of Dr. Ziegler's administration of Dianabol to York weightlifters later the same year. While some of the West Coast lifters migrated to the “pen” in nearby Venice Beach, most of the hardcore lifters and equipment from Muscle Beach settled in “the dungeon,” the basement of an old five-story hotel at 4th and Broadway. Here the likes of Reeves, Eiferman, Irwin “Zabo” Koszewski, Arthur Jones, Don Howorth, Bill McCardle, Pat Casey, Chuck Ahrens, and other greats of the game “descended the stairwell” in the early 1960s. With much the same tone of reverence Harry Paschall once used to speak of the gym at 51 North Broad Street where so many of the old York gang trained to become world class weightlifters (*Strength & Health*,

Oct. 1950, p. 36), Dave Draper, quoted by Roach, speaks of the dungeon where so many future bodybuilding champions emerged.

A very long, steep, and unsure staircase took me to a cavernous hole in the ground with crumbling plastered walls and a ceiling that bulged and leaked diluted beer from the old-timers tavern above. Puddles of the stuff added charm to the dim atmosphere where 3 strategically placed 40 watt light bulbs gave art deco shadows to the rusting barbells, dumbbells, sagging milk crates, and splintery handcrafted 2x4 benches. Pulleys and twisted cable from a nearby Venice boatyard, a dozen Olympic bars, bent and rusty, and tons of plates were scattered throughout the twenty-five hundred square foot floor. Dumbbells up to 160s that rattled at broken welds added the final touch that completed what was unquestionably the greatest gym in the world. ...

Here bodybuilding began, embryonic: the original, not the imitation. Here exercises were invented, equipment improvised, muscle shape and size imagined and built, and the authentic atmosphere exuded like primal ooze. You were awash in fundamentals and honesty. I loved it then, the memory more now.

The magic didn't come from the pharmacist; it came from the soul, the era, the history in the making, the presence of un-compromised originality yet to be imitated. [Dave Draper, *Brother Iron Sister Steel* (On Target Publications, 2001), 22-23]

The atmosphere of the dungeon—plus his hard training and use of anabolic steroids—not only enabled Draper to mold his 1965 IFBB Mr. America physique, but it served as an incubator for other bodybuilders who later migrated to the first Gold's Gym on Pacific Avenue,

which Roach calls “the first bodybuilding gym for strictly bodybuilders” (p. 376). What can be inferred from Draper's remarks, as bodybuilding's mecca moved west from the mid-Atlantic region (via Chicago) to California, is that both of these venues would serve as proving grounds for the “first wave” of steroids and would remain a vanguard for the drug-induced, hyper-physiques of the next several decades. Indeed the sport was “drifting from its origins” in physical culture and increasingly “confined to a limited number of men who strongly pursued a desired look not shared by the general public” (p. 456). It would soon mark the disappearance at the highest levels of competitive bodybuilding of natural bodybuilders whose reliance on supplements proved to be “no match for the growing drug arsenal” (p. 479).

These untoward developments obviously trouble the author, leading him to end his account by emphasizing the more principled designs of Johnson, Gironda, Robert Atkins, Bill Pearl, and Mauro Di Pasquale. The latter is represented as a “fulcrum or balancing factor between the old natural order of bodybuilding and the new chemical frontier.” Biochemistry, as viewed by Roach, is a two-edged sword which on the one hand “served up a compound that would mutate the sport both in its physical appearance and at the core of its essence.” What Di Pasquale did by his innovative dietary programs was “divert that same biochemistry into the corner of the natural bodybuilder in the way of understanding and manipulating the body's hormones naturally” (pp. 507-8). Thus while “Smoke & Mirrors” does accurately reflect much of the development of bodybuilding in the past, it is not the course that Roach desires, nor does it reflect his own candid approach to the subject. Obviously Roach will have more to say about “smoke & mirrors” in his projected second volume. In the meantime this dose of honest research and straight talk should serve as a reminder of how far the Iron Game has advanced and the urgent need for redemption. Only by a restoration of the physical culture ideals of health, balance, and harmony will bodybuilding earn a greater degree of respect and public acceptance. This is a timely book which, in its homeopathic appeal, would bring a smile to the face of the late Vic Boff.

