



*Six months or so ago I began writing an occasional blog for our website—www.starkcenter.org. I call the blog “Don’t Weaken,” and I’ve used it primarily as a way to inform people about various activities here at the Stark Center. Since most readers of **Iron Game History** are probably unaware of this blog we decided to use an abbreviated version of something I wrote about the time David P. Webster, O.B.E., spent with us last spring.*

—Terry Todd

Our Davie

Before my iron game-lifelong pal David Webster actually leaves Texas for his home in the bosky dells of seaside Scotland I wanted to share with readers how fortunate Jan and I feel to have had him with us at the Stark Center since the middle of January.

I first met David way back in 1964 in York, Pennsylvania, while I was living there and working as a managing editor of the York Barbell Company’s *Strength and Health* magazine, by then a leading iron game publication in the U.S. for over 30 years. As it happened, David was the organizer of a group of Highland Games athletes who were scheduled to be in Baltimore on a tour of North America, and so he had called the York Barbell Company to say he would like to bring a group of his “heavies” to York to see the famous lifters and bodybuilders who trained there. As David was already a major figure in the strength sports he was, of course, invited to come, with “heavies.” The next morning he and his kilted laddies arrived at the York Gym for what turned out to be a memorable visit.

Over 45 years have passed since that day, and the more I’ve learned about David Webster since that time the more admiration I have for the “wee mon.” For the last 60 years, few if any men have done more to advance the cause of physical culture around the world, and particularly in his beloved Scotland. It’s hard to know where to begin, really, but here are a few of his accomplishments. Born in 1928, David joined the Health and Strength League at age 14, took a college degree in physical education, became a fine all-rounder in hand-balancing and lifting, and was able to stretch a custom-

made set of cables no one else as of 2010 has been able to stretch. (The cable is now and will remain at the Stark Center and be available to any challengers.) In his professional life he worked his way up until he became the Director of Leisure, Recreation, and Tourism for a large section of Scotland, with over 2000 people working under his direction.

In multi-sport organizations David has been a Life Vice-President of the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland since 1990, the Chief of Mission for the Scottish team in the 1998 Commonwealth Games, and the founder and (for over 30 years) still the promoter of the World Highland Games Heavy Events Championships. He is also the world’s leading authority on the Highland Games and has done the color commentary for many hundreds of Highland Games worldwide.

In weightlifting, David was part of almost every British team at the World Championships and Olympic Games as a coach, technical official, or referee through parts of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s; and he organized and directed the World Junior WL Championships in 1985. He has been the Chairman of Weightlifting Scotland for years, and in his last competition, in 1999, he won the 148-pound class in the Scottish National Master’s Championships. In bodybuilding, he competed as a very young man, went on to become a founding member of the National Amateur Bodybuilding Association (NABBA), and served as a judge at many Mr. Britain and Mr. Universe contests.

In the Strongman sport, he is one of its true founding fathers, having organized in 1955 the first televised Strongman competition, which featured the lifting and carrying of heavy stones. He also consulted with the developers of the first “World’s Strongest Man” contest in 1977 and went on to serve that show for over two decades in contests all over the world. What’s more, for the last ten years he has served as my chief of officials at the Arnold Strongman Classic in Ohio. In fact, when Jim Lorimer and Arnold Schwarzenegger asked me to create and conduct a heavy-duty Strongman contest at the Arnold Sports Festival, the first man I asked to help me was David Webster.

David has also done a great deal of television work related to physical culture activities, and most of his media work has been in either the Highland Games or strength sports such as weightlifting and Strongman competitions. He has also created and helped to produce several special TV programs, including two about the Highland Games and one, called “Glamazons,” that was

a contest for women strength athletes.

Although David has received many honors and been inducted into most of the halls of fame in the iron game, his most significant honor came in 1995 when he was “invested” by the Queen as an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. He was given this very singular and coveted O.B.E. because of his wide-ranging and effective work in support of physical culture and sports and because of how that work had introduced people all over the world to the ancient sport known as the Highland Games.

One little-known aspect of David’s remarkable career is that he was perhaps the first sporting official to convince a group of scientists to work with sports officials and create a method of drug testing which could be applied to the sports in which ergogenic drugs were already a problem. He began this effort in 1969. David was also a pioneer in the application of film analysis to the “Olympic Lifts,” and in this work he filmed many major championships and conducted clinics about his analysis and research in many parts of the world.

One of the reasons David, Jan, and I have become increasingly close as the years have passed relates to our shared interest in collecting materials about physical culture, and particularly the aspect of physical culture dealing with the history of the strength sports. David began collecting well over 60 years ago and, through his diligence and knowledge, has built perhaps the finest private collection in the world.

One of the things separating David from most serious collectors is that he has always made full use of his collection by writing about many aspects of the world of physical culture. The Stephen King of physical culture writers, David has written approximately 1000 articles in over 50 publications as well as more than 30 books, including such landmarks as *Modern Strand-pulling* (1953), *Scottish Highland Games* (1959), *The Iron Game* (1976), *Barbells and Beefcake* (1978), *Sons of Samson Vol. 1&2* (1993 and 1997), and *Donald Dinnie* (1999). As of this moment he has three titles awaiting publication –



David Webster, in March of 2010, seated in front of his image on the Wall of Icons at the entrance to the Joe and Betty Weider Museum of Physical Culture.

one a history of wrestling around the world that we hope to publish as part of the Todd Book Series at UT Press.

Before David came to Texas to help us with the museum named in honor of his old and dear friends Joe and Betty Weider I always wondered how he had accomplished so much in so many fields. However, I no longer wonder, because every morning when we arrive at the Stark Center David says hello to our other staff-members and then goes straight to his office, shuts his door, and immediately begins working at the task he had put down the previous evening when we left the university, usually around 8:00 pm. His “secret” is further revealed every night after the three of us get home, have dinner,

and he goes across the yard to our guest house. By the time Jan and I get upstairs to our two home offices and I look out of my window, David is already sitting in front of his computer and he generally stays there until around midnight. Most nights, if he’s still up then, I’ll usually go over with a bottle of single malt scotch in my hand, knock on his door, and ask if he’d care for a “wee dram” before turning in. He never says no.

Watching David work at the Stark Center these past ten weeks makes me think of elbow grease, grit, dedication, willpower—call it what you will—but a word that works for me is love...a deep, abiding love of the iron game. Having David here to help us shape our shared dream of building a facility in which people with a similar love can see, and read about, and study in detail the history of our game has been a blessing and a gift we can never repay. David has already given us many of the hard-won treasures he collected over the years, including our oldest book—Mercurialis’ sixteenth century *De Arte Gymnastica*—but the gift of his precious time here, in the late fall of his long, full life is the most precious gift of all. But when he leaves us physically in a few days his spirit—and his image—will remain. In fact, we’ll still see him every day at the entrance to the Weider Museum standing larger-than-life between Steve Reeves and Eugen Sandow on our Wall of Icons. He has earned his place.

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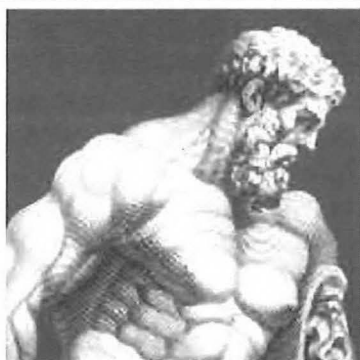
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