

Book Review

A PANTHEON OF IRON GAME HEROES

Bill Pearl, George and Tuesday Coates, and Richard Thornley, Jr.,
Legends of the Iron Game, Reflections on the History of Strength Training
 (3 vols., Phoenix, OR, Bill Pearl Enterprises, 2010).

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The heroic tradition of physical culture, traceable to the legendary Milo of Crotona and the ancient Greek pursuit of excellence (*arête*), still permeates our approach to the iron game in the twenty-first century. It was first evident in a modern sense nearly a century ago in early editions of *Strength* magazine, published by Alan Calvert's Milo Barbell Company, with depictions of leading strength athletes of the day, often wearing no more than a jock strap, to display their pleasing physiques. The legendary Harry Paschall, now better known for his acerbic wit and artistic talent [*Ed. Note: Both Paschall's wit and his artistic talent were sometimes displayed in ways that revealed prejudice against racial and ethnic minorities.*], was one of the most popular. The heroic tradition was carried forward in other muscle magazines by such notables as Bob Hoffman, Joe Weider, Dan Lurie, Peary and Mabel Rader, and Bob Kennedy, almost always with a leading bodybuilder on the cover accompanied by a plethora of lavishly illustrated articles inside. Invariably the focus was on individuals rather than groups or even contests, ostensibly to fire the blood of young men to develop stronger, healthier, and better-looking bodies but also to satisfy a more immediate need to sell magazines and products.

As traditions mounted during the twentieth century some of these heroic portraits were assembled into larger compilations by iron game authors to cater to a growing nostalgic interest. One of the earliest of this genre was Edmond Desbonnet's 1911 magnum opus, *Les Rois de la Force* (The Kings of Strength), which contained several hundred photographs along with biographies and records of scores of notable strength performers. In America, *Mighty Men of Old*, assembled by Gord Venables in 1940, featured a gallery of pictures and biographies of old-time strong men. It was followed thirty years later by David Willoughby's massive *The Super Athletes*, again with a focus on individual feats.

Another ambitious undertaking, now a collector's item, was David Webster's ground-breaking 1976 survey, *The Iron Game*, albeit with a British flavor. Webster followed it with *Barbells & Beefcake* in 1979, focusing on bodybuilding, and eventually published a two-volume *Sons of Samson* (1993 & 1997) featuring biographical vignettes of strong men over the ages. Meanwhile Leo Gaudreau assembled many of his historical articles that originally appeared in Weider publications into a handsome two-volume set entitled *Anvils, Horseshoes, and Cannons* (1975), and Dick Tyler utilized a similar format in his 2004 rendition of *West Coast Bodybuilding, The Golden Years*. Most recently Bob Kennedy's special issue of *Legends of Bodybuilding* (2010) traces the evolution of the sport over the past century by highlighting the contributions of its greatest stars.

Bill Pearl, with George and Tuesday Coates and Richard Thornley, Jr. have combined many of the best features of previous collective works into a massive three-volume set entitled *Legends of the Iron Game*. Few readers can conceive the extent of research, writing, and fact-checking that went into the production of its 1,094 pages and almost a thousand illustrations. In this respect the authors were assisted by some of the best minds in the game, including Joe Roark, David Webster, David Gentle, and especially Terry and Jan Todd who were able to tap the rich resources of the newly-constructed Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports at the University of Texas. No less obvious is their indebtedness to the dozens of individuals whose names appear on the picture credits. Though launched and led by Pearl, one of the foremost iron game icons, *Legends* is in every sense a collaborative effort.

Undoubtedly the greatest challenge was to select whom to include (and exclude) in order to achieve a balance amongst the many components of the iron game. One can only imagine the endless hours of pleasurable

but agonizing discussions among Pearl, Coates, and the late Leo Stern over the selection process, not to mention how much space should be allotted to each entry and section and what kinds of information should be divulged. Though broad in scope, their compilation does not presume to be comprehensive or definitive. Nor could it be, given the hundreds of individuals who have made an impact on the sport. Rather, the authors' intention is to present "reflections" or, as George Coates put it, "a look back in time at many of the people who shaped and developed this great lifestyle" (p. 4). Indeed the underlying tone of *Legends* is celebratory, but there is no obvious attempt to cover up the trials, tribulations, and failures experienced by many of the heroes. That their "triumphs will delight you" and their numerous tragedies a "move you" (p. 2) is no idle boast.

Although volume one appropriately begins with manifestations of strength in pre-modern civilizations, coverage intensifies in chapter three with the initiatives of "Father" Friedrich Ludwig Jahn in the early nineteenth century. From that point a clear-cut line, tapping emergent Teutonic-Gallic-and Gaelic traditions, leads to such iron game patriarchs—organized sequentially according to date and year of birth—as Professor Attila (Louis Durlacher), Edmond Desbonnet, Bernarr Macfadden, Alan Calvert, and such glittering innovators as Richard Kyle Fox, Louis Cyr, Eugen Sandow, Katie Sandwina, and the Saxon (Hennig) brothers. Among the most fascinating descriptions is the dietary regimen of strongwoman Minerva (Josephine Schauer Blatt), who proudly claimed that "eating is about the principal part of my existence" (p. 94). Also notable is Ottley Coulter's description of the Brooklyn home of strongman Warren Lincoln Travis (Roland Morgan).

Travis had his exhibition barbell and dumbbell in his living room. Also a solid dumbbell weighing about 400 pounds, and another about 600 pounds, a revolving hip lift carousel, a back lift platform, back lift scales and planks of different weights. His basement had all kinds of iron implements such as ship anchors, oil drums to load with slugs, many pounds of shot, railroad car wheels, castings of various sizes and shapes, shells of various sizes and shapes, a barbell weighing about 2,000 pounds that he wanted to sell me. . . . I have never seen such a collection outside of a junk yard and I never expect to see such a collection again (p. 110).

Travis owned several huge performance dumbbells.

Among his most prized possession, one of these bells would eventually grace the portal of Bob Hoffman's old York Barbell Company headquarters and another one would wind up being displayed in the Stark Center.

Some of the most spectacular strength feats described in this volume are attributable to Henry "Milo" Steinborn. It would be no exaggeration to say that squats, especially heavy squats, were not part of the training regimen of weightlifters and strongmen a century ago. Squat racks, as we know them, were non-existent. Milo helped to change all that by drawing attention to his extraordinary leg strength. "At a height of five-feet, nine-inches and weighing 205 pounds, he was able to take a 550-pound bar, stand it on end, squat down and lower the bar across his upper back and shoulders. Then he would stand erect, go into a deep squat, and stand again, before rocking the barbell to one side and back to upright." (p. 218) At Herrmann's Gym in Philadelphia, a hotbed of American lifting in the 1920s, Steinborn shocked contemporaries by performing a 350 pound clean and jerk, a 205 pound one-hand snatch, and a 192 pound one-legged front squat! At his peak, the authors tell us, he could squat 550 pounds for five repetitions and 315 pounds 33 times (p. 218). This is the kind of stuff from which legends are made. On a broader level, in a chapter on the remarkable feats of strongman Hermann Goerner, we learn that before World War I, Leipzig, Germany had seventy-six lifting clubs (p. 181). A sequel to this story is that this robust strength culture was almost wiped out when allied bombers fire-bombed the city during World War II.

Inspirational stories and lessons from the past also abound in this volume. In 1906 the great Arthur Saxon expressed a strong preference for athleticism as the basis for physical development. It was advisable, Saxon believed,

to judge a man by his capabilities as an athlete, whether a weightlifter or wrestler and not by the measurement of his biceps or chest. In the course of my travels I have met physical culturists who come to me to show their development and whilst it must be admitted, it is splendid to look upon, yet, it is evident to me a number of such men have injured their health in an endeavor to squeeze the last fraction of an inch from their muscular development (p. 114).

Saxon's idealism was reflected in the career of Bavarian performer Maxick (Max Sick), who was proficient in weightlifting, gymnastics, hand-balancing, and muscle

control. But the physique photos accompanying his entry show an abdominal development (rectus and obliques) that would rival many Mr. Olympia contestants a century later, thereby showing a natural derivation of form from function (pp. 149-54). Even the great artists' model, Tony Sansone, we are told, developed his body from a combination of weight training, hand-balancing, gymnastics, swimming, sprinting, and handball. "This blending of sports and exercise produced his stunning physique, which exuded both power and beauty, and enabled him to begin his lucrative modeling career while a teenager" (p. 259). His altruistic approach to bodybuilding is also evident in his decision to quit during his prime owing to a troubled conscience over the commodification of his physique. "I couldn't call my body my own" (p. 262). But the most poignant anecdote accompanies the entry for arm-wrestler Ian "Mac" Batchelor, who learned in a 1977 meeting with Jan and Terry Todd, during which Jan demonstrated her remarkable hand strength by bending between her thumb and extended forefinger a bottle-cap from a European beer, that Jan had the exact same birth date as his daughter, also named Jan (p. 275) [Ed. Note: *The reason Batchelor was so saddened to learn of this coincidence is that his daughter had abandoned him and even stolen from him late in his life after he had suffered a stroke and become almost totally blind.*].

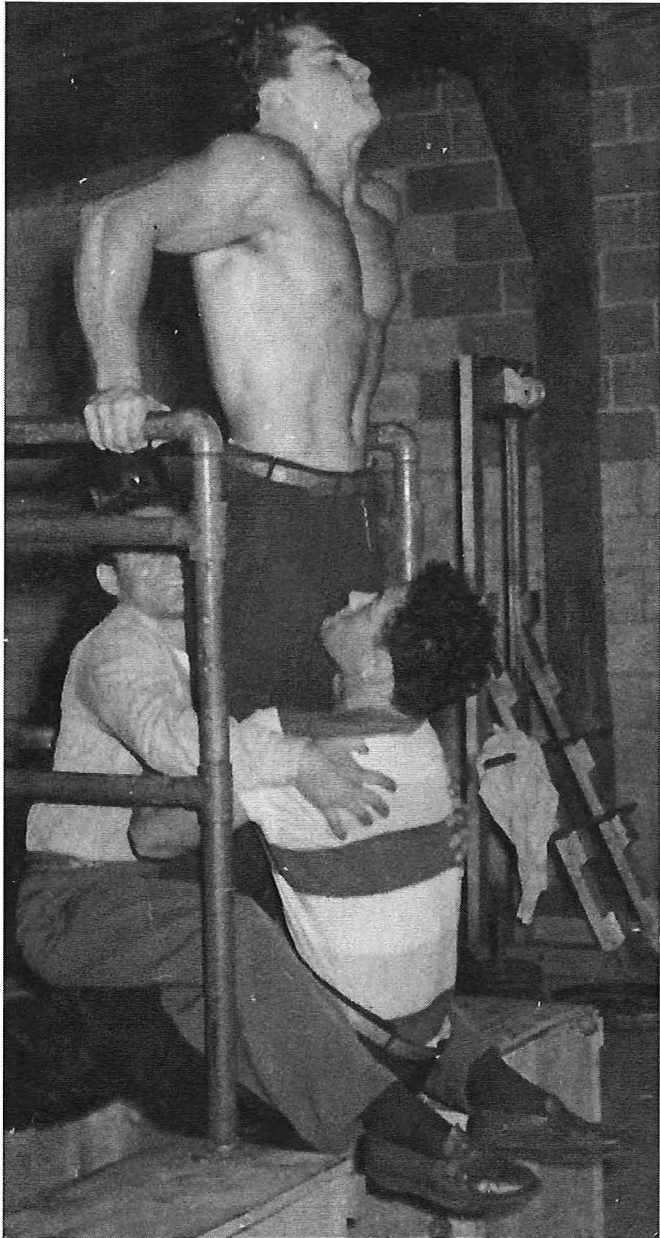
A commendable feature of all three volumes is the inclusion of some seemingly secondary figures who, though slightly less recognizable as legends, nevertheless had a seminal influence on the development of the iron game and might otherwise be forgotten. Such figures in volume one include William Pullum, Ottley Coulter, Joe Bonomo, Charles Smith, and Walt Marcy. Similar figures in this category that might have been included in the book are "Doc" Frederick Tilney, Mark Berry, Joseph Curtis Hise, Ray Van Cleef, Tony Terlazzo, and the Barnholth brothers.

Volume two focuses on what is often viewed as a golden age of strength-related sports. With the emergence of bodybuilding and powerlifting as separate entities, the selection of exemplary legends during the post-World War II era must have been particularly difficult for the authors. It is not surprising to find such names as Les and Pudgy Stockton, John Davis, Joe Gold, the Weider brothers, Dan Lurie, Norbert Schemansky, Steve Reeves, Reg Park, Tommy Kono, Bill Pearl, Paul Anderson, Larry Scott, and Sergio Oliva among the entries. However, strong cases could also have been made for such notables as Bill "Peanuts" West, Cleve Dean, Bob Crist, Bob

"Ninth Wonder" Bednarski, Vasily Alexeyev, Boyd Epley, Jon Paul Sigmarsson, Khadr El Touni, Doris Barilleaux, Jim Lorimer, Dr. Thomas DeLorme, Jim Murray, and Joan Rhodes.

Among the amazing feats performed by people profiled in volume two are the 1,665 push-ups and 1,225 parallel bar dips, each in ninety minutes, claimed by "Sealtest" Dan Lurie at only 165 pounds bodyweight. Also, although Irvin "Zabo" Koszewski never won a major title, he captured the best abdominals subdivision in every physique contest he entered. In the course of winning many world and national titles, Norbert Schemansky established twenty-two world records, but his greatest single lift, according to the authors, was the 364 pound split-style snatch, made at age thirty-eight, at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo. From 1948 to 1975, Mr. America George Eiferman was a familiar sight at school assemblies throughout the nation where he lectured on the benefits of exercise and executed strength feats while playing a trumpet or harmonica. The claim that he made over 15,000 such appearances, however, can only be sustained if he made multiple appearances during each school day. One is more inclined to believe Nautilus inventor Arthur Jones' claim that he "worked twenty-six hours, eight days a week" (p. 157). No one, however, seems to doubt the strength feats of Marvin Eder, whose parallel bar dip of 435 pounds at a bodyweight of 198 will probably never be equaled. Even Pat Casey, a powerlifting pioneer and legendary bench presser of the 1960s, pronounced him, pound for pound, "the strongest man to walk the face of the earth." (p. 218) Charles Smith estimated that Eder was rivaled only by Hermann Goerner and Doug Hepburn, as "the strongest of all strongmen . . . using high-intensity training when several of the modern crop, who were claiming to have invented it, weren't lifting anything heavier than a baby's rattle" (p. 218-20). That Eder was declared a professional athlete (as a result of being on the wrong side of the political fence from the York Barbell Club) and denied the opportunity of becoming an Olympic champion or Mr. America was one of the greatest injustices of iron game history. If one had to choose the greatest unsung hero of our sport, Marvin Eder would be a strong contender.

Also unsung are the accomplishments of Gene Mozee who, prior to the advent of drugs and supportive gear, bench-pressed four hundred pounds as a light-heavyweight in 1959 at a contest in which a two second pause was mandatory. He went on to author over 2,000 articles and edit several muscle magazines, including *Muscle Builder*, and helped launch the careers of many



One image not included in *Legends of the Iron Game* is this rare photograph of Marvin Eder doing dips while supporting two men.

Courtesy John Fair

leading bodybuilders. John Grimek once called him “the first and foremost bodybuilding photojournalist” (p. 258). Though also a bodybuilder of note, Mozee—according to Pearl—never sought to exploit the muscle media for self-gain. Nor did Stan “Flash” Stanczyk crave glory, although he set numerous world records and won five world titles as well as gold and silver Olympic medals. This characteristic was evident in what is possibly the most publicized instance of sportsmanship in iron game annals. At the 1948 Olympics in London, Stanczyk snatched a world record 292 pounds to the sat-

isfaction of two of the three judges, but he refused to accept credit for the lift, pointing out that his right knee had touched the platform. During those same Olympics, a sport scientist using an electronic timer determined that he had the fastest physical reaction of any athlete tested at the games, hence the nickname “Flash.” Legendary gym owner Vince Gironda is normally viewed as an iron game curmudgeon, not unlike Charles Smith or Arthur Jones. But a spirited exchange with a 1970s reader of *MuscleMag International* reveals an interesting inversion of a classic Gironda insult into a moral pronouncement. When asked why, if he was so great, none of the current champions trained with him, he replied that the “current champs don’t work with me because I don’t hand out steroids! Most of them are bloated drug abusers and not true physical culturists” (p. 30). These sentiments were later echoed by Marvin Eder:

Health was never divorced from my training. I’ve never, under any circumstances, considered the use of artificial drugs to stimulate my muscle growth. What’s going on now is a nightmare, an obscenity. . . . I don’t care what present bodybuilders’ goals are. You want to get muscular and stronger, work out hard and look after yourself like I did (p. 220).

[Ed. Note: As for Gironda’s remark, it must be remembered that the winner of the first Mr. Olympia, Larry Scott, was one of Gironda’s most famous “pupils.” Scott won the title in 1965, by which time the use of anabolic steroids was endemic in bodybuilding. As for Eder, since anabolic steroids were essentially unknown during his tragically short lifting career, his claim that he never considered taking them is meaningless.]

Though hardly known for his stance against drugs, Sergio Oliva made a heroic and memorable gesture by his flight to freedom as a member of the Cuban weightlifting team at the Central American and Caribbean Games in Jamaica in 1962.

There are also many entries in volume two that will elicit a smile. Contrasting pictures of a shirtless Leo Stern at age seventeen, as an aspiring wrestler and football player on page fifty eight, and as a thickly-muscled Mr. California on the opposite page make for an interesting study of the efficacy of weight training. Also, a picture of Joe Gold and George Eiferman in diapers while appearing in Mae West’s famous all-male revue shows how far bodybuilders were willing to go to earn

some easy bucks in the pre-Chippendale era. Nor have the authors overlooked the wit of Norb Schemansky. In a memorable incident, Olympic teammate Lou Riecke recalls checking into a Los Angeles hotel at a time when the Black Panthers were making news:

The clerk at check-in handed Norb and me forms to fill out. The clerk looks at Schemansky's and says, 'You didn't fill in your religion. What's your religion?' Norb's got blond hair and blue eyes. He looks back at the clerk, as dead-pan as can be and says 'Black Muslim!' (p. 122)

Readers will also be struck by a picture of the ever-so-exquisite Steve Reeves in work boots performing a teeth-lift with 210 pound Eiferman and by the observation that Steve was apprenticing as a plumber prior to his box office success in *The Labors of Hercules*. The most touching image of the entire volume, however, is that of *MuscleMag* editor Bob Kennedy on a Canadian ski slope with his son Brandon before their tragic car accident that permanently disabled the latter.

Secondary figures in *Legends* who at some point exercised primary influence in the physical culture world include Ray Wilson, a professional wrestler who launched American Health & Silhouette Figure Form Studios, which expanded to 277 locations and then a chain of European Health Spas in 160 locations with a million members. Likewise Jerry Kahn, a native of Pelham, Georgia, and protégé of Bill Curry, established the International Physical Fitness Association which served over a thousand affiliates by 1970, and later developed a conglomerate of 150 fitness facilities that became part of the Bally Casino network of more than four hundred gyms. Those who cherish the days when all-round development was an ideal will appreciate the inspirational entry on Bill Seno of Chicago, who was equally adept at weightlifting, powerlifting, and physique. His chief claims to fame were winning two senior national titles in the early days of powerlifting and securing the "Most Muscular" award at the 1964 Mr. America Contest over Sergio Oliva. It should be noted that it was these kinds of individuals, and not just luminaries such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jane Fonda, and Kenneth Cooper who set the stage for the fitness revolution of the late 1970s.

Among the icons featured in volume three, which covers the most recent period, are Dave Draper, Frank Zane, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Larry Pacifico, Bill Kazmaier, and Cory Everson along with such sto-

ried contests as the AAU Mr. America, the NABBA Mr. Universe, and the IFBB Mr. Olympia; hallowed venues such as Muscle Beach and the York Hall of Fame; and even sections for historians and photographers. Readers will recognize some of the more memorable strength feats that even old-timers would deem remarkable. Two-time Mr. Olympia Franco Columbu, who could perform repetition deadlifts with nearly seven hundred pounds at a bodyweight of only 180, was admired by many as much for his strength as his physique. His attempt, however, to carry a four-hundred-pound refrigerator on his back at the first "World's Strongest Man" competition in 1977 resulted in tragedy when he dislocated his left knee, resulting in six hours of surgery and years of recovery. For some iron game aficionados, Bill "Kaz" Kazmaier will forever reign as the "world's strongest man," having won that title officially from 1980 to 1982, along with numerous national and world powerlifting championships and world records in Highland Games competitions. As the authors point out, his strength was commensurate with his physique. At a bodyweight of around 325,

his fame rested nearly as much on his massive muscular appearance as it did on his brute strength. Carrying little body fat, Bill sported a 60-inch chest, 23-inch biceps, large calves, and a trim waist. ... His [official] feats included a 969 pound squat, a 661 pound bench press, and a 907 pound deadlift, for a total of 2,425 pounds. His weights in the gym were even more impressive with a 900 pound triple in the squat, a 633-pound triple on the bench, and 505 pounds for 21 reps. These feats were accomplished without the aid of a support shirt (pp. 89-90).

But what must have dumbfounded contemporaries was Bill's ability to cheat curl 405 pounds once and 315 fifteen times using an "E-Z Curl" barbell. Bev Francis emerged in the 1980s as the most remarkable woman strength athlete. In high school and college she excelled in virtually all sports before turning to powerlifting where she won six consecutive world championships and became the first woman officially to bench press over 300 pounds. But her most memorable performances occurred in physique contests. In 1983 her co-starring role in the pseudo-documentary *Pumping Iron II: The Women* framed an ongoing debate between femininity and muscularity in women's bodybuilding. As for the men, Dorian "The Shadow" Yates introduced a new

dimension of size and muscularity to professional bodybuilding, leading Jon Hotten (in *Muscle*, p. 54) to observe that eight time Mr. Olympia Lee Haney was “the last of the regulation freaks, the last man that a normal man might feel existed as a part of the same species.” Yates was the first of the “really freaky freaks.”

What haunts virtually all the entrants in volume three and detracts from their otherwise spectacular performances is the specter of drug use. Though aware of the critical importance of this factor, the authors are careful to discuss it only in those cases where it has already been divulged. So we know from an article in *Iron Man* that powerlifting record-holder Anthony Clark, who died of a massive heart attack in 2005, abused steroids. Likewise, nine-time world champion powerlifter Larry Pacifico, who survived three heart attacks, describes how he integrated them into his training routines in a remarkably candid book, *Champion of Champions* (1986). The 1972 AAU Mr. America, Steve Michalik, was known for his brutal five-hour training sessions. “Like many hardcore bodybuilders of his era,” the authors note, he was “seriously addicted to anabolic steroids and often ingested a cocktail of up to 14 drugs, including speed, to get through his workouts, followed by downers, so he could sleep” (p. 183). Boyer Coe won multiple Mr. America and Mr. Universe titles in a bodybuilding career that spanned three decades. Although he firmly believed in “a positive mental approach,” it was his “liberal use of anabolics and growth hormone” that enabled him to “get in my all time best shape” for the 1994 Masters Mr. Olympia (p. 44). Casey Viator never explains the role steroids might have played in his meteoric rise to become the youngest (at age 19) to win the AAU Mr. America title in 1971, but there’s a touch of irony in his concern four decades later over “the large amounts of chemicals” bodybuilders of the current generation were consuming. “It hurts to see them ruining their health, just for cash and trophies. I don’t encourage anyone to use steroids” (p. 56). Although the authors only mention Mike Mentzer’s tragic abuse of various recreational drugs in connection with his long-term mental health problems, his death at age forty nine of a heart attack and the death of his forty-seven-year-old brother Ray of kidney disease several days later in 2001, allow savvy readers to draw their own conclusions.

Indeed heroism in this volume takes on a different meaning—a mixture of triumphs and tragedies. While African American bodybuilder Harold Poole was denied the AAU Mr. America crown in 1962 and 1963,

allegedly because of racial prejudice, he eventually won multiple Mr. America titles, once with the IFBB and twice with Dan Lurie’s WBBG. An even more bizarre turn of fate awaited 1951 Mr. America Roy Hilligenn, who seemed to be a perfect blend of strength, physique, and wholesome demeanor. However, as the authors point out, he spent most of his last twenty years in prison for assault, sexual battery, and grand theft. Shortly after release the once robust Hilligenn died after a fall at age eighty-five. In fact, the Mr. America contest itself, once the epitome of success for bodybuilders, fell on hard times by the 1980s, it being noted that “AAU physique contests had drastically diminished as the top bodybuilders aligned with the IFBB, in hopes of becoming professional competitors, with a payday in sight” (p. 189). No longer entitled to individual entries, Mr. America winners after 1978 are relegated to less than legendary status with a mere listing of names. Likewise the NABBA Universe contest, which once rivaled the AAU Mr. America in prestige, was faltering. Owing to minimal coverage in the bodybuilding press, such worthy winners of the last several decades as Edward Kawak, Charles Clairmonte, and Eddie Ellwood, in stark contrast to Lee Haney, Dorian Yates, and Ronnie Coleman, never became bodybuilding icons. It is also unfortunate that this volume is devoid of any recent heroes from the realms of powerlifting or Olympic weightlifting. Strongman, the newest strength sport, remains a question mark as a source for future legends.

Omissions in volume three would include the likes of Ricky Wayne, Bill Starr, Ron Collins, Dan Duchaine, Wayne DeMilia, Lamar Gant, Naim Suleymanoglu, Ed Coan, Dennis Rogers, Mark Henry, and Zydrunas Savickas. Although it could be argued that some of these individuals would qualify more as anti-heroes in the drug-infused and commercialized state of the sport in the twenty-first century, few historians would gainsay their overall impact. Unlike the earlier volumes, heroes are more difficult to identify in this one.

After the authors profile their last “Legend,” they move to facilities, groups, and contests such as the Amateur Athletic Union Mr. America event. For example, they explain that much of the competitive energy and public attention that once resided with the AAU and NABBA has been redirected over the last several decades towards the International Federation of Bodybuilding and the Mr. Olympia Contest, largely owing to the influence of the Weider brothers and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

There is no question that the IFBB 'Mr. Olympia' contest has taken competitive bodybuilding to new heights. Sixty years ago, the sport appeared as a small subculture, recognized by those who practiced and followed it. Thanks to Joe and Ben Weider, the IFBB 'Mr. Olympia' event has become an annual spectacle shown on pay-per-view television and beamed to hundreds of countries.

Still, the iron game is steeped in tradition, as evinced in this volume by special features devoted to heritage activities and shrines. One of the former, the Association of Oldtime Barbell & Strongmen, was founded by Vic Boff in 1987 to celebrate the lives of former greats. Significantly, at his annual dinner at the Downtown Athletic Club in New York City, Boff, a true traditionalist who knew Joe Bonomo, George F. Jowett, and Charles Atlas, shied away in the early years of the AOBS from anyone associated with drugs. Other historical entries include the York Barbell Hall of Fame, for which Boff served as a consultant; the Oscar Heidenstam Foundation; and "A Night To Remember," a 1991 gathering in San Diego of "many of the brightest stars of the Iron Game from the 1930s to the late 1980s." It was likely "the most memorable gathering of bodybuilding legends ever" (p. 258). The volume concludes with a chapter devoted to the H. J. Lutch Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports at the University of Texas. A 27,500 square foot facility funded primarily by a grant of \$5.5 million from a Texas foundation, it includes *inter alia* a museum, a sports gallery, a reading room, a library/archive, and an art gallery. Created from the collection of literature and artifacts Terry and Jan Todd had been assembling for nearly a half century, it is the most ambitious enterprise ever undertaken to preserve and promote physical culture history.

Without question, *Legends of the Iron Game* is a story worth telling, and readers will appreciate the opportunity to weigh the comparative worth of strength athletes from different eras. What Bill Pearl and his associates have provided is a sense of historical perspective which enables us to draw our own conclusions. A measure of the value of their work is the fact that I referred to it repeatedly in the spring of 2011 in my class on the History of American Weightlifting and Bodybuilding at Georgia College. The text is richly resourced, reader friendly, and lavishly illustrated. It is no exaggeration to say that the pictures alone, many of which I had never seen, justify the price of the three vol-

umes. The most poignant of them appears in volume three. It features a proportional and trim Frank Zane, three-time Mr. Olympia, with his attractive wife Christine, winner of the 1970 NABBA Miss Universe Bikini Contest, in an affectionate pose. Both exude a kind of health, fitness, and beauty reminiscent of yesteryear and depict an athletic ideal for masculine and feminine physiques. Their tightly tapered mid-sections provide a striking contrast to the bloated bellies and hyper-muscularity of current physique champions. It is hardly surprising that over the past decade Zane has achieved iconic status among those who seek a return to a natural look in bodybuilding and view his *Fabulously Fit Forever* (1993) as a source of inspiration.

The three volumes of *Legends* provide many more sources of inspiration, but most of them pre-date the 1960s. Many of the developments over the last several decades, reflective of a larger culture driven by the media and virtual realities, should arouse concern if not alarm among physical culturists. One can only wonder how a future *Legends* compilation, say a hundred years hence, will perceive the nearly invisible Olympic lifters, gear-ridden powerlifters, and freaky bodybuilders of today. Will Crossfit and Strongman competitions provide a way out of our current dilemma? Will health, fitness, and athleticism ever matter again amongst iron game elite? And will we ever regain the respect of the general public who often mock our current heroes and regard their competitions more as spectacle than sport? Even within the inner sanctum of *bodybuilding* there are indications of boredom with oversized chemical-induced physiques. In the June 2011 issue of *Muscle-Mag International* (p. 192), Peter McGough asks "why at every Arnold Classic, do the halftime acrobatic acts and the strongman finals receive a standing ovation, while bodybuilding performances leave fans in bums-on-seats mode?" A clear message implicit in the many portraits drawn by Bill Pearl and his colleagues is that if the heroic tradition is going to survive, physical culturists must return to the genuine pursuit of excellence and not just the appearance of excellence.

Legends of the Iron Game
may be ordered at
<http://www.billpearl.com>.



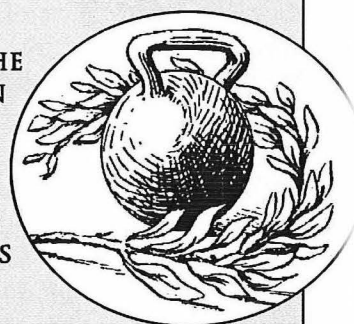
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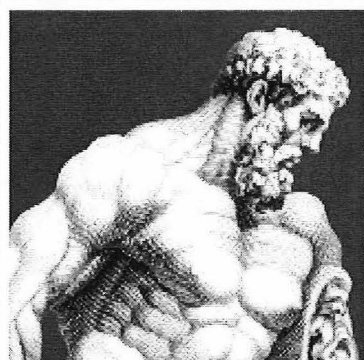
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