



IRON GAME HISTORY



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A Dream Come True

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The University of Texas at Austin

“Dream dreams, then write them. Aye, but live them first.”

—*Samuel Eliot Morison*

My acquaintance with the Stark Center goes back several decades before it was the Stark Center, when it was just the Todd-McLean Collection housed in several upstairs rooms in the old Gregory Gym. I had been following the athletic exploits of Terry and Jan Todd along with their meanderings in Pennsylvania, Alabama, Georgia, Nebraska, and Nova Scotia for many years, during which time they accumulated a massive collection of physical culture materials. I had just started working in iron game history when I learned in a 1984 *Iron Man* article by Al Thomas that the Todds were in Austin (Terry's home), that they were on the faculty of the University of Texas, and that the materials they had been collecting were available for researchers. In October of 1985, while attending a British Studies conference in San Antonio, I hopped

on a bus one sunny afternoon for Austin where Jan picked me up and introduced me to Terry and the collection. Former *Weider* magazine editor Charles A. Smith, then in his seventies, happened to be there helping to sort newspaper clippings. His opening remarks to me were memorable: “Young man, there's nothing new in this game. It's all been around since the 1920s.” What impressed me most, however, was the collection and Terry's vision of how they were going to make it grow

and expand into a first class archive complemented by a museum with Greek statuary along with paintings and photographs of physical culture icons—all within the restrictive confines of the then somewhat dingy Gregory Gym. “Dream on!” I thought to myself. I returned several months later to do research and kept returning regularly for the next twenty-five



Highland Games official Dr. Bill Crawford, John Fair, and David P. Webster pose for the camera in March of 2012 at the Stark Center.

years after the collection moved to even dingier but roomier confines in the basement of Anna Hiss Gym. That the Todds have been able to keep building their collection of manuscripts, books, pictures, and artifacts and find the resources to create the present H.J. Lutchter Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, prominently housed and fully staffed, in the largest structure on the University of Texas campus is a remarkable achievement—a tribute to their lifelong persistence and commitment to a worthy ideal.

About a year ago it became evident that I could play a larger role in this enterprise when I was granted a sabbatical from Georgia College to complete my book

on “Mr. America” during the spring semester of 2012. With assistance from the Todds I was able to negotiate living quarters within walking distance of campus and acquire faculty status as adjunct professor of kinesiology, a private office, a computer, and access to the many resources available at the university. No less meaningful have been the friendships and working relationships I have been able to establish with members of the Stark staff—Kim Beckwith, Cindy Slater, Ana Gonzalez, Tommy Hunt, and Geoff Schmaltz—as well as various graduate students, especially Dominic Morais and Jason Shurley, and former UT students. One of the most enjoyable aspects of my experience was the interaction

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with the many academic visitors to the center—too numerous to mention—who come from the U.S. and beyond to do research for books, films, or articles. Even more exciting was my interaction with David Webster, widely recognized as dean of iron game authors, who was with us for several months, during which he and I were able to interact on an almost daily basis. His memory and range of experience constitutes the most valuable human resource from the past that we can currently tap. With only slightly less historical memory are the Todds, whose knowledge encompasses virtually all facets of the iron game and related scholarship over the past half century. Their physical culture connections and awareness of the current scene is unparalleled. Nor are their connections only within the academic side of physical culture. In fact, one of the reasons for our deepening friendship has been that Terry and Jan, since 2001, have been the organizers and directors of the Arnold Strongman Classic, which is held annually in early March in Columbus, Ohio, as part of the enormous Arnold Sports Festival. Because of my past involvement in both weightlifting and powerlifting—as a competitor as well as an official—Terry asked me to serve as an official at this event, which is considered to be the heaviest and truest test of basic body strength in the Strongman sport. For many years now, my wife Sarah and our son, Philip, have also worked as part of the scoring and timing staff at the “Arnold.” The weekend has become a part of our lives.

Beyond that, during my time here this semester the Stark has experienced an almost constant stream of other visitors, including such notables as Tommy Suggs; Dr. Bob Goldman; Dennis Rogers; Mark Henry; Highland Games athlete and former NFL lineman Mike Baab; Dr. Fred Hatfield; Dr. Bill Crawford; the magician David Blaine; writer Ken O’Neill; and Jack LaLanne’s daughter, Dr. Yvonne LaLanne. Over these past months I have also enjoyed many guest speakers, conferences, departmental-related events, and even “Movie Night” at the Stark, where we watched and then discussed such films as Garrick Daft’s two-hour documentary about Strongman competitors Travis Ortmeyer and Derek Poundstone, Federico Fellini’s *La Strada*, and one of the silent films starring the massive physical culture notable Bartolomeo Pagano as Maciste.

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of the Stark is the ambiance. Though embedded in a football stadium complex, everything in the Stark is tastefully designed

and related in some way to physical culture or sports. The variety of materials is amazing. At the heart of the center is the collection of manuscripts and printed materials, many of which are priceless and consume dozens of rows of compact shelving. My only concern is that with the current rate of acquisitions, a remote storage site will be necessary to supplement this gigantic 27,500 sq. ft. facility.

By no means the least important aspect of my stay has been the experience of living in Austin for an extended period, during which time my wife has visited several times. Austin is a happening place. And for anyone working in the field of physical culture, the Stark Center is the place to be. For me, it’s been a real learning experience, a kind of continuing education course that would be available nowhere else in the world. It has enabled me not only to complete my book manuscript on the history of Mr. America contests, but to finish a scholarly article (which appears in this issue of *Iron Game History*) as well as numerous smaller pieces. At the end of this semester I will be retiring from Georgia College, but I plan to return each spring semester to Austin for approximately six months to take advantage of the research materials and to mingle with the many iron game personalities associated with the center.

Although much of my work at the Stark is routine research and writing, hardly a day passes that I don’t think about how Terry’s vision of a first class center for the study and appreciation of physical culture, which seemed so outlandish in 1985, has come true. Beyond that, the Stark Center—which includes the Weider Museum of Physical Culture and the Long Art Gallery—has endowed this burgeoning field of scholarship with a degree of credibility and status that it has never had, not only by the size and quality of the collection but by its location in an academic department at a major research university. My wife, knowing my passion for iron game history, has told various acquaintances that she always knew I would end up here somehow. Indeed for me—no less than for Terry, Jan, and the growing number of people with a serious interest in physical culture—it is a dream come true.

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