

THE USA VS. THE WORLD:

AN ANALYTICAL NARRATIVE OF AMERICAN, WORLD, AND OLYMPIC WEIGHTLIFTING RESULTS, 1970-1992

Part Two of a Three-Part Series

John D. Fair

The University of Texas at Austin

It was my reaction against having grown up in Europe, where government was totally in charge of everything, and 70 percent of people worked for the government, and the highest aspiration was to get a government job. That was one of the reasons why I left for the United States.¹ —Arnold Schwarzenegger

Data presented in the first installment of this series were designed to serve as groundwork for an interpretive analysis of how and why American weightlifting failed to stay abreast with the rest of the world from the end of the 1960s to the early 1990s. What follows is by no means the first attempt to identify the factors that influenced changes in the power structure of the sport. Louis Simmons, from a powerlifting perspective, attributes American inferiority to a lack of basic power. “Our lighter lifters especially must increase their leg and hip strength,” Simmons argued in 1994, adding that foreign lifters perceive U.S. lifters as lacking strength. “To succeed at weight lifting . . . you must be very strong.”² Long-time weightlifting coach Carl Miller concurs. “Olympic Lifting is actually Powerlifting,” he contended in 1985, “To the purist, it is to the 4th Dimension. Doing something athletically using speed, timing, agility, and flexibility in the coordinated power chain of hips and legs, back, and then arms against an immovable object! Now this is real power!! The most powerful sport of all!!!”³ The 2005 scientific formulations by Mike Stone and a team of researchers draw much the same conclusion—“that maximum strength is strongly related to weightlifting performance independent of

body mass and height differences.”⁴

Lyle McDonald’s 2008 internet series, “Why the US Sucks at Olympic Lifting,” regards such views as simplistic, that “maximal strength is only relevant to OL performance up to a certain point, beyond that point it doesn’t help (and may even hurt).” Yet McDonald’s own interpretation of American weightlifting woes, smothered in a welter of 22 lengthy discourses, covers Kenyan runners, cycling, NASCAR, baseball, doping, swimming, speed skating, and much else while never directly addressing the actual state of American weightlifting, much less how it developed.⁵ While informative and entertaining, McDonald’s focus is more on the present than the past. Andrew (Bud) Charniga’s six-part series, “There Is No System,” published in 2009-2010, exhibits historical awareness, but its perspective is limited to the 1950s and 1960s with scant attention to the critical changes that were taking place during the 1970s and 1980s. Despite its inclusion of a multitude of data and references to foreign sources, Charniga’s account is premised by unwarranted assumptions that early American success was almost totally the result of devastation wrought by World War II on Soviet and Eastern European nations and that American decline was attributable largely to “the commercialization of the ‘Power Rack’ (Functional Isometrics),” an obsession with big muscles, and reliance on static strength training.⁶

Yet embedded in these rambling accounts is a verity that coincides with the hypothesis drawn at the conclusion of the first part of this series. McDonald’s stream of consciousness brings to light an underlying element of compulsion and conformity within the Soviet and Eastern European regimes. “First and foremost,” he concludes, was the belief that, “the success of the state as a whole is more important than the success of the indi-

Correspondence to: Dr. John Fair, NEZ 5.700, Dept. of Kinesiology & Health Education, Stark Center, University of Texas at Austin, 78712.
Email: john.fair@gcsu.edu

vidual. Folks are raised to put the success of the country before their own individual needs and that means doing what they are told is best for the country. . . . It was about proving that Communism was a superior political ideology without having to go to actual war and risk getting nuked.”⁷

Charniga is even more direct. “The reasons for the USA’s rise and fall in the international weightlifting arena, if enumerated one by one, are many,” he admits, but “the core reason for the descent can be summed up in one word: communism.” As for America, he argues, “There Is No System.”⁸ The current study, drawing largely on the periodical literature from 1970 to 1992, seeks to show the historical process whereby the democratic/free enterprise West was directly challenged by the collectivist/totalitarian Eastern bloc for weightlifting supremacy.⁹ But this USA vs. The World encounter on the weightlifting platform was merely a reflection of a larger power struggle between conflicting ideologies. While the influence of leaders, lifters, and drugs cannot be discounted, America’s increasingly lackluster performance was systemic in nature, rooted deeply in the ethos of its capitalist culture.

Within this broader context, the six Olympic cycles discussed in the preceding data analysis provide a framework to identify some of the agents of change. While it was possible to overlook or rationalize America’s decline to a second-rate weightlifting power in the 1960s, the staging of the 1970 world championships in Columbus, Ohio, the first ever in the United States, provided a stark awareness that the performance gulf with the rest of the world was a problem that was only going to get worse. Despite a silver medal by mid-heavyweight Phil Grippaldi and a bronze by heavy-weight Bob Bednarski, Soviet bloc lifters dominated the competition, leading *Strength & Health* editor Bill Starr to ask “What was so different about the European lifters, and especially the Russians, from our own men?” He responded that for every registered American lifter, the Russians had hundreds, hence a “larger crop” from which to draw elite athletes. Once identified, the talented lifter “gains much more attention in the USSR than he does in this country. This, naturally, stems back to the national system of government support. The Soviet lifter is provided with facilities, coaching, and constant encouragement.” Hence he can “give his full attention to the sport” and with more time to train “can train harder. . . . The point does have to be brought home to our



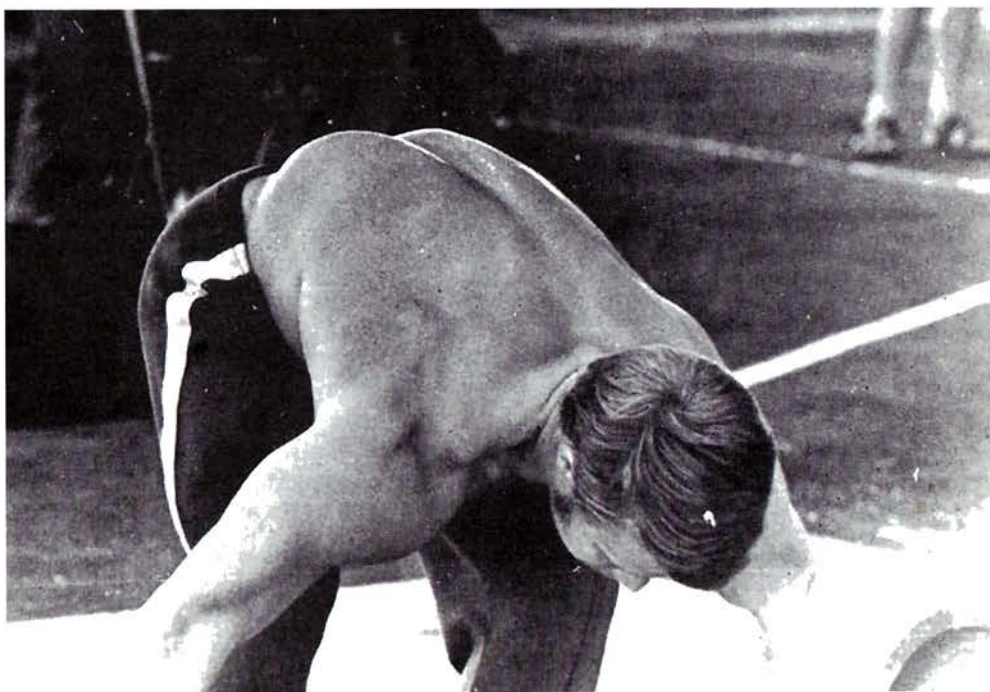
No athlete is more closely identified with the supremacy of the Soviet weightlifting system than superheavyweight Olympic and World Champion Vasily Alexeyev. During his long career, Alexeyev broke 80 world records, won gold medals in the 1972 and 1976 Olympic Games, and won a total of eight World Championships in weightlifting as the Olympic Games are also the world championships in the year the Games are held.

younger lifters, however, that larger and larger doses of anabolics, gimmick training methods, and the like are not the secrets of success. It was once said that any type of technique and any type of program will result in success if you work at it hard enough. Unquestionably the foreign lifters were stronger. . . . Strength, weightlifting fans, is still the name of the game.”¹⁰ Starr also expressed concern that some officials care more about themselves than their athletes and that most American lifters believe that the “gap” between athletes and administrators “has widened, which is quite tragic for the sport.”¹¹

Iron Man editor Peary Rader concurred that “American lifting has a problem.” Rader, benefitting from on-site observations and conversations at Columbus with Polish coaches, was told that “we were following the wrong training methods and that when we change our methods and get better organization (they claim we are very poorly organized and have no unity in our efforts) it will still take at least two years before we can change our downward trend and level off and eventually get started back up again and that it may be 10 years or more before we can come back.” Similarly, an American observer backstage told Rader that “one of our failures was in the area of team spirit. He felt that the USA team members were individualists and were in there for themselves whereas the European lifters worked as a team and encouraged each other tremendously.” While there did not appear to be much difference in training exercises or diets, European programs seemed more intense. In contrast to the frequent or long layoffs Americans often took between meets, Iron Curtain athletes rarely let a day or two elapse between sessions and were usually back to hard training immediately after a meet. Perhaps it was some new drugs they were using, but it was obvious to Rader that their lifters were stronger than the Americans. He was impressed with the development of the spinal erector muscles on many Russian lifters, especially light-heavyweight Gennadi Ivanchenko as he bent over for a snatch pull in the training hall. “It was the most amazing sight I have seen in a long time.” For Rader as well as Starr, it appeared that state socialization led to more efficient training practices, camaraderie, and strength.¹²

The response to these kinds of concerns was a

desire for greater regimentation of American lifting protocol. It appeared to be a daunting task inasmuch as the Soviet Union was supposedly devoting billions of rubles yearly to the development of its sports programs where its elite athletes, posing as students, army officers, or factory workers, received full government support to train and rewards for winning Olympic and world championship medals. “Sport is a profession” admitted heavyweight Olympic weightlifting champion Yuri Vlasov.¹³ In America most weightlifters were scattered throughout the country and had full-time jobs. One way to reach them was through periodic clinics, a task voluntarily undertaken by Carl Miller, a physical educator from New Mexico, who offered budding lifters a choice of three routines, all of which stressed a combination of power and form. The one from Russia “has been copied to a great degree with success,” he noted.¹⁴ Chairman Rudy Sablo reported at the 1971 annual meeting of the



No wonder Peary Rader was so impressed with the lower back of Russian light-heavyweight Gennadi Ivanchenko. In his caption for this photo in *Iron Man* (February 1971): 49, Rader wrote: “We have mentioned before our amazement at the lower back development of some of the Russian lifters . . . and managed to snap this photo . . . showing the unbelievable depth of development of the erector muscles. Keep in mind that he is bending over so that the muscles are stretched and flattened. Now try to imagine, if you can, how they bulge when he stands erect. They must have a depth of three or four inches. We could not believe it was possible and wonder how it was done. Some say high pulls, but we have seen men doing high pulls who have nothing like this.” On that same page Rader also noted that the erectors of several of the Russian lifters, “look like two huge balled biceps muscles.”

National AAU Weightlifting Committee that numerous successful clinics had been held around the country, including a five-hour session at the national championships, and Athletes Representative Russ Knipp, a former Olympian and world record holder in the press, presented a blueprint calling for national coaches, more lifting clinics, and greater communication through a national newsletter with up-to-date information on training methods and techniques.¹⁵ Sablo's successor, Bob Crist, reiterated the importance of clinics but placed the highest priority on recruitment of top lifting prospects to be carried out by an international selection committee composed of 11 leaders throughout the country. "Lifting the USA to a world power in weightlifting is still our primary goal," Crist insisted.¹⁶

Much would depend on engaging the nation's youth, but high schools and universities did not stress Olympic sports, and strong prejudices persisted among coaches that weightlifting would make their athletes muscle-bound, slow, and inflexible.¹⁷ According to Ray Yeager, the nascent Junior Olympic Weightlifting Program, funded in part by Quaker Oats, provided "the most practical vehicle at our disposal" to train young boys, mostly at YMCAs. What was needed in the meantime, however, was "a nation-wide system of coaches reporting to a national coach, better organization of local weightlifting committees—with a real responsibility to the national coach."¹⁸ By now, after another dismal performance by Americans at the 1971 world championships in Lima, Peru, the idea of greater central direction through a national coach was gaining momentum in official circles, owing in part to the comments by Armenian heavyweight Sergo Ambartsumian to the question of "Why are the Soviet lifters so strong?"

The secret of the successes of our weightlifters is due to the mass character of Soviet sports in general and in particular, weightlifting. Presently, there are specialized weightlifting sports schools in many cities of the country. Each year they become bigger. Highly qualified specialists with a superior education in physical culture are employed in order for the weightlifters to have a good material and technical basis, many specialized palaces and halls for weightlifting have been built in

recent years. Of no small importance is the fact that the coaching has been assigned to former greats of the 'iron game' such as Rudy Plukfelder, Fedor Bogdanovsky, and Alexy Medvedev. These are the factors, in my opinion, that form the basis for success.¹⁹

Proof of the efficacy of the Soviet system cited by Ambartsumian was 1971 mid-heavyweight world champion David Rigert, who started at one of the Soviet sports schools in 1966 and went on to set twelve world records.²⁰

American officials estimated it would cost about \$25,000 per year and require at least four years to implement a national coaching scheme to resemble the Soviet model, but all proposals calling for financial contributions by the sport's membership were rejected at the 1972 national committee in Detroit.²¹ Nevertheless, with AAU funding for a coach but not the program, the executive committee approved a national coaching plan at the 1972 Olympics in Munich to be effective 1 January 1973.²² Duties would include the conduct of clinics throughout the country to train coaches and young lifters and supervise a coaching school at a central headquarters. Hopes were high that Tommy Kono, America's greatest weightlifter and national coach for Mexico in 1968 and Germany in 1972 would accept the position, but he wisely turned down the meager recompense and instead became Director of Physical Fitness for the Recreation Department of Hawaii which included a handsome salary, benefits, and a settled family life. Instead the committee chose Carl Miller who had directed a successful teenage weightlifting camp in July 1972 at the Marine Corps Training Center in Arlington, Virginia. Here 16 budding champions were subjected to a grueling week-long program modeled on successful European training methods. They included a variety of general fitness activities and two lifting sessions where the teenagers were exposed to the Russian Split Routine and the Russian 4-Day Routine. "Athletes! That is what we had at the 1972 Teen-Age Weightlifting Camp," boasted Miller. "You can talk all about your European and Asian weightlifters being able to do gymnastics, track & field, soccer, etc.," he explained, "But after coaching the champion teenagers of this country I wouldn't trade our teenagers for any of them. These guys could do anything—splits, back flips, front flips,

jump 30" above their height, standing broad jump ten feet, wrestle, play a good game of soccer. You name it, they can do it, and well.²³ What most impressed Miller, despite their long hair and psychedelic attire, was "the emotional soundness of these athletes. They have their feet on the ground."²⁴ Still, by the end of the summer no provision was made for the coach's salary or his headquarters. It remained to be seen whether a voluntary system drawing on limited financial and human resources could successfully emulate and compete against the massive state systems put into place decades earlier.

Results from the 1972 Olympics were hardly uplifting. American lifters made their poorest showing in recent times and for the first time in modern Olympic history won no medals. Nor was the future international outlook encouraging, with athletes from 53 countries entering weightlifting events and 11 of them represented on the medal stands. Furthermore Bulgaria, a nation of under 9,000,000 and a GNP of 2.7% that of the Soviet Union (with 253,000,000), toppled the highly favored Russians to win team honors, showing that a government managed sports system could be effective in producing remarkable results. The message was clear: if Bulgaria can be a giant killer, any nation can do it with the right system.²⁵ Ignoring the ideological implications, pundit Herb Glossbrenner had a different view of the Bulgarian triumph, reasoning that the American team accomplished more than the Soviets by having fewer lifters (one vs. four) who failed to make a total. "Weightlifting is once again on the up-swing in this country," he believed, "we should be proud of this year's Olympic squad . . . Let us have more bouquets and less brickbats for our lifters."²⁶ Peary Rader was no less upbeat, confident that the hiring of a national coach was the beginning of "a huge effort" that would result in some gold medals in 1976 at Montreal. "We learned a great deal about how other teams are making champions in our stay in Germany this year. It isn't all the fault of our lifting fraternity, but partly the fault of our society in general. Can we meet the challenge? We think we can."²⁷ Hope persisted that the United States, the world's richest and most powerful country, could beat the socialist countries by making sufficient adjustments to its free enterprise sports economy.

Such aspirations, however, were out of synch with reality. Part of the problem was that most financial support for American weightlifting, by way of training facilities, travel, and even jobs, had come from Bob

Hoffman and York Barbell since the 1930s. His model of corporate socialization had fostered a "golden age" of American weightlifting until the state socialization model put in place by the Soviet Union after World War II began producing athletes superior to Bob's lifters in the 1960s. Stinging from this Cold War defeat and consequent loss of international prestige, Hoffman increasingly directed his attention and resources to softball, powerlifting, national politics, and other activities. Prior to 1973, Bob devoted an estimated \$25,000 yearly to softball and over \$100,000 in subsequent years. At one time he sponsored 17 York County teams and even sent them on extensive trips.²⁸ "Power lifting is sweeping the country by storm," observed Peary Rader in 1969. By 1973 it had clearly surpassed Olympic lifting, according to Denis Reno, who predicted that it would soon become the "number one lifting sport in the world" and "placed in the Olympic Games by 1980."²⁹ As Bob Crist explains, "Bob wanted to go out a winner." He not only sponsored numerous national competitions but supported the creation of an International Powerlifting Federation (IPF) and hosted the first world powerlifting championships in York in 1971. It was he who "bankrolled the IPF and really got powerlifting moving" in the 1970s.³⁰ All of this left Olympic lifters in the lurch.

A vicious cycle ensued whereby the more Hoffman's interests diverged from Olympic weightlifting the more his residual influence was resented, especially as a generation gap emerged between athletes and their elders. It culminated in the firing of his editor Bill Starr for a 1971 article which was not so much a defense of the use of steroids and amphetamines by youthful lifters as an assault on the hypocrisy of the York establishment.³¹ The article was a clarion call for rebellion to many of the rising generation of athletes. From that point, as Hoffman became less committed and more disengaged with American weightlifting, it became imperative that the national weightlifting committee fill the void. But national chairman Crist, although an unpaid volunteer, was expected not only to supervise fund raising and national coaching efforts for weightlifting but to administer AAU powerlifting and physique, and serve as IPF president after 1972. It seemed like an impossible challenge, but he seemed undaunted. Crist even hosted the 1973 Senior National Weightlifting Championships at the College of William and Mary near his home in Virginia. Despite Crist's best laid plans to showcase

weightlifting to the American public, cameras from CBS *Sports Spectacular* recorded the sorry spectacle of lifter after lifter bombing out or performing below his potential. Evidence of drugs, both ergogenic and recreational, were much in evidence not only in the lifting but in a tragic episode of lawlessness and destruction afterwards. “What has happened to us?” asked Tom Holbrook, Starr’s successor. There was “something drastically wrong.” Light-heavyweight Joe Puleo

*recently told me that when he looked at [Gennadi] Ivanchenko and [Vasily] Kolotov at the '70 World Championships, 'I could see the handwriting on the wall.' He knew we weren't ever going to win again and in his opinion, our lifters have simply given up. . . . The comment of Dick Smith also comes to mind. He said that many of our lifters don't even act like men any more. . . . The sport has been infiltrated by a collection of freaks who are trying to corrupt everyone around them. Like a bunch of demented pharmacists, they can be seen snaking their way around the meets bent on perverting others to the insanity of their world.*³²

Holbrook concluded that “we are in trouble!”³³ The descent continued at the 1973 world championships in Havana where four of the seven Americans failed to make a total, and the team finished twelfth behind Czechoslovakia, Iran, Italy, and Cuba, the most hated Communist vassal state. “NO OTHER AMERICAN TEAM EVER MADE SUCH A MISERABLE FAILURE,” Hoffman exclaimed. “U.S. WEIGHTLIFTING IS AT ITS LOWEST EBB.”³⁴

The lifters responded by submitting two reports that blamed their administrators for the team’s poor showing in Cuba. They complained not only about the incompetence of their coaches and assistants but about the “lack of knowledge and awareness” of the numerous “tourists” who accompanied the team. The lifters felt few members of the American delegation “seemed concerned about the athlete’s needs, his aspirations, and how to best help him to perform to his optimum level.” Their second report recognized that “the gap separating the U.S. from the other major lifting powers has been grow-

ing wider at an ever increasing rate.” It focused on proposals to restore America to a “respected,” if not dominant position in the world. Their implementation would cost money, and “unfortunately, he who currently foots the bill (Bob Hoffman) and who does love the sport enough to do so, does not also have the best personnel for the job.”³⁵ But there were no other sources of funding in sight. Furthermore, at the annual AAU convention in October at West Yellowstone, Montana, the reaction of members of the national weightlifting committee to the lifters’ grievances, reported Clarence Bass, was “point the finger back at the athletes and say that they were not sufficiently disciplined, etc. Little was said in defense of the athletes. The discussion seemed to focus on finding a better way to pick our athletes for future international competitions.” But the committee was no more successful than the athletes in identifying sources of funding to implement reforms. The USOC had allocated \$15,000 to weightlifting for 1973, but stipulated that none of it could be used to fund salaries. “We cannot have the full time coaches we need without salaries,” Bass pointed out. Hence Carl Miller’s position was downgraded from coach to national coordinator. For the period leading up to the 1976 Olympics, the committee requested \$170,000 or \$56,700 per year from the USOC, mostly to fund clinics, camps, and international travel.³⁶

Feeling that the legitimate proposals of the Havana seven had fallen on deaf ears, other lifters with similar feelings of bitterness and frustration, led by ex-York lifter Charlie Shields, formed the American Weight Lifting Association (AWLA) to serve the lifters and provide an outlet for grievances against the AAU. That it planned an annual budget of \$25,000, mostly from membership fees, to send top unaffiliated lifters to national and world championships, however, would put a pinch on already limited funding sources within the Iron Game.³⁷ Obviously the dissension between youthful lifters and their elders had a lot to do with the dramatic slump in American lifting in 1973, leading three of the signatories to state they “never want to compete in another World Championship. It’s just too damned frustrating when you know you’re beat before you even start.”³⁸

Their defeat, however, was no less a product of advancement in world weightlifting standards. The most obvious explanation was the elimination of the press. Conventional wisdom suggested that records in the snatch and clean and jerk would soar. Tom Holbrook

believed, with less work and time devoted to pressing muscles, there would be a significant improvement in the remaining lifts of “at least 2½ to 5 kilos higher in most classes.” David Rigert concurred that “there’ll be greater possibilities for rapid growth in the quick lifts, especially for the younger lifters.”³⁹ *Strength & Health* even featured a ten-part series authored by leading lifters on “Training Without the Press” to assist with the transition.⁴⁰ According to Bud Charniga, America’s top lifters had been “keeping up internationally in the press but falling behind in the other two movements.”⁴¹ However, a compilation of data of all three movements by Herb Glossbrenner shows that America, despite the widening performance gap that appeared in 1973, was no less adept than the Russians historically in the quick lifts and even somewhat inferior in the press. Of the top 100 pressers through September 1972, regardless of year or bodyweight, 49 were Russians and 12 were Americans, while comparable figures for the snatch and clean and jerk were 48 to 15 and 58 to 15 respectively.⁴² While elimination of the press hastened the retirement of middleweight Russ Knipp, one of the world’s best pressers, in 1972, mid-heavyweight Phil Grippaldi, also known for his huge presses, placed generally higher, at seventh, than the average of his American contemporaries, at 8.6 in international competition over the next four years. The belief that Americans suffered unduly from the loss of the press when it had never been their strongest lift cannot be sustained.⁴³ Furthermore, as shown in Part One of this series, it was not so much that Americans were getting better in the quick lifts as that other countries were improving more.

What else then, aside from the general malaise that set in, can explain the sudden and lasting differential between America and the rest of the world after 1972? For one thing, continuous revelations of superior training environments in socialist countries played no small part in lowering American morale. Cuba, now seventh in the world, had also leaped to the forefront of Pan-American nations. In 1974 Soviet correspondent Yur Salomakhim explained there were:

84 weightlifting clubs in Cuba. In each club there are 10 barbells. 13 thousand Cubans go in for weightlifting. Soviet trainers have stood by the baby cradle of Cuban weightlifting. In 1966, 37 trainers were ready for duty. Before

that there were none at all. Now there are 119. Young chaps in Cuba go in for barbells at the age of 14.”⁴⁴

On a visit to Russia, Pete Talluto, an American lifter stationed with the Army in Europe, observed that “everyone talks about weightlifting in the streets and shops. One can listen daily to discussions on his favorite’s success and world lifts.” The first thing one notices upon entering a training hall “is the tense atmosphere. Here the business is the training of world champions. Each one gives 100% in his training. No unnecessary conversation is permitted.” Particularly important was the training of those muscles specific to Olympic lifting. “The entire back is strongly developed.” Novices, starting at age 14 or 15, used lighter weights to perfect style but “remarkably heavy weights in assistance exercises. They also employed a variety of general conditioning movements, including short dashes, jumping exercises, acrobatics, and practice on parallel bars. Finally, “Russian lifters have unlimited time for training” with all expenses and modern conveniences paid by the government. It was, Talluto concluded, a “paradise of lifters.”⁴⁵ Such conditions were in sharp contrast to the latitude permitted American lifters, some of whom, according to Rader, “are completely lacking in the necessary discipline, not only in their training habits, but in their personal living habits. This is something that is strictly enforced in other countries and is one of the secrets of their superiority. In America this situation is not confined to weight lifting, of course, but is a part of our total permissive society in which discipline seems to be a misunderstood word.”⁴⁶ To become a world champion, Rader believed, a lifter must “channel all his efforts and his whole life in this one direction.”⁴⁷ Yet America’s free-wheeling capitalist system could not easily accommodate such a regimented lifestyle without government intervention or the lure of big money.

It was not so much that money alone could solve the nation’s weightlifting ills; it was more a matter of how the money was raised and spent. In his monthly New England newsletter in March 1973, Denis Reno announced that matching funds from a lifting booster would be available for donations up to \$500, but by the following month he received just \$15.00⁴⁸ Sensing the national coaching program was in jeopardy, Clarence Bass lamented that Carl Miller continued to conduct camps and clinics unpaid. Although the USOC was

making “rumbling sounds” of possible support, Bass argued that “what has been done so far has been on a ‘poor boy’ basis to say the least. American weightlifting deserves better.”⁴⁹ Though sympathetic with the appeal for voluntary funding, one prospective donor noted that it was “being made when we are on the bottom of the heap, so to speak. It is always difficult to gain support for something that might be viewed as a lost cause.”⁵⁰ To the fund-raisers, however, it was hardly a lost cause. George Nagy reminded *Strength & Health* readers that the United States still ranked second to the Soviet Union in Olympic gold medals won, 20 to 14, since 1936 but that five other Soviet bloc nations ranked ahead of America in distribution of worldwide power in weightlifting. To stem this decline, Nagy believed it was imperative to “act now!”⁵¹

Undaunted by continued American setbacks at the 1974 and 1975 world championships, Carl Miller, at his own expense, continued an exhausting pace of clinics nationwide. More importantly, he attempted to establish the components for a national coaching system. First, he attempted to tap some training precepts of the Bulgarians, who were often outperforming the Soviets. To this end he visited Ivan Abadjiev, the Bulgarian National Coach, who was known for implementing a system renowned for its brutal intensity. These methods, Miller observed, were “based on the theory of adaptation. Man can undergo great stresses if he is allowed to adapt to them slowly.” Abadjiev also initiated an intensive recruiting program for young boys who showed promise and worked with medical authorities to establish an appropriate level of intensity without resorting to drugs. Abadjiev’s athletes “train with great intensity and they know that they have made one great effort of which to be proud. They say, ‘What is four years to give for the honor of your country?’”⁵² Abadjiev later revealed to Talluto that

Our lifters develop best by training with weights which are close to their best contest weights and perform their contest lifts and movements which are like contest lifts with these top weights. . . . A known fact is that the training load and intensity represents the physiological stimulation which produces the desired reaction in the muscular system. A large training load and high intensity

*produces a large stimulation and causes a strong reaction in the system which results in more deep seated physiological, morphological and psychological changes.*⁵³

Even protégés enforced the rigid disciplinary measures invoked by Abadjiev in Sofia, as world champion Valentin Hristov reveals of his training under Viktor Dimchev at a state-sponsored center in Pernik. At age 15 he was hoisting as much as 1200 tons per month. “My muscles would begin to feel more or less normal only on those days when, totally exhausted, I would swear off the weights and wait for Dimchev to come to the house to take me back to the gym.” A carefully regulated drug regimen enabled further intensification. According to Hristov, prior to the 1976 Olympics Abadjiev was giving him, per week, 180 five-milligram Dianabol tablets as well as a weekly injection of Deca-Durabolin.⁵⁴

In order to determine what level of intensity might be appropriate for American lifters Miller urged adoption of the “K Value,” a formula he learned from Mexican and other European coaches that enabled a lifter to adjust his poundages and repetitions to reach an optimal total that he might realistically expect to achieve in competition. “I can’t stress enough the importance of planning around the K value,” he advised lifters. “It is a basic tool.”⁵⁵ First and foremost, however, was the need to establish a national training center. “Stationed at a University, we would have many lifters actually going to the school and others who would come in and out all year long. It would be a place where top-quality training and learning would take place.” To support such an enterprise, he even elicited the interest of the president of a leading life insurance firm, thereby imparting movement to weightlifting’s stalled fund-raising efforts.⁵⁶ Thus it was somewhat of a surprise that Miller, after all his efforts over four years, should resign his post at the 1976 AAU national meeting in Phoenix. His decision likely stemmed from the selection, by a seven to six vote, of Tommy Kono to the prestigious position of Olympic coach by the national weightlifting committee.⁵⁷

Miller’s loss along with his socialization initiatives, however, seemed less significant than the silver medal won at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal by mid-heavyweight Lee James, a “home alone” lifter from

Albany, Georgia. Celebrations ensued. “As Lee mounted the second place position on the podium to receive his medal,” reported Bruce Klemens, “a great tumult greeted him, even louder than the winner, David Rigert, received. This great jubilation was accompanied by tears of joy from many old-time lifting diehards, as well as from Lee himself.”⁵⁸ “Hip, hip, hooray!” exclaimed Fritz Mahoney of Erie, Pennsylvania, who noted that three other Americans—Phil Grippaldi, Mark Cameron, and Bruce Wilhelm—also came close to winning medals, adding “I really feel that we are back on the right track.” J. L. Hewitt of Fort Lauderdale also believed James’ success would inspire others and maintained that “we will win a gold medal in Moscow” in 1980, adding that “Nothing breeds confidence like success.”⁵⁹

What was hidden by this euphoria was the less pleasant fact that the American team finished just eighth, lifted as a team 60 kilos less than they had at the national championships in Philadelphia, and had two of its members, Grippaldi and Cameron, test positive for steroids.⁶⁰ Furthermore, despite strenuous efforts to provide ideal living and training conditions, including pre-competition camps at York and Plattsburgh, New York, “to establish team spirit,” reported Kono, “personality clashes among several team members made this virtually impossible.”⁶¹ Denis Reno, Miller’s successor, was quick to recognize “the personality problem” that persisted as a standoff between lifters and administrators since the athletes’ report of 1973. He urged both sides to redirect their energies to support fund raising, better coaching, and the implementation of a national plan. “We do not have the resources to waste on building up individual athlete’s or administrator’s egos. We do not have the time to spend blaming each other for every failure we encounter. And we cannot waste our emotions on jumping on the negative ‘we’ll never make it’ bandwagon.” A lengthy letter arguing the lifters’ point of view for the sake of “democracy and freedom,” submitted by Athletes’ Representative Arthur Drechsler to the national committee in December 1976, only added fuel to the fire.⁶² A final constraint to American development was the under-utilization of the medium of television which was broadcasting an increasing number and variety of sports in the 1970s. The cameras showed up in Montreal, but lifting fans were disappointed, according to Bill Penner, by ABC’s coverage. “Most of the lighter body-weight classes received only a minute or two of coverage. Then the superheavyweights were given more than



Weightlifting coach Carl Miller, shown here working with York team member, Kim Goss, spent hundreds of hours in the 1970s working for the betterment of American weightlifting. Miller wanted a national coaching program but could never garner the economic support to make it a reality. Through 1976 he gave clinics around the country, generally at his own expense, in which he introduced American lifters to the training techniques then being used in the Soviet bloc.

their share of coverage, along with a sensational story about the absurd quantities of food that these 300-plus pounders eat.”⁶³ In striking contrast to the coverage given to Russian gymnast Olga Korbut at the 1972 Olympics, who became America’s sweetheart and helped gymnastics become a popular sport, viewers got to watch Vasily Alexeev’s belly, which reinforced many of the stereotypes about weightlifters, discouraged parents of prospective lifters, and projected the worst possible image of the sport to average Americans. It was a punch in the gut to United States weightlifting.⁶⁴

By this time a new regime was in place in the US, the result of a restructuring which separated AAU powerlifting and physique from weightlifting, now headed by Murray Levin, a retired New York City stockbroker.⁶⁵ Levin recalled that when he took over “we had

\$300 in the bank. . . . The USOC had no real monies to give us. We had no sponsors, the athletes went overseas in ripped up dirty sweatsuits” and “coaches and managers paid their own way.”⁶⁶ Utilizing his Wall Street experience, and connections inherited from Crist and Miller, Levin picked up the fund-raising pace, first by tapping lifting loyalists at meets for money to send athletes on trips. He also held income-generating events. The Europe vs. The Americas contest held near his home in Gettysburg in December 1975 enabled him, with \$1,000 from the USOC, to send a nine-man team to the Junior World Championships the following June at a cost of \$9,000.⁶⁷ A corporate break-through occurred in early 1977 when Sears & Roebuck agreed to sponsor the Junior Olympic program to prepare weightlifters for international competition. Sears President Dean Swift wanted to provide young American athletes the same opportunities as state-run programs in Eastern Europe. His company’s goal was to “help get the Gold at the 1980 Olympics.”⁶⁸ Perhaps Levin’s boldest move was his staging of the Record Makers Invitational at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas in December 1977. Although no records were set, no Americans excelled, two Russians failed to make weight, and the Cubans and Bulgarians withdrew, the meet was a dazzling success. “Everyone came to enjoy themselves in this center of capitalist decadence,” reported Bruce Klemens.

Imagine, if you will, a huge wheel of chance in the plush Aladdin casino. Surrounding the betting table, wagering silver dollars on the spin of the wheel are Vopronin, Nassiri, Vardanyan, and Rakhmanov. And who do you think is spinning the wheel, but Alexeev himself? Not content merely to give the wheel a gentle spin, Alexeev would rear back and yank it with all his might, revving it up to about 500 RPMs and threatening to send it into orbit. After spinning for what seemed an eternity, the wheel would finally stop, invariably not on any number the lifters had bet on. This happened numerous times until their supply of dollars was exhausted. Every time the croupier cleared the money from the table, Rakhmanov would give him a glare guaranteed to

*scare Godzilla.*⁶⁹

Owing to an injured right wrist, Alexeev was unable to even attempt any world records, but his one-hand snatch with his other arm of 220 pounds pleased the audience in the auditorium and viewers on television who tuned in to see the world’s strongest man.⁷⁰

In essence it was a victory for American weightlifting. Levin was delighted with the image presented to the world. Television ratings were high, national committee members and athletes were properly dressed and “behaving like Americans should,” and he was receiving requests from other countries for more matches in the United States and invitations to meets abroad. Levin was especially pleased with the income generated by Record Makers which, along with increased USOC funding, added about \$70,000 to weightlifting coffers. “This means we are no longer a pauper sport having to run auctions, passing hats around during meets, selling old magazines, or running raffles.” Levin did not believe American lifters could overtake the Soviet Union by 1980, “with its vast number of lifters” (about 500,000 to “our 5,000”), but he did believe this meet would be “the final clincher to make us a power in World Weightlifting.”⁷¹

A by-product of these successes was an immediate improvement in morale and relations between athletes and administrators. “The National Committee has never been better organized or more active and with less friction than it is at the present time,” observed Peary Rader. “Olympic Lifting is really booming and growing rapidly in this country.” Adding to this boom was the ability of Levin to secure the 1978 world championships in Gettysburg and the sponsorship of Mack Truck for American weightlifting. As he explained ten years later to Bud Charniga, he had approached the trucking concern in 1976, “but after our men were caught on drugs I lost two years in getting them to come in. . . . Upon running the world championships in Gettysburg in 1978 Mack committed to sponsorship and has been with us ever since.”⁷² Furthermore the USOC, consequent to the break-up of the AAU that resulted in a streamlining of weightlifting, was playing a greater role in the preparation of athletes, not only by increased funding but by setting up Olympic training facilities, including a major center in Colorado Springs. A week-long sports festival there in July 1978 was a premonition of more centralizing tendencies to come.⁷³ These kinds of governmental



Ivan Abadjiev, shown here with a 286.5 pound (130 kilo) clean and jerk, was the first Bulgarian weightlifter to win a medal in the World Weightlifting Championships. In 1957, in Tehran, he took the silver in the 67.5 kilo (148 pound) class. After retiring, Abadjiev turned his attention to coaching and was the guiding force behind Bulgaria's rise to the heights of weightlifting.

and corporate efforts led Rader to speculate on whether it was possible to mimic the "pattern followed by the Soviets" to achieve maximum success, the most noteworthy example being Alexeev. It would enable dedicated American athletes to devote their full time to weightlifting and, according to Rader, "attain the highest potential possible. . . . We are moving in the direction of implementing these things." However, no mention was made of the fact that the highly regimented Soviet sports machine was merely a small but highly visible part of its totalitarian society. Could the United States create a totalitarian sports regime without risking the freedoms it enjoyed within its free enterprise system?⁷⁴

It was obvious that there were no easy answers to these questions, and frequent interaction with Eastern Europeans never seemed to simplify the matter. To Ken Leistner of New York City it was "not as simple as saying that we ought to train eight hours per day because the Bulgarians do. . . . The key is, and has always been, to learn how to do the two lifts. After that, just get stronger than any of your opponents." From watching the Europe vs. Americas match in 1975, Doug Cooney concluded "the Europeans are just stronger than our lifters," and better conditioned, but they were also "similar to ourselves. Stronger yes, perhaps more drive but still humans."⁷⁵ Slow motion movies revealed that many European lifters had serious flaws in technique, accord-

ing to Rader. "What these champions do have is unbelievable, superhuman power." He recognized that "better conditioning methods, more intense training systems, 'living for lifting only' systems as used in some European countries are major factors in their superior lifting ability." It was especially puzzling to him to see that some "very small countries with very low lifting populations lifting well above what our men do." Despite the recent optimism in American lifting, "it looks like an impossible task for us to reach the top again."⁷⁶ Most revealing were the comments of three American lifters and their coach that appeared in *Sovietskii Sport* just after the Friendship Cup match in Moscow in 1978. When asked whether there were journalists who were popularizing Olympic lifting in the United States, one of them replied:

The best popularizer of weightlifting in the U.S. is Vassilii Alexeev. As poorly as weightlifting is known in America, everybody knows Alexeev. He is now the weightlifting 'ambassador' to all the world.

When can the level of weightlifting in the U.S. be expected to rise? Under the existing circumstances, never! answered someone.

Why? retorted another. If we find people who love sport, and not the money in sport, then a rise is possible.⁷⁷

What remained unclear, however, was how, in a capitalist-driven society such as the United States, could any young lifters at the beginning of their working lives be expected to make such sacrifices simply out of love for the sport and not money.

Any dreams of rising to the top again remained especially dim after the dismal performance of American lifters at the 1977 and 1978 world championships. Even the Russians adopted a pitying tone, stating that *they* did not look good beating the United States in its current state. According to Levin, they suggested "some of our best Junior and developing lifters come to Russia to learn the sport."⁷⁸ Since money alone seemed to be having little impact on the nation's weightlifting ills, some of the best minds in the sport addressed the issue in a

more systematic way, first by a massive survey drawn up by Dr. Fred Hatfield, a physical education professor at the University of Wisconsin, to determine coaching, recruitment, and training practices in the United States, and secondarily by a proposal to establish a national research committee for weightlifting by national heavy-weight champion Mark Cameron and University of California at Long Beach professor John Garhammer.⁷⁹ Lee James, however, America's only medalist since 1970, poured cold water on such ideas, contending that studies of physiological or technical aspects of lifting were a waste of the funds recently acquired from the USOC and Mack Truck.

Gentlemen, the problem facing American weightlifting is the lifters themselves. . . . I also maintain that our lifters are subpar only psychologically. . . . The Russians approach the bar with fight and determination, ready to make the supreme effort, to succeed at any cost, because they realize that they are not participating in a game; they are soldiers in a war. God only knows what is going through the minds of our lifters, if anything. But, one can easily tell their attention is not focused on the bar. . . . All I ever hear from our lifters is how tough we have it or how we don't stand a chance of beating the Russians. Well, I am sick and tired of hearing so much whining, griping, and complaining from a bunch of wimps.⁸⁰

Peary Rader too was disappointed that weightlifting's improved financial base was not producing results, but he believed the problem was more systemic. He believed it would take a "miracle" to create world champions under the present system and that only "government sponsorship" would allow lifters to dedicate their whole time and energy to weightlifting. Rader maintained that "It is almost impossible to develop world champions in the type of society in which we live. Our society seems to place great emphasis on doing your thing, and ends in living with lack of discipline, lawlessness and richer comforts at any price."⁸¹ By this measure, whatever psychological problems American lifters had might be attributed to the lack of regimentation of thought endem-

ic in their society.

A vivid illustration of totalitarian-style training was provided by Hungarian weightlifting coach Andras Orvos at the 1979 National Sports Festival in Colorado Springs. In Hungary, Orvos explained, selected athletes would go on a four-year plan, beginning at 11 years of age with general conditioning and exposure to lifting technique. Thereafter the emphasis was on strength, stamina, and performance with most lifters peaking in nine or ten years. A classification system provided an incentive for athletes to set goals and climb to a higher level. When asked for his evaluation of American lifters, Orvos, according to American national coordinator Dick Smith, "felt our men overemphasize technique and would profit more with extra conditioning and strength work."⁸² It was obvious that the Eastern Europeans, almost in lock step, trained harder and longer than the Americans. After another lackluster performance at the 1979 world championships in Thessalonika, Smith observed that the Americans only train heavy up to a contest and that "the Bulgarian approach is even more physically demanding than the Russian system." At a Junior Cup tournament held in Silver Springs, Maryland, he witnessed the ultimate in base conditioning.

Antonio Krastev, an 18-year-old Bulgarian superheavy took an extensive backstage warmup to 374¾ in the snatch but went out and opened with 352 ½ for a nice success. He then jumped to 396¾—which was a Junior World record—and lost it overhead. Undaunted, he went to 418¾ and lost it behind him. Moving back down to 407¾ on a fourth attempt, he was again successful.

He went through another rigorous warmup for the clean and jerk and still had enough steam to give a good account of himself in this lift, ultimately trying a Junior World mark of 490½ but missed it because it was not in the groove. A fine performance indeed. However, the most unbelievable thing concerning Krastev's performance was the fact that he took a fairly heavy workout the day before the meet and trained

*again the morning of the meet.*⁸³

Smith could not gainsay the effectiveness of Bulgarian measures, but it was obvious that “our current lifestyle in this country” would never allow it.⁸⁴ American super-heavy Tom Stock and Peary Rader agreed that the Eastern Europeans had an enormous edge in strength which was the “main ingredient” to Olympic success. “Technique is extremely important, but without power, technique has very little value.” Rader argued that Alexeyev did not have the best technique, but he was the greatest superheavyweight of all time because of his “enormous power.” Likewise, David Rigert’s lifting style was hardly flawless, Rader continued, “yet he was the greatest lifter of all simply because he had an enormous amount of power and knew how to use it to his greatest advantage.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, Ken Patera, America’s strongest weightlifter of the 1970s, deserted the sport for professional wrestling, noting that in lifting he was “broke” but in wrestling was making \$100,000 a year.⁸⁶

How to obtain greater strength and translate it into power movements without selling one’s soul to the state remained a critical question for all who wanted to restore winning ways to American weightlifting. Michael Yessis, editor of *Soviet Sports Review*, advised that “the key to development of the high levels of strength that we are today witnessing is due mostly to adaptations in the nerve-muscle relationships. It is a well-established fact that the nervous system is the key to all learning and development.” Keith Connelly confirmed this connection in an experiment in which he determined that “a systematic program of isokinetic exercise will significantly increase muscular power.” In less than two months his subject, a female high school athlete, “increased her vertical jump by 25%, reflecting an increase not in static strength, but in functional explosive speed and power,” exactly the qualities needed in Olympic weightlifting.⁸⁷ This was a program later stressed by Harvey Newton, a lifting coach from Florida who was being groomed for a full-time position as national coach at the rapidly developing Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.⁸⁸ A handful of weightlifters, including light-heavy Pete Cline, mid-heavy Kevin Winter, and super-heavy Jerry Hannan made their way there to sample the facilities. Levin predicted competition lifts of 400 and 500 pounds from Hannan shortly. Several of the athletes expressed their

willingness to move there to attend school and train year-round. All of them requested Newton as their coach, and he was formally appointed on 1 January 1981. “This is one of our hopes for the future” observed Denis Reno.⁸⁹

In the meantime, hopelessness seemed more evident at the 1980 Senior Nationals in Philadelphia, which featured several lifters who came out of retirement to compete in this Olympic year. Fred Lowe, Joe Puleo, and Mike Karchut, who first won national championships over a decade earlier, came in second, first, and second respectively against the current crop of lifters. And Joe Dube, America’s last world champion in 1969, placed a respectable third as a super-heavyweight. A further indication of stagnation was the fact that many American records existed since the 1960s, and only one was broken in Philadelphia. In contrast to world record totals in 1980, they were an average of 43.38 kilos (95.44 pounds) less for each of the ten weight classes.⁹⁰ No team could compete at the 1980 Olympics in Moscow as a result of the Carter administration’s boycott, but 18 world records were set by lifters from those countries that did. Discouraged by prospects for any success against state-controlled programs, Rader believed it was “fortunate for this country that we did not get into the Olympics” and argued that weightlifting’s woes were merely part of a “national problem. It is one we must tackle from a national angle.” Indeed Rader’s concerns, much like those of other elders of his cold war generation were rooted in greater fears of America’s industrial and cultural decline relative to godless socialist powers.⁹¹

Most leaders, however, with a national training center in place and more money than ever in weightlifting coffers, seemed oblivious to structural realities, which seemed insurmountable, and tended to focus on more practical needs of American lifters. One of the easier, and now affordable, obstacles that could be overcome was more exposure for top lifters to international competition. To substitute for the 1980 Olympics, an alternative meet was arranged for boycotting nations in Shanghai, China, where the United States placed second to China but ahead of Japan and ten other nations. To Herb Glossbrenner it was indicative of “U.S. Prestige Regained,” a verdict seemingly confirmed a week later at an America Cup competition in Honolulu with another second place finish in a field of 19 countries. America’s showing reminded a Chinese official of the

era dominated by such greats as George, Kono, Sheppard, Davis, Vinci, and Schemansky. "I believe your men will become strong once again in the world."⁹² At the 1981 America Cup in Fort Lauderdale, the United States easily won over Canada, Australia, and Mexico, and took the team title against 14 nations mainly of the Pacific rim in the New Zealand Games. But at the Friendship Cup in Lvov, Soviet Union, attended by most of the best lifting countries, Americans could place no higher than fourth. Coach Dick Smith was overwhelmed by the Russians' "seemingly bottomless bag of talent, most of whom were 'terrifically built.'" Smith was especially impressed with the startling number of guest lifters, one of whom, Vladimir Marchuk, broke Alexeev's world clean and jerk record of 567½ pounds. Smith observed, "They are d-e-e-p in talent, to say the least!"⁹³ The Russians and Bulgarians were no less impressive at the 1982 Record Makers Invitational at the Playboy Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, but the Americans were the stars of the show, setting ten American records. "We may finally have turned the corner onto the road that will once again put U.S. lifting on top," exclaimed Bruce Klemens. But no American placed higher than a foreigner. Arguably the greatest athletic feat, however, was veteran Fred Lowe's 180 kilo (396 pound) clean and jerk at the 1981 Senior National Championships in San Francisco which he followed up with a 3:30 marathon in Port Huron, Michigan.⁹⁴ It is unlikely that any Russian or Bulgarian could match this achievement, but the increasingly prevalent idea during this period—that the United States was on its way back to greatness—was an illusion. [*Editors' note: Any elite Russian or Bulgarian lifter who would have even tried such a thing would have been dismissed from the national team.*]

Nor was the national training center providing any magical solution to America's weightlifting ills. Results from the 1982 Senior Nationals indicated that lifters from the USOC Training Center fared little better than non-residents with only four of the 11 placing higher than fourth and three failing to make a total. Referring individually to nine of his USOC Training Center charges, Coach Harvey Newton said such things as, "Just did not put it together," "did not make any progress," "his generally lazy attitude," "could have done better," "did not perform well," "has breakdowns in his technique," "did poorly," "does not understand the game," and "goes through the motions, but has problems

with communication between himself and me." Baffled by their lack of progress, Newton concluded that "constant time in camp seems to have taken some of the fight out of some of the lifters." A better plan might be to bring leading lifters into the center "for preparation prior to major meets, rather than spending four years here doing the same routines."⁹⁵ Roger Sadecki, observed that the lifters showed insufficient "cooperation, initiative, and enthusiasm." Later, as manager at the 1982 world championships in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, he reported some team members "were obviously not in best shape. Some seemed to have a primary purpose of trading with the Soviet and other teams. Most did not show much in training previous to competition."⁹⁶ Even a decade later Murray Levin reflected that lifters who spent extensive time at the center "became weightlifting bums and chased women at night. Not one of them has panned out."⁹⁷ It became evident to the sport's leaders that simply providing a central training facility with experienced coaches for elite athletes would not guarantee the same results as Soviet-style training halls.

What was missing was the authority and discipline that was implicit in a collectivist system and could be enforced at will. Westerners, products of a free-market economy, were individualist by acculturation and, especially after the cultural revolution of the late 1960s, were more inclined than ever to "do your own thing." It was evident at first in the rebellion and lingering resentments against the York establishment. By the early 1980s the latest generation of leaders had to cope with lifters who demanded a piece of the action. Their protest culminated in a heated exchange of letters between USWF President Murray Levin and Artie Drechsler, athletes' representative on the national committee. While insisting that he just wanted to bring change "within the system," the latter explained that "there are plenty of athletes who'd rather destroy it," and that the "battle lines were drawn." He argued that the athletes should choose half the board members.

This country was founded on the principle that all people have a right to elect those who "administer" the nation. Our government is for the people and by the people. What I'm proposing for weightlifting is nothing more and nothing less than the governing philosophy of this country! All citizens have the

*right to vote for those who will administer the country.*⁹⁸

In keeping with his “democratic” approach, Drechsler sent cards with his proposal (pre-addressed to Levin) to 75 of the top lifters, 60 of whom signed and mailed them. When the proposal came up before the Board, however, only two members, Bob Hise and Frank Bates, voted in favor. “The athletes want a say in governing our sport—they tell me that all the time,” Drechsler explained. “They’d tell you that if they thought they safely could and that you’d listen.” At the 1981 National Sports Festival in Syracuse 40 athletes, called by Drechsler “the best we have,” demanded representation.

*All of the athletes signed a petition supporting what they wanted and they were ready to boycott the Nationals to get it. I suggested that we could improve our representation peacefully and I’ve been working for that ever since. If the athletes don’t see some improvement soon I think you’ll have some real conflict on your hands. This may be the best of times from a money standpoint [but] it isn’t from a morale one.*⁹⁹

Little did Drechsler realize that what made the Soviet and East European programs so successful was highly authoritarian structure, in which lifters had virtually no voice and did not expect any.¹⁰⁰

Arguably Drechsler’s protest movement merely made matters worse. Neither he nor Levin were able to rise above their power struggles to understand the greater struggle for power in international weightlifting that America was losing. The result was continued infighting, a general atmosphere of dissension, and a consequent lowering of morale. Taking a larger view was pundit T. G. Thompson, who believed the roots of America’s dilemma was cultural. “The Soviet standard of living is lower than ours and state-supported athletic programs offer a means of escape from a hard, laborious existence,” he contended. “Rigert, Alexeev and Vardanyan are on the payroll and live as luxuriously as many of our pro athletes.” To counter this socialist system Thompson recommended a purely capitalist solution—professionalizing the sport.

We should hire a sharp promoter to popularize the sport and make the public think they need to see weightlifting. Some of the angles to be exploited are:

Encourage the extroverts to brag, gesture, make predictions and even show off for the audience. (Muhammed Ali did all these things!) Remember, charisma can be manufactured. Think how much Ilie Nastase & Mean Joe Green were helped by T.V. exposure.

Convince the public that they ‘want’ to see weightlifting televised. You could use mottos like ‘The Macho Sport’ or ‘The Ultimate Athletes.’

Appeal to the value systems as well as the senses. Today’s rock bands put on visual shows with flashing lights and absurd costumes. They use sex to get people interested—through lyrics, gestures, even newspaper ads. Gimmicks and trademarks attract viewers. I’d like to see a top lifter wear a lifting suit with the Superman emblem emblazoned across the front, or see him flex his biceps before every lift.

*The last and most important thing is to see that the top lifters get paid! I realize it may be years before the national champs are getting \$40,000 a year, but even \$1,000 would be an improvement over nothing.*¹⁰¹

What Thompson was proposing to do was sever all amateur ties, including those to the USOC, and to sensationalize the sport, much in the manner of Vince MacMahon’s highly popular World Wrestling Federation. To accomplish such a radical transformation, however, would require a dictator with far more powers than Levin possessed, and the result would likely be a spectacle rather than a sport. In the meantime the talented athletes so badly needed in weightlifting were being drawn away to powerlifting, which was much easier to do, and professional sports, which were far more

lucrative.¹⁰²

In 1983 the drug problem exacerbated American weightlifting woes when Jeff Michels, the 110 kilo national champion, and five foreign lifters tested positive for testosterone at the Pan Am Games in Caracas. Although Michaels denied ever taking the banned substance, he was suspended for a year from international competition, and there was much negative publicity in the press. In an interview with the Springfield *Daily News* of Massachusetts, former world record holder Bob Bednarski not only admitted using steroids in the 1960s when he was “breaking world records like crazy,” but he insisted that “95 percent of all the athletes in this world that are of international caliber are using it.” That there were 23 world records set at the 1983 world championships in Moscow suggested that international lifters were getting an extra boost.¹⁰³ What Americans could not understand was how the Soviets and other lifting powers setting those records were escaping detection. Jim DeCoste believed:

the Soviet Union has a special institute that devotes all of its resources to developing drugs for sportsmen. This is not hard to believe. Anyone remember the last Russian lifter to get busted for steroid use? Even as far back as the 1976 Olympics, when steroid testing began, the Russians not only came out clean but also accounted for most of the world records set on that occasion. We can see how much propaganda mileage they got out of the Pan Am incident when one of their official newspapers commented that America's drug problem has now spread into athletics.¹⁰⁴

“The Image Remains a Problem For Lifters” was the title for Peter Alfano’s *New York Times* report of the 1984 Olympic Trials in Las Vegas. Alfano reported that there was a conviction among American weightlifters that “the East Europeans have made better use of science to enhance the performance of their athletes and have, for the most part, successfully avoided detection.” There were some who even believed that the Soviet refusal to participate in the 1984 Olympics was not so much retaliation for the US boycott in 1980 as concerns that some of their lifters would test positive.¹⁰⁵

The impact of testing on the Soviets’ “secret program” cannot be determined, but the publicity stemming from the Michels incident weighed heavily on the public image and morale of America’s lifting program. None of America’s three lifters at the 1983 world championships registered a total, and the United States ranked twenty-first of 23 nations. As the 1984 Olympics approached there was much “unneeded publicity” in leading magazines about the sport’s drug problem. “If you just scan these national publications,” noted Denis Reno, “you’d be led to believe that Jeff is king of athletic drugs.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore “we lost our television sponsor” which Murray Levin reckoned at \$45,000 per year.

I believe this was primarily because of the fact that our men were caught on drugs at the Pan Am games in 1983 in Caracas and afterward the fiasco at the world championship when it appeared that many bombed deliberately. I had to hide under the desk when the calls came from Mack Truck...[our] television sponsor, the USOC and many others. ... I also lost 2 large potential sponsors I was working on from the investment field.¹⁰⁷

In the absence of the world’s best weightlifting countries, the United States finally won two medals in Los Angeles, but there were no world records. By way of contrast, 30 world records fell at an alternative meet held by the boycotting nations in Varna, Bulgaria.¹⁰⁸

Remarkably the United States, primarily because of the 41 medals won during its golden age, was in total medal count still second to the Soviet Union’s 54 after the 1984 Games, with Bulgaria (21) and Poland (21) a distant third.¹⁰⁹ Fond memories remained of a heroic past, but it seemed ironic that Artie Drechsler should initiate a series called “Heroes of Weightlifting” in *Weightlifting USA* to honor current American lifters who exhibited “great strength and courage” to see “their dreams become reality.” He first featured super-heavyweight Mario Martinez, whom he dubbed “the strongest man in the free world.”¹¹⁰ [Editors’ note: Bruce Wilhelm used this line earlier when comparing himself to Vasily Alexeyev.] To have Martinez—who was only a silver medalist in the talent-poor weightlifting competition in Los Angeles—and other Americans subsequently por-

trayed as “heroes” must have seemed an accolade of dubious distinction. Likewise Drechsler’s *bête noir*, Murray Levin, would have hardly regarded that period as heroic. On the one hand, Levin was reelected president, and the USWF, with less than 2,000 lifters, received a windfall share of profits from the Los Angeles Games that amounted to \$1.1 million over the next two years, the same as wrestling (with an estimated 100,000 athletes) and track and field with many more.¹¹¹ But there was little prospect that American weightlifters were getting any better, and maverick promoter Bob Hise II was re-forming the AWLA. Levin was disappointed that American lifters finished behind Brazil and Canada in the Pan American Games in 1985 and sensed a want of dedication. “It seems like some of our international lifters feel no shame when they bomb out or perform poorly in front of foreign competitors.” No less than quality of commitment, greater numbers were necessary, and Levin maintained that “Having less than 2,000 lifters in a nation of 225 million people is disgraceful.”¹¹² Bill Starr was even more blunt in his assessment of American lifting.

Olympic weightlifting has been at a standstill since the late sixties. In fact, it has regressed. Totals that placed in the nationals in 1968 would still be placing now, and there are but two lifts, rather than three to work on. In 1969 we produced two World Champions: Joe Dube and Bob Bednarski. The late sixties also witnessed Bednarski, Dube and Ernie Pickett setting World Records. No one has even considered one since, let alone loaded up the barbell to attempt one. There have been a smattering of what I would consider world class lifters since: Ken Patera, Mark Cameron, Lee James, but again, these guys began lifting in the pre-drug era, they worked for their numbers. . . . No one lately has stepped forward to challenge any European lifter and I see no one on the horizon.¹¹³

The current crop of American lifters, according to Starr, were too awestruck by the Europeans to compete effectively with them and too reliant on performance-enhanc-

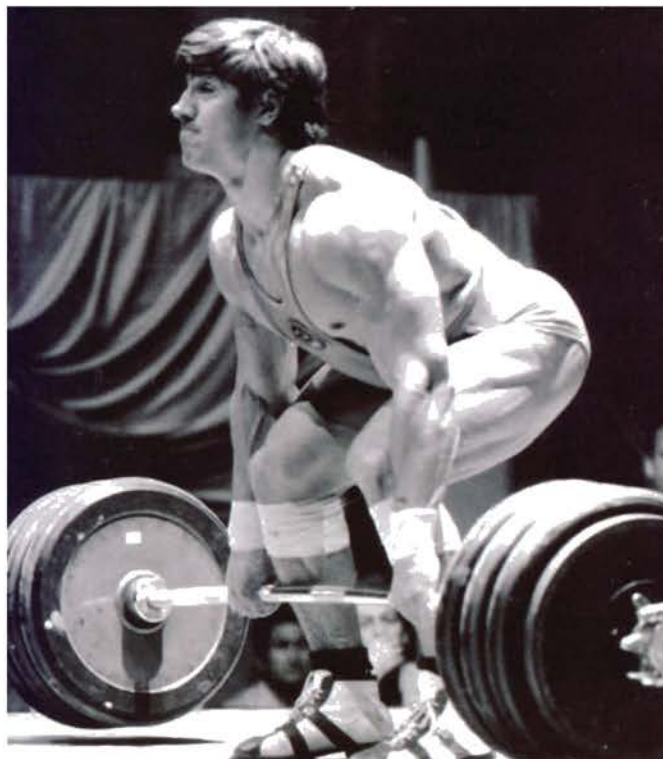
ing drugs. “The real reason that they are kicking us around is that they work harder and are therefore stronger. Period.”¹¹⁴

Over the next several years two encouraging developments appeared on the horizon. In contrast to American placements of fourteenth, fourteenth, seventh, and eighth at the 1985 world championships for men in Sodertalje, Sweden, American women took two first places and a second at an international tournament in Budapest in March 1986. Then, at the first women’s world championships in Daytona Beach in 1987, the women came in second to China with placements of third, second, third, fourth, sixth, second, sixth, first, and second. Levin was delighted. “If I am smiling as I write this,” he exclaimed, “it is because the rest of the world who laughed at us have now come to respect us as the innovator of the best thing in weightlifting since discs were used instead of solid barbells.” It was “the first time in 18 years that the United States has had any gold medal winners.”¹¹⁵ [Editors’ Note: *The primary reason for the early successes of the U.S. women weightlifters was the unstinting support provided to them by Georgia’s John Coffee—through his coaching, personal attention, and especially his extensive financial contributions.*] Almost as encouraging was the defection to the United States of Cuban star Roberto “Tony” Urrutia who had won three world championships and set numerous world records as a lightweight and a middleweight in the seventies. Although Urrutia easily set a string of American records and won national championships, he placed only third at the 1987 Pan American championships in Indianapolis, eighth at the 1987 world championships in Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, and eighth at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul. Yet Urrutia did better than all but one lifter on the American team.¹¹⁶

By the late 1980s United States Weightlifting was transformed by the replacement of Harvey Newton as executive director of the Colorado Springs training center by George Greenway, and Levin’s replacement as federation president by Gene Baker. In talking with lifters and officials throughout the country, Baker quickly perceived the negative impact of the “we” and “they” atmosphere that existed under his predecessor. “I heard complaints about our organization that had references to a ‘THEY’ group which controls the sport. This perception may be one of our real problems. What has happened is that we have lost our ability to work together and trust one another.” By professing openness to new

ideas and complaints, Baker hoped to “get American lifting moving again” by replacing the adversarial “THEY” with a “WE” can do it attitude. His democratic approach might reduce dissension, but it hardly coincided with former national coordinator Carl Miller’s diagnosis of what made the Eastern Europeans so successful. “My experience in coaching individuals in individual and team sports and my observations through close contacts strongly makes me believe that it is lack of discipline that prevents good talent from achieving its potential.”¹¹⁷ The most serious blow to American hopes for improvement through its existing free enterprise system was the loss of two major publicity mediums in 1986—*Strength & Health*, soon after the death of Bob Hoffman, and *Iron Man*, which became a bodybuilding magazine after its sale to John Balik. Although hardly noticed by current lifters or officials, both publications for the previous half century had been critical sources of inspiration and recruitment, two qualities most lacking in American weightlifting.

Soon after the 1988 Olympics, Naim Suleymanoglu, who had clean and jerked 419 pounds at a 130-pound bodyweight to set a world record and win a gold medal at Seoul, visited Colorado Springs where he was treated like a celebrity. “If we could just develop someone of his caliber, weightlifting in the U.S. would skyrocket,” USWF Coach Bob Morris observed. Suleymanoglu explained how it could be done. His secret to success was not so much superior technique but discipline and his love for the sport. “I train six days a week, six hours a day,” he revealed. Although he lifted for Turkey, he credited his former Bulgarian coach for instilling in him this training regimen. It never seemed possible, however, for American lifters to replicate the kinds of training regimens used by the Bulgarians. In July 1990 at Gettysburg College, Leo Totten organized a training camp called “hammer time,” where athletes were exposed to high intensity workouts. His assistant, Chris Polakowski, noted that “the highlight of the week was Wednesday’s Bulgarianized workout, which consisted of six half-hour sessions of very high intensity. . . . Throughout the day, several records were established by athletes, a few in multiple lifts. The feeling from the group was that Americans can incorporate this method of lifting in the right dose.”¹¹⁸ Exactly what was meant by “right dose” is uncertain, but the intense program Totten administered to his lifters was still a far cry from the “six days a week, six hours a day” regimen of Suleymanoglu.



The dense muscularity Russian weightlifter David Rigert built through training is readily evident in this photo by Bruce Klemens. Rigert won six world championships and a gold medal at the 1976 Olympic Games. He was—except for Vasily Alexeyev—the most successful weightlifter in Soviet history, setting 68 world records.

A more sustained effort to imitate the Bulgarian system was put in place in 1991 by Dragomir Cioroslan, coach of the new national resident training program at Colorado Springs. Here America’s elite athletes would have the opportunity to train five or six hours a day with high quality coaching at every workout, excellent nutrition, access to the latest in sports science, and no worries about rent or transportation. Significantly, two-thirds of the training time in Cioroslan’s high intensity plan was devoted to strength-building.¹¹⁹ Former Bulgarian Coach Angel Spassov, who had moved to the United States, was skeptical whether it would work on Americans. He told reporter Stephen Grabe that “we have some very good athletes in our ranks,” but he found it “shocking that in a country such as ours, with our heritage in WL, we have set fairly modest goals.”¹²⁰

After so many decades of relative decline, however, there seemed to be no stone unturned to achieve higher goals. Still the stagnation continued. In the 1989, 1990, and 1991 world championships the United States finished fifteenth, ninth, and eleventh respectively, while

the women, not yet allowed in the Olympics, ranked second (1988), third (1989), fourth (1990), third (1991), and sixth (1992) in their world championships. While the greatest emphasis was always placed on recruiting, the number of registered weightlifters grew slowly each year from 1,687 in 1985 to 2,389 in 1991, likely the result of more women entering the sport. It was “one of the greatest mysteries” to USWF President Jim Schmitz that Olympic lifting was not popular in the United States.

I began Olympic-style weightlifting in 1960 when the population of the United States was about 180,000,000 and I think there were about 1,000 Olympic lifters, 1000 power lifters or odd lifters as they were called then, 1,000 bodybuilders and about 10,000 weight trainers. In those days anyone who lifted or trained with weights was quite rare. However, now in 1991 with the population at about 250,000,000 and weight training an accepted activity for both men and women, there are about 2,500 Olympic lifters, 30,000 power lifters, 2,000,000 bodybuilders and 75,000,000 weight trainers.¹²¹

Untoward trends notwithstanding, Schmitz was upbeat about American prospects as the 1992 Olympics approached, speculating that 20 or more lifters would equal or exceed IWF qualifying totals. At Barcelona, however, where 247 athletes from 69 countries competed in weightlifting, the team did just “alright.” No American lifter placed higher than eighth, and the United States men’s team finished thirteenth.¹²²

For the previous two decades the sole intent had been to raise American lifting to world standards, but in the early 1990s an unexpected windfall occurred with the collapse of totalitarian regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and it seemed possible that the world might be moving closer to the United States in performance. In a perceptive, 1991 article entitled “Weightlifting after the Cold War,” Jim DeCoste correctly pointed out that weightlifting superiority in the eastern bloc was made possible by massive government support that enabled athletes to train full time. “Not even moderately subsidized programs in free world countries could train lifters in this manner.” Hence communist ath-

letes in the seventies “began to make rapid strides past the rest of the world. . . . Now things are on the verge of major change,” DeCoste predicted. With economic deterioration, environmental crises, housing shortages, industrial decline, and the emergence of capitalist democracies in former Communist countries, the newly enfranchised masses would no longer tolerate the charade of expensive sports programs designed to showcase the superiority of socialism. He believed that “Russia and all of its former satellites will be dealt a weaker hand” while “the western democracies and their allies will . . . clearly be gainers. . . . Along with Australia, Turkey, Japan, Canada and Germany we could be a moving force in the nineties.”¹²³ The iron curtain had fallen, the Soviet Union had self-destructed, and millions of newly liberated people were able to practice free market capitalism, but would these seismic changes result in a dismantling of the authoritarian structure that had always given the formerly Communist programs such an edge in weightlifting?

What happened over the next several years was the development of a new balance of power in which the Soviets (now the Russians) and the Bulgarians, deprived of their stranglehold in the lifting elite, were forced to relinquish some of their medal harvest to other aspiring nations, including former USSR republics. At the 1993 world championships in Melbourne, Ukraine—once a fertile recruiting ground for Soviet lifting talent—ranked first in team standings with three medalists and several world records. While Bulgaria and Russia still placed second and sixth in the team standings, it is notable that newly liberated Belarus and Armenia ranked eighth and ninth respectively, and that the recently reunited Germany was fifth. Of the non-former Eastern bloc nations, Turkey, benefitting from Bulgarian defector Naim Suleymonoglu, placed third, while newly naturalized Stefan Botev, trained in Bulgaria by Ivan Abadjiev, enabled Australia to claim seventh. Communist China, at fourth, would eventually become the world’s foremost weightlifting power, and the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan would soon be a force to be reckoned with. Within this new mix of weightlifting celebrity nations, there seemed to be no room for the United States, which dropped from thirteenth of 50 nations in 1993 to twenty-second of 52 in 1994, to thirty-first of 63 in 1995. What was particularly galling in the latter instance was that the thirtieth position was held by Nauru, a tiny island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with barely 8,000 people,

the second least populated nation in the world.¹²⁴ Nor did matters improve in the next decade, during which United States men, at the 2002 Warsaw world championships, descended to thirty-second, just behind Ecuador and Croatia, and even the women could fare no better than tenth.¹²⁵

What DeCoste failed to reckon in his optimistic rendering at the end of the Cold War was not only the greater impact of former Soviet republics and satellites over the next two decades but the increased number of other nations who were seeking international recognition through weightlifting. The number of athletes increased from 160 from 55 nations at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics to 247 from 69 nations at Barcelona in 1992. But the real squeeze started with a 1994 IWF ruling that allowed only those nations that placed in the top eight in the 1995 world championships to send a full ten-man team to the 1996 Olympics.¹²⁶ With even more restrictive quotas in succeeding years, an increasing number of the 155 eligible nations wanting to be represented in weightlifting, and a reduction of weight classes in 1998 from nine to five, the United States was relegated to a position of standing room only for some of its best lifters. (The 1994 ruling to restrict full teams from future Olympic Games was instituted because of mandates from the International Olympic Committee to reduce the number of weightlifters.)

Of the 260 weightlifters who competed in the 2012 Olympics, American participation was limited to two heavyweight women, who finished seventh and tenth out of 14, and one man, who was admitted on a contingency basis but finished well out of the medal range. The United States men finished in a three-way tie for thirty-fifth out of 70 nations, while the women were seventeenth of 57 countries.¹²⁷ What's more, despite the demise of Communist rule, nine of the 19 countries that medaled in weightlifting were former members of the Eastern bloc, and four others were still under socialist or authoritarian rule, indicating that despite the end of totalitarian rule, the methods and mentality it fostered over several decades were alive and well. The cruel irony that emerges from the worsening performances by American weightlifters on the world level for nearly a half century is that United States men remained second historically in total Olympic medals after the 2012 games in London, trailing Russia by 21 and leading Bulgaria by five.¹²⁸

Such retrospectives offered little consolation, but they continued to foster false hopes, nurtured since

the 1960s, that the United States would experience a new golden age in weightlifting, much in the manner that Bob Hoffman had achieved in a bygone era. It was accompanied, however, by a growing awareness that Hoffman's brand of corporate socialization was no longer possible and that the leading weightlifting powers were merely applying his principles on a comprehensive level, tapping the resources of entire nations, justified by a rival ideology. Hence American leaders for ensuing decades borrowed what they deemed as Russian and Eastern European strategies for success—training techniques, a national coach, a national training center, greater funding, and more international competitions—continuously hoping against hope that things would get better. And when all else failed, embracing the chimera that the collapse of the communist empire would bring salvation. What Americans did not understand was that piecemeal changes were insufficient, and that the highly regulated Russian and Eastern European programs were an outgrowth of the totalitarian societies that embraced them. As historian Gordon S. Wood famously observed, “context is everything in history.”¹²⁹ Not only was this influence pervasive within the cultural context of the times, but it persisted even after the critical changes that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. Notwithstanding the advent of free market economies and more democratic political systems, the sports mentality framework of Eastern bloc countries remained more tightly wound than those in the more democratic West. While most of the world rejected Marxian socialism and was won over to the more appealing lifestyle and culture of America, the highly authoritarian and disciplined approach that permeated Soviet and Bulgarian training halls between 1970 and 1992 remained a robust legacy. That Communist China soon emerged as the world's foremost weightlifting power became the most enduring evidence of its efficacy.

NOTES:

1. Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Total Recall: My Unbelievably True Life Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 244.
2. Louis Simmons, “How to Regain Top Form,” *Milo, Journal for Serious Strength Athletes* 2 (October 1994): 28; and Louis Simmons, “What If?” *Milo, Journal for Serious Strength Athletes* 4 (April 1996): 26.
3. Carl Miller, “Conditioning For All,” *International Olympic Lifter* 12, no. 2 (1985): 23.
4. Michael Stone et al., “Relationship of Maximum Strength to Weightlifting Performance,” *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*

- 37 (June 2005): 1037. "Simply defined, strength is the ability of a muscle or muscle group to exert force to overcome resistance and to measure the amount of weight lifted without regard to time, while power, or speed-strength, is the amount of work performed per unit of time and is normally used as a measure athletic performance."
5. Lyle McDonald, "Why the US Sucks at Olympic Lifting," Part 1, viewed at: www.bodyrecomposition.com.
6. Andrew Charniga, Jr., "There Is No System," Part 1, p. 3. viewed at: www.sportivnypress.com, Notwithstanding its human losses, material devastation, and ruined economy, Soviet Union was able to match the United States at the 1946 world championships in Paris. "The entry of a fine team of Soviet lifters was the highlight of these championships," according to David Webster. "Over the first five places, as was common at that time, they had a convincing win over America in second place. . . . On medals alone USA did best." Likewise at the 1947 European championships in Helsinki, the Soviet Union far outdistanced all other nations by winning 12 of the 18 medals. David Webster, *The Iron Game* (Irvine, Scotland, 1976), 87. As for the impact of functional isometric contraction and the commercialization of the sport, Charniga obviously overlooked my assertion in *MuscleTown USA* that by 1963 "Hoffman had concluded that his wonder system had not lived up to expectations. Not only had it not catapulted America back to the front rank of lifting powers, but it had proved unprofitable." Supporting evidence from Hoffman's correspondence includes a January 1962 letter to Dr. Francis Drury that "we do not sell many racks in proportion to the courses that have gone out," and a June 1963 letter from Drury noting that he was "sorry to hear that the spread of Isometric Contraction exercise programs have weakened the financial structure of the York Barbell and Associated Companies to such an extent that the Bob Hoffman Foundation cannot fulfill its commitments." On a personal note, when I trained at the York gym during the summer of 1967, I can recall none of the champions using the power rack for isometrics, nor have I seen this training mode employed in any of the scores of gyms I've trained in since that time. It was a fad that vanished quickly. Finally, and no less egregious is Charniga's statement that I "coined the term 'The Golden Age of Weightlifting' in reference to the dominance of the national weightlifting teams of USA and Soviet Union during the 1950s." My phrase, referring to the decade or so after 1945 (not just the 1950s) was "The 'Golden Age' of American Weightlifting," a huge difference. Such ignorance and misappropriation of my work calls into serious question the authenticity of Charniga's claim to "misinformation engineering." See Charniga, "There Is No System, Part 3, p. 15; and John Fair, *MuscleTown USA* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 103, 207-8, and 400.
7. McDonald, "Why the US Sucks," Part 6, pp. 1-2.
8. Charniga, "There Is No System, Part 2, p. 20.
9. *Strength & Health, Iron Man, Denis Reno's Weightlifters Newsletter, Weightlifting USA, and World Weightlifting*.
10. Bill Starr, "Columbus, An Appraisal," *Strength & Health* 39 (January 1971): 26-27, 75-76.
11. Bill Starr, "Involvement," *Strength & Health* 39 (March 1971): 44.
12. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 30 (February 1971): 49.
13. John Weyland, "Russian Sports Program," *Strength & Health* 39 (March 1971): 55.
14. Carl Miller, "Modern Weightlifting Programs," *Iron Man* 30 (May 1971): 44.
15. Morris Weissbrot, "National AAU Weightlifting Minutes," *Strength & Health* 39 (October 1971): 59.
16. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 31 (March 1972): 40.
17. Gil Layman, "Where Lies the Potential of American Weightlifting?" *Strength & Health* 39 (December 1971): 14-15.
18. Ray Yeager, "Organizing a Junior Olympic Weightlifting Program," *Strength & Health* 40 (March 1972): 14.
19. Bill Penner, "The World of Weights," *Iron Man* 31 (May 1972): 45.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 31 (September 1972): 51.
22. "National Weightlifting Coaching Program Approved in Munich," *New England Association AAU - Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 14 (14 November 1972): 3.
23. Carl Miller, "1972 Teen-Age Weightlifting Camp," *Strength & Health* 41 (January 1973): 27.
24. Peary Rader, "A National Coach," *Iron Man* 32 (November 1972): 40.
25. See U.S. State Department, *Countries of the World and Their Leaders* (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1977), 242, 979; and Bill Penner, "The World of Weights," *Iron Man* 32 (January 1973): 44.
26. Herb Glossbrenner, "Cheers for our Olympians," *Strength & Health* 41 (January 1973): 9.
27. Peary Rader, "Olympic Report," *Iron Man* 32 (November 1972): 34.
28. A coaching center of the type envisioned by weightlifting leaders for weightlifters to train, receive instruction, and become enthusiastic was provided by a Christian businessman in Tulsa for Athletes in Action in 1972. Hopes that it would become the national coaching center, however, failed to materialize. Bill Starr, "The Daisy Chain," *The Weightlifting Journal* 1 (January 1973): 28; and Peary Rader "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 32 (May 1974): 62.
29. Clair Bollinger interview with author, 18 September 1992, York, Pennsylvania; Hoffman to C. Carson Conrad, n.d., Hoffman Papers in author's possession; and Bob Hoffman, "York, PA, - Physical Fitness City," *Strength & Health* 40 (May 1972): 5.
30. "General Comments," *New England Association AAU Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 14 (14 November 1972): 8.
31. Bob Crist interview with author, 3 May 1987, Hampton, Virginia.
32. Bill Starr, "Anabolic and Amphetamine[s]," *Strength & Health* 39 (February 1971): 54.
33. Tom Holbrook, "The Times, They Are A Changin'," *Strength & Health* 41 (October 1973): 32.
34. *Ibid.*, 35.
35. Bob Hoffman, "1973 World Championships Report," *Strength & Health* 42 (February 1974): 41-42.
36. See "1973 World Weightlifting Championships Report by the United States Team," *New England Association AAU Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 22 (24 December 1973): 1, 4-6; and a more detailed "Athletes' Report of the 1973 World Weightlifting Championships" in the *International Olympic Lifter* 1 (February 1974): 20-22. In his rebuttal to the athletes' report John Terpak strongly defended his actions as coach and explained how their grievances were without merit. "Athletes' Report," *Strength & Health* 42 (August-September 1974): 8-9.
37. Clarence Bass, "Notes from the National Convention Weight Lifting Committee," *Iron Man* 33 (January 1974): 51, 65.
38. John Sopensky, "The American Weight Lifting Association," *New England Association AAU - Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 26 (29 July 1974): 13. The AWLA later supported Senate Bill S 3500 to break up

- the AAU, hoping to make a bid for control of weightlifting. Paul Sopensky, "Veritas," *New England Association AAU – Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 32 (26 April 1975): 4.
38. See: Athletes of the 1973 World Weightlifting Team, "Concerning the Problems Confronting Our Sport and Possible Solutions," *International Olympic Lifter* 1 (January 1974): 4-6.
39. Tom Holbrook, "The Press is Out," *Strength & Health* 41 (February 1973): 38; and Bill Penner, "The World of Weights," *Iron Man* 32 (May 1973): 51.
40. See "Training Without the Press" series in *Strength & Health*: Phil Grippaldi and Frank Capsouras, 41 (June 1973): 10, 14; Mike Karchut, 41 (July 1973): 16; Dan Cantore and Bob Bednarski, 41 (August 1973): 10, 14; Russ Knipp and Alan Ball, 41 (September 1973): 50, 54; Fred Lowe and Arkady Vorobiev, 41 (December 1973): 18, 20; and "Problems in Physical Culture," *Bulgarian Journal* 41 (March 1974): 10.
41. Charniga, "There Is No System," Part 2.
42. See: Herb Glossbrenner, "The Strongest Pressers of All Time," *Strength & Health* 41 (February 1973): 50-55; Herb Glossbrenner, "The Strongest Snatchers of All Time," *Strength & Health* (March 1973): 40-45; and Herb Glossbrenner, "The Strongest Jerkers of All Time," *Strength & Health* (April 1973): 36-42.
43. Jim De Coste makes the interesting point that with the elimination of the press "we began to hear more about pulling techniques such as the double knee bend as we entered an era where skills were emphasized over strength. These new trends undoubtedly made Olympic lifting a rather forboding [sic] activity to those outside the sport." Jim DeCoste, "From a Grass Roots Perspective," *Weightlifters Newsletter*, no. 90 (13 February 1982): 14.
44. Bill Penner, "World Olympic Championships," *Iron Man* 33 (January 1974): 41.
45. Pete Talluto, "Impressions from Russia," *Strength & Health* 41 (July 1973): 29, 71. Bill Penner, who was also fluent in Russian, informed Peary Rader that "the Russians are unbelievably scientific in their research and development of all sports." They also "have a lot of state funding which goes into these projects." "Readers' Round-Up," *Iron Man* 34 (November 1974): 41. When David Webster visited Arcady Vorobyev at the Moscow Institute of Physical Culture in 1974 he also found the laboratories: "very impressive with all sorts of mechanical and electronic items. BUT I MUST IN FAIRNESS SAY THAT I DID NOT SEE ANY PHARMACEUTICAL EVIDENCE AT ALL, ALTHOUGH I HAD MY EYES OPEN ALL THE TIME." Dave Webster, "Soviet Secret Weapons," *International Olympic Lifter* 2 (January 1975): 24-26.
46. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 32 (September 1973): 55.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Denis Reno, "Campaign Kick-Off \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$: The American Weight Lifting Association," *New England Association AAU – Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 16 (1 March 1973): 10; and "Thanks to the Contributors for the National Weightlifting Fund," *New England Association AAU – Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 17 (11 April 1973): 4.
49. Clarence Bass, "A National Coaching Plan—Now or Never," *Iron Man* 32 (July 1973): 73.
50. Fritz Markham, "Aid Your Sport," *Strength & Health* 42 (February 1974): 9.
51. George Nagy, "Weightlifting Fund," *Strength & Health* 41 (December 1973): 44.
52. Carl Miller, "My Trip to the European Coaches' Clinic," *Strength & Health* 43 (April-May 1975): 15, 60. See also "Five Lessons from Ivan Abadjiev," 15 March 2011, viewed at: www.haskestrength.com; Hannah Karp, "Heavy Lifting, No Rest, Candy: the Bulgarian Method," *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 June 2011, viewed at: www.wsj.com; and Jim Moser, "The Bulgarian Method of Training Olympic Lifters," *Starting Strength*, 22 April 2011, viewed at: www.startingstrength.com.
53. Ivan Abadjiev, "Basic Training Principles for Bulgarian Elite," *International Olympic Lifter* 3 (March 1976): 12-13.
54. Valentin Hristov, *Champion on a Cross* (Sofia, Bulgaria: Guternov & Son, 1997/1998), 22, 169. Cited in Michael Cayton, "Reflections on Valentin Hristov's *Champion on a Cross*," *Iron Game History* 12 (August 2013): 29, 32.
55. Carl Miller, "Important—Up To Date—Olympic Lifting Training Hints," *New England Association AAU – Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 27 (1 September 1974): 190; and Carl Miller, "K Value Revisited," *New England Association AAU – Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 28 (1 November 1974): 9. Miller also outlined a plan, based on the Bulgarian model: "How to Find Champion Weightlifters," *Strength & Health* 43 (June-July 1975): 10-12, 67.
56. Carl Miller, "Carl Miller Reports," *International Olympic Lifter* 3 (March 1976): 4.
57. "Miller to United States Coaches, December 19, 1975," *New England & Region 1—Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 39 (24 January 1976): 17; and Peary Rader, "Groan & Groan," *Iron Man* 36 (January 1977): 57.
58. Bruce Klemens, "Many Records at Olympic Lifting," *Iron Man* 36 (November 1976): 46.
59. "Weightlifters in Montreal," *Strength & Health* 44 (October-November 1976): 8.
60. "Decision on Steroids," *Strength & Health* 45 (April-May 1977): 10.
61. Tommy Kono memo to Members, U.S. Olympic Weightlifting Committee, 1 October 1976, Hoffman Papers.
62. Denis Reno, "Let's Continue Solving Our Problems to Improve Weightlifting in the United States," *New England & Region 1—Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 45 (18 September 1976): 3; and Arthur Drechsler, "A Report to the National AAU Weightlifting Committee at the 1976 AAU National Convention," *New England & Region 1—Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 48 (14 January 1977): 8-9. Typical of the "We'll never make it" bandwagon were the realistic views of lightheavyweight national champion Joe Puleo. "It is unfortunate in a country such as ours, which is the richest in the world, that there is so much frustration on the part of our best weightlifters. Many of us know how difficult it is to train for and compete in international weightlifting. There is a great deal of sacrifice and energy required. It is distressing to watch idealistic and youthful weightlifters dedicate their lives to the sport, to watch them exert themselves to the limit, time after time dreaming of winning a title which is certain to go to a Bulgarian, Russian, or other professional. Joe Puleo, "A Former Champion Expresses His Views," *Strength & Health* 43 (August-September 1975): 67.
63. Bill Penner, "The International Scene," *Iron Man* 36 (November 1976): 56.
64. The same kind of impression was conveyed by a 1973 television movie inspired by Alexeev's 1970 record entitled "The 500 Pound Jerk," starring former Detroit Lions tackle Alex Karras. "Once again the public's opinion of a big, dumb clod being the only one capable

- of lifting weights has been reinforced," was the opinion of one viewer. George Ludwine, "The 500 Pound Jerk," *Strength & Health* 41 (May 1973): 8.
65. "Some New AAU Rules," *Strength & Health* 44 (April-May 1976): 37.
66. Murray Levin letter to Bud Charniga, 15 September 1988, Hoffman Papers.
67. "The 1977 Push is on for Junior Olympic Weightlifting," *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 49 (28 February 1977): 9; and "Behind the Scenes Our National Chairman Keeps Promoting," *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 42 (16 May 1976): 3.
68. "The Iron Grapevine," *Strength & Health* 45 (April-May 1977): 29; and Bob Hise, "The State of USA Weightlifting," *International Olympic Lifter* 5 (1979): 3.
69. Bruce Klemens, "The Las Vegas Record Makers' Invitational," *Iron Man* 37 (March 1978): 53-54.
70. Terry Todd, "I Remember Vasily Alexeyev," *Iron Game History* 11 (January 2012): 1-4.
71. "AAU Notice #78-20," *AA You Weightlifting Newsletter*, 1 February 1978: 22; and "AAU Notice #78-42," *AA You Weightlifting Newsletter*, 8 March 1978: 38.
72. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 37 (May 1978): 51; and Levin letter to Charniga, 15 September 1988, Hoffman Papers.
73. "Fans-Contact Dick Giller and Put Weightlifting Into Your Scout Program," *New England and Region 1 Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 63 (14 October 1978): 38.
74. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 36 (September 1977): 36; and *Iron Man* 37 (July 1978): 55.
75. See Leistner to Reno, *New England Association AAU-Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 33 (20 May 1975): 5; and Cooney to Reno, 16 December 1975, *New England Association AAU-Weightlifters' Newsletter*, no. 39 (24 January 1976): 5.
76. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 36 (January 1977): 57; and *Iron Man* 37 (November 1977): 57. The most recent example was the emergence of East Germany, a nation of 17 million, as a weightlifting power at the 1976 Olympics. Its success could be attributed to easy access to sports clubs and specialized schools and an aggressive recruitment of athletes as young as age six. Frank Shuman, "The East German Olympic Training System," *Strength & Health* 45 (June-July 1977): 8-9.
77. Bill Penner, "Strongmen Here and There," *Iron Man* 38 (November 1978): 52.
78. Murray Levin, "AAU Notice #79-49," 26 April 1979, *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 68 (9 June 1979): 31.
79. Hatfield to Reno, 21 December 1978, *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 65 (13 January 1979): 5-12; and Cameron to Levin, n.d.; and Garhammer to Levin, 21 July 1978, *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 64 (29 November 1978): 33, 34.
80. James to Dick Smith, November 24, 1978, *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 65 (13 January 1979): 20.
81. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 39 (November 1979): 52.
82. "Hungarian Training Program-Part 1," *New England & Region 1 Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 70 (8 September 1979): 20; and Dick Smith, "Moscow, A Look Ahead," *Strength & Health* 47 (November 1979): 62.
83. Dick Smith, "Moscow, A Look Ahead," *Strength & Health* 48 (March 1980): 49-50.
84. *Ibid.*
85. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 39 (July 1980): 54.
86. Jeff Shorter, "Money Reason Patera Chose Pro Wrestling," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 1979, cited in *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 69 (2 August 1979): 23.
87. Michael Yessis, "Recent Trends in the Development of Strength," *Soviet Sports Review*, cited in *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 80 (6 December 1980): 18; and Keith Gonnely, "Using Isokinetic Exercise to Increase Power and Vertical Jump," cited in *New England & Region 1-Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 72 (15 December 1979): 5.
88. Harvey Newton, *Explosive Lifting for Sports* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2010). It should also be noted that these concepts were by no means absent in the thinking of previous American world champions. Pete George often emphasized the importance of strong mind to muscle commands to activate as many fibers as possible for maximal performance, and Tommy Kono employs explosive concepts, synoptically termed "acceleration" and "mental conditioning," in Tommy Kono, *Weightlifting Olympic Style* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Kono Company, 2001) and Tommy Kono, *Championship Weightlifting* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Kono Company, 2010).
89. Dick Smith, "Moscow, A Look Ahead," *Strength & Health* 48 (March 1980): 50; Murray Levin, "AAU Notice #80-47," *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 78 (13 September 1980): 22; and "Results-American Weightlifting Championships," *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 80 (6 December 1980): 29.
90. Bob Hoffman, "The 1980 Senior National Weightlifting Championships," *Strength & Health* 48 (September 1980): 10-11; and "American and World Records," *Strength & Health* 49 (January 1981): 50-51.
91. George Kirkley, "Sensational Lifting at the Olympics," *Iron Man* 40 (November 1980): 43; and Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* 39 (September 1980): 57.
92. Herb Glosbrenner, "U.S. Prestige Regained at Shanghai Invitational," *Iron Man* 40 (July 1981): 48; and "Letters to the Editor," *Strength & Health* 49 (May 1981): 9.
93. Karl Faeth, "America Cup II," *Strength & Health* 49 (July 1981): 10-11; Marty Cypher, "Weightlifting at the New Zealand Games," *Strength & Health* 49 (July 1981): 36-37; and Dick Smith, "Friendship Cup Weightlifting Championships," *Strength & Health* 49 (July 1981): 60-62.
94. Bruce Klemens, "The Record Makers Lives Up To Its Name," *Iron Man* 41 (July 1982): 48n; and "Yanko Rusev Can You Top This?" *Strength & Health* 50 (March 1982): 24.
95. Harvey Newton, "OTC Monthly Report-June, 1982" and Harvey Newton letter to John Terpak, 20 October 1982, Hoffman Papers.
96. Roger Sadecki, "Report of Attendance at Olympic Training Center, August 23-September 10, 1982," and "Managers Report, 1982 World Weightlifting Championship, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia," Hoffman Papers.
97. Murray Levin interview with the author, 7 July 1992, York, Pennsylvania.
98. Artie Drechsler letter to Murray Levin, 8 February 1982, Hoffman Papers.
99. *Ibid.*
100. In a similar debate in 1975 over athletes' rights, Levin reminded Drechsler that he had earlier proposed to the conduct and ethics committee a resolution empowering the coach to overrule any lifter

who chooses an "unreasonable poundage" in an international meet. "This was not directed at guys that bomb out a lot," he explained, "but because the best lifting countries in the world use this method and it is a sensible one." Murray Levin letter to Artie Drechsler, June 1975, Rader Papers, Stark Center, University of Texas, Austin.

101. D. G. Thompson, "Afterthoughts on the 1981 Senior Nationals," *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 85 (13 July 1981): 19.
102. Bruce Apotheker, "More Interesting Food for Thought on Science," *Weightlifter's Newsletter* no. 83 (18 April 1981): 3.
103. Dick Baker, "They Like Muscles," *Daily News*, 30 August 1983, cited in "Pan Ams, Bob Bednarski Comments," *Weightlifters Newsletter*, no. 105 (13 October 1983): 26; and Bruce Klemens, "World Weightlifting Champs," *Iron Man* 43 (May 1984): 72.
104. Jim DeCoste, "Comments on the Recent 'Drug' Tests/Problems," *Weightlifters Newsletter*, no. 107 (7 January 1984): 5.
105. Peter Alfano, "The Image Remains a Problem For Lifters," *New York Times*, 13 May 1984, cited in *Weightlifters Newsletter*, no. 111 (16 June 1984): 26.
106. Bruce Klemens, "World Olympic Championships," *Iron Man* 43 (March 1984): 72; and Denis Reno, "National Coverage of Weightlifting," *Weightlifters Newsletter*, no. 112 (16 July 1984): 3.
107. Murray Levin letter to Bud Charniga, 16 September 1988, Hoffman Papers.
108. "Alternate Olympics," *Strength & Health* 53 (January 1985): 45.
109. Herb Glossbrenner, "World Weightlifting Review," *Iron Man* 44 (January 1985): 66.
110. Artie Drechsler, "Heroes of Weightlifting," *Weightlifting USA* 3 (1985): 9.
111. "National Governing Bodies Will Receive \$1,131,579 Each," *The*

Olympian (February 1985): 22-23; Levin to Finance Committee, 28 February 1985; USWF 1985 Quarterly Financial Reports; United States Amateur Weightlifting Foundation, 1985, Financial Reports; and Digest of Minutes, USWF National Convention, Board of Governors Meeting, 6 May 1985, Hoffman Papers; and Levin to Bud Charniga, 16 September 1988, Hoffman Papers.

112. Murray Levin, "Challenge Put to U.S. Lifters," *Weightlifting USA* 3 (1985): 1; and Murray Levin, "Message from the USWF President," *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 124 (21 December 1985): 6. By 1985 the official number of registered lifters was only 1,537, generating a yearly income of \$7,685. "1985 Local Weightlifting Committee Development Funds," Foundation Box, USA Weightlifting Papers, USA Weightlifting Office, Colorado Springs.
113. Bill Starr, "The State of Olympic Lifting in America," *Iron Man* 45 (January 1986): 11.
114. *Ibid.*
115. "U.S. Women Capture Medals in International Competition," *Weightlifting USA* 4 (1986): 1; "Karyn Marshall Wins World Title for U.S.," *Weightlifting USA* 5 (1987): 1; and "Murray Levin to All USWF Members," *Weightlifting USA* 5 (1987): separate insert.
116. In 1986, six years after his defection from Cuba, Urrutia recalled in Cuba "everything an athlete does is used politically. Everything is for Fidel. If you do good one day, your coaches treat you well. If you have a bad day, they treat you bad. Too much pressure. I was always training, training, training. Never any rest." "Carrying the Weight of the World," Boca Raton *Sun-Sentinel*, 23 December 1986. In 1992, Urrutia finished 17th at the Olympics.
117. Gene Baker, "We and They," *Weightlifting USA* 6 (1988): 1; and Carl Miller, "First USA Weightlifting Coordinator Suggests Improvements in Weightlifting Programs," no. 134 (28 February 1987): 11.
118. Mary Ann Rinehart, "Suleymanoglu Demonstrates Technique in Colorado Springs," *Weightlifting USA* 6, no. 6: 1; and Chris Polakowski, "Eastern Lifters Sustain 'Hammer Time' at Camp," *Weightlifting USA* 8, no. 5 (1990): 5.
119. Bobbie Lee, "Lifters Commit to Year-Round Training," *Weightlifting USA* 9, no.1 (1991): 14; and "Cioroslan Diagnoses Resident Athlete Abilities," *Weightlifting USA* 10, no. 1 (1992): 22-23.
1120. Stephen Grabe, "Coaching—Angel Spassov—Coaching," *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 157 (16 September 1989): 4.
121. Jim Schmitz, "President's Message," *Weightlifting USA* 9, no. 4 (1991): 2.
122. Jim Schmitz, "President's Message," *Weightlifting USA* 9, no.6 (December 1991): 2; and *Weightlifting USA* 10, no. 4 (September 1992): 2.
123. Jim DeCoste, "Weightlifting after the Cold War," *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 177 (14 December 1991): 20-21.
124. Nick Place, "Coming Soon: Our Guarantee of Gold," *Sunday Herald* (Melbourne), 30 December 1990, cited in *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 170 (23 February 1990): 6.
125. Denis Reno, "World Weightlifting Championships-Warsaw," *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 274 (21 December 2002): 12, 21.
126. "Olympic Participation," *World Weightlifting*, no. 3 (1992): 16; and "Number of Lifters in Olympics will be Limited," *Weightlifter's Newsletter*, no. 199 (15 May 1994): 15.
127. "Superb Games in London with 33 Olympic and 11 World Records," *World Weightlifting*, no. 3 (2012): 5.
128. *Ibid.*, 7. American women, however, rank 13th since 2000.
129. Gordon S. Wood, "A Constant Struggle," *New York Times Book Review*, 13 November 2005, 10.



One of America's most successful weightlifters was Norbert Schemansky, who earned medals in four Olympic Games, including a gold in Helsinki in 1952. Schemansky's career was directly impacted by the rise of the Soviet system of state support for weightlifting.

Photo by Douglas of Detroit