

THIRTY YEARS OF IRON GAME HISTORY: USHERING IN A NEW ERA



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Thirty years ago, in February of 1990 to be exact, this journal made its debut. *Iron Game History (IGH)* was founded because Terry and Jan Todd realized that a gap existed in the academic literature.¹ Journals that concerned themselves with sport history occasionally included articles related to the history of physical culture but, as their titles implied, their primary focus was on the history of competitive sports. Popular magazines, like *Strength & Health* and *Iron Man*, had previously included articles on strongmen, trainers, and others who sought health and achievement through exercise regimens. By the last decade of the twentieth century, however, those magazines had either ceased publication or moved away from historical pieces. Nonetheless, there was an interest among many in reading about feats of strength from bygone eras, or regimens that have been used to promote health and longevity. So, the Todds founded this journal “to provide accurate information about the fascinating world of physical culture.”² Further, Terry and Jan expressed hope that *IGH* would be a journal that endured longer than its initial readership.

As long-time readers are no doubt aware, this publication has been a labor of love – which made it susceptible to fits and starts. Even with a committed and diligent editorial board, and the help of graduate students and others affiliated with the University of Texas, the brunt of producing *IGH* fell to the Todds. When stacked on top of their other teaching, administrative, researching, fundraising, coaching,

and sport promotion duties, however, *IGH* at times fell by the wayside. Still, the gap the Todds identified three decades ago persists – there are no other peer-reviewed publications dedicated to the history of physical culture despite several publications with “physical culture” in the title. Moreover, there is as much public interest in physical culture now as there has ever been. As an example, the live stream from the deadlift event at the professional strongman contest at the 2019 Arnold Sports Festival has been viewed nearly three million times on YouTube. Another event, the “Wheel of Pain” has more than four-and-a-half million views. Microbreweries from Texas to Idaho and Michigan produce ales with some variant on “caber toss” in the name. *Food & Wine* magazine has featured a drink called the “Coney Island Strongman.” Eugen Sandow and caricatures of other strongmen have appeared on spirits ranging from whiskey to wine. Sandow has even appeared on the label of a brand of toilet bowl freshener. Depictions of strength or strength performers, then, can be found everywhere from the gym, to the bar, to the pantry, and even the bathroom. It is noteworthy, however, that one brand of wine that features Sandow’s image prominently on the label is a cabernet called “Freakshow.”

Indeed, while there is significant interest in physical strength, strength performers (both contemporary and departed), and the modern and early implements used to develop that strength, there is a certain risk that this interest is tied to a sort of car-

toon-like depiction of strength. It is here that *IGH* plays a valuable role. As it has since its inception, *IGH* will publish peer-reviewed academic work related to physical culture and provide context and depth to the lives and feats of physical culturists of the past. At first glance, a reader might assume that this is a journal limited to the history of strength (ie. the “Iron Game”). Since October 1998, however, *IGH* has carried the sub-title “The Journal of Physical Culture.” When Terry and Jan Todd opened the Stark Center in 2009 they wrote a definition of physical culture for their website that they refined over the years to also reflect the growth of the academic area known as Physical Culture Studies. They wrote:

We define Physical Culture as the various activities people have employed over the centuries to strengthen their bodies, enhance their physiques, increase their endurance, enhance their health, fight against aging, and become better athletes.

The academic discipline known as Physical Culture (or Physical Culture Studies) explores physical, nutritional, and therapeutic regimens and their relationships to the body, human movement and elite performance. It does this through historical, sociological, anthropological, and gender and race-based approaches.³

Historian John Fair similarly defined physical culture as any “philosophy, regimen, or lifestyle seeking maximum physical development through such means as weight (resistance) training, diet, aerobic activity, athletic competition, and mental discipline.” Further, according to Fair, “specific benefits [of physical culture practices] include improvements in health, strength, endurance, flexibility, speed, and general fitness as well as greater proficiency in sport-related activities.”⁴ *Iron Game History*, then, is concerned with the history of *all* affects of physical culture, as evidenced by the articles in this issue that discuss the intersections of sports, fitness, nationalism, and gender. Beyond continuing to provide an academic outlet for the history of physical culture, the new editors have a second, more personal, goal in mind. As noted in the statement of purpose in the first issue, it was both Terry and Jan’s hope that *IGH* would endure longer than its original readership. Our aim is to make that hope a reality as we re-establish this journal in the wake of Terry’s passing.

As it has been since its inception, *IGH* will continue to be a labor of love, albeit with a new editorial team. Jan will still be involved with the journal in the capacity of “Executive Editor,” but in order to

make the journal appear in a more timely manner, she is turning over editorial duties to three Co-Editors in Chief: Kim Beckwith, Tolga Ozyurtcu, and Jason Shurley. All three have published in *IGH* previously, and Kim Beckwith has been involved with *IGH* as business and subscriptions manager since nearly its inception. Beckwith, Ozyurtcu, and Shurley all took their doctoral degrees under Jan’s supervision, and have been closely involved with the Todds and the Stark Center for more than a decade. Both Beckwith and Ozyurtcu, like Jan, are faculty members in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Shurley is an Associate Professor in the Department of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Coaching at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater.

Our plan is to move to two journals a year. This first issue under our new editorial team will be followed by a second issue in late summer. However, to make the journal thrive and continue to have an impact, we need submissions sent to us for consideration. As is the case with other academic journals, articles submitted to *IGH* will undergo peer review, and the journal itself remains a non-profit enterprise. However, unlike many journals, articles published in *IGH* experience high readership and are frequently cited because our back issues are freely available on the Stark Center’s website and are now fully searchable. We hope that those interested in reading and writing about anything related to the history of physical culture will contribute to this journal. By so doing, they will help us continue to do the work started by Terry and Jan in providing the world with reliable, interesting, and significant work on the history of strength and physical culture.

In closing, the new editorial staff would like to thank Terry and Jan for their enormous contribution to the field of sport studies. Further, it is our hope that scholars will consider contributing to this journal and help us fulfill our mission of sharing the history of exercise and physical culture with the wider world.

NOTES

1. Terry Todd and Jan Todd, “Editorial – A Statement of Purpose,” *Iron Game History* 1, no. 1 (February 1990): 1-2.
2. *Ibid.*, 2.
3. Terry Todd and Jan Todd, “Our Mission: The H.J. Lutzer Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports,” viewed at: www.starkcenter.org/our-mission/.
4. John Fair, “Physical Culture,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, viewed at: www.britannica.com/topic/physical-culture.