

BOB HOFFMAN PASSES AWAY

1898-1985

BY TERRY TODD

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Preface: Terry met Bob Hoffman for the first time in 1958. He was still playing tennis for the University of Texas at the time and was on his way home from the Intercollegiate Tennis Championships in Baltimore when he and several teammates took a detour to York where they visited the York Gym and managed to meet Hoffman. The "Father of American Weightlifting," made an indelible impression on Terry. Over the decades that followed they spent a great deal of time together—during the years Terry worked for York Barbell, at various lifting contests, and on the various visits Terry and I made to see Bob and Alda whenever we were near York. Although Terry's longer memory piece, "Remembering Bob Hoffman" published in Iron Game History in September of 1993, contains several amusing stories about Bob and his endless self-promotion, I chose this obituary because it more clearly reveals Terry's respect for all that Bob had accomplished for the Iron Game, and because it reveals how Terry saw him as a role model for his own life's work. As I said in my remarks at his memorial service, Terry, like Hoffman, was also a man of large dreams.

~ Jan Todd



***"Have a purpose in life, and having it, throw such strength of mind and muscle into your work as God has given you."* –Carlyle**

On Thursday, July 18, at 10 p.m., Bob Hoffman died quietly in his sleep at the hospital in York, Pennsylvania, the town he made famous. Bob's fierce will to live was finally over matched by the inexorable passage of years, but as hundreds of his friends and relatives gathered to pay their last respects in the spacious, beautiful Weightlifting Hall of Fame where his bemedaled body lay surrounded by flowers, it was difficult to even imagine a future in which his name and contributions would not be remembered. Whatever else may be said about him by sports historians, Bob Hoffman will without question be viewed as the dominant figure of the 20th century in the field of resistance exercise.

Bob was a man of large dreams and one of his dreams, having been born barely 13 months before the arrival of the year 1900, was to live in three centuries. And for well over 80 years he had dreamed of the day when all athletes would use weights to help them, as he liked to say, "in their chosen sport." And even though neither dream

was realized, he did live 86 vigorous years and he did live to see his once-ridiculed ideas about the benefits of weight training for athletes accepted and used by almost everyone. Perhaps no better definition of a productive life could be found than that a man aimed high and almost reached his aim. "If man's reach does not exceed his grasp, then what's a heaven for?" And make no mistake, Bob's reach was phenomenal, as the following partial list of accomplishments will demonstrate.

He sponsored the York Barbell Club, winner of 48 national team titles in weightlifting.

He wrote more than 20 books and over 1000 articles in the field of health and physical fitness.

He built the York Barbell Company into a multi-million-dollar business.

He coached five Olympic teams in weightlifting.

He bent pressed 270 pounds even though he didn't begin to practice the lift until he was over 40 years of age.

He created and nurtured *Strength & Health* magazine until it became, in its prime, the most widely read and influential magazine of its kind.

He was a pioneer in the area of the successful marketing of health foods.

He was an early supporter of powerlifting once he realized the sport was here to stay, and he sponsored the first national championships in 1965, as well as the first world championships in 1971.

He provided the travel expenses for many bodybuilders to competitions in this country and to those abroad, such as the ones held by NABBA in England.

He delivered thousands of lectures through the years to promote the cause of weight training and good health.

He was a member of the President's Council on Physical Fitness for almost 30 years.

He was a philanthropist who gave millions of dollars to his favorite local charities, which included the YMCA, softball, the Salvation Army, the Boy Scouts and Dover Township, where he had lived many years.

So what if he wasn't the world's healthiest man or the world's polka dancing champion or whatever? The point is that he was a surprisingly healthy man considering how hard he pushed himself and, more importantly, that he spent his life in a remarkably successful effort to convince other men—and women, too—to live their lives so that they could become healthier. I'm sure that Bob felt that by putting an extra shine on a story about himself he could convince a greater number of people to adopt his rules for healthful living.

Different people reacted to Bob in different ways, of course, and he had his share of detractors, as any powerful, competitive man will have, but many, many people loved and admired him. I know that on my way to his funeral and in the few days since, he has been much on my mind. And in my own fashion, I've tried to honor him in ways he would, I think, have understood. One thing Jan and I did as we drove to York was to stop at the



Terry understood Bob wasn't perfect, but he nonetheless remained impressed and inspired by how Bob's efforts to promote weight training (and the York Barbell Co.) had changed the world. Terry viewed Bob as both a friend and role model, and as he says here, their relationship proved to be a major influence on Terry's own life. The photo was taken in 1978 at the IWF World Championships in Gettysburg, PA.

Shartlesville Hotel, a famous Pennsylvania Dutch, all-you-can-eat restaurant he introduced me to over 20 years ago. It was one of his favorite places and I, as he used to do, ate many platefuls in his memory. And later, in York, we went to the weight room he had equipped at the "Y" and I did a few power cleans with a York Olympic Bar and some one-hand swings with their set of solid York dumbbells. And after the funeral we drove with Vic Boff out to Brookside Park and walked among the tall trees where Bob used to have those wonderful picnics and where he lived in a little house and wrote his first and best book, *How to be Strong, Healthy and Happy*. And we drove up on the hill in York and looked at the big rock house and swimming pool he built in the 1930, abandoned now, but familiar to long-time readers of *S&H*.

And back home now in Texas, I have pledged to do what I can in the time I have left to help those who love the Iron Game to remember that as new lifting records are made, that as new standards are set in bodybuilding, that as athletes continue to turn to progressive resistance and that as more and more people train with weights in order to be strong and healthy, we would not be where we are had we not been carried forward in the arms of giants, the tallest of whom was Bob Hoffman.

