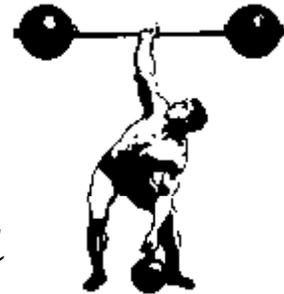




Jim Murray

More Memories of Bob Hoffman



We are happy to announce that beginning with this issue we will publish a series of articles by Jim Murray, who, as a young man, worked as an editor for both Bob Hoffman and Joe Weider. Murray also played a critical role in the acceptance of weight training for athletes. In 1956, he co-authored a groundbreaking book, *Weight Training in Athletics*, with Dr. Peter Karpovich. Murray lives in New Jersey and is retired, though hardly inactive; he is president of his local school board.

Prompted by Terry Todd's "Remembering Bob Hoffman" (*IGH* Vol. 3, No. 1) and by a phone call from Terry, I decided to set down some of my own memories of Bob Hoffman, dating from the early 1940s until 1956. To provide perspective, I'll have to include some personal information, for which I apologize. One of Bob Hoffman's favorite precepts, which he ignored, was "Self praise stinketh." I have tried to observe this and will endeavor to keep self praise out of the personal material.

Picture, if you will, two starry-eyed high school sophomores, Jim Lorimer and Jim Murray, attending the U.S. National Weightlifting Championships and Mr. America contest in Philadelphia, in 1941. We had begun weight training somewhat haphazardly, to increase our strength in order to become—as the song said—football heroes and get along with the beautiful girls. (It worked, incidentally: as seniors we were co-captains of a championship football team and were dating, later to marry, two lovely and vivacious cheerleaders from the junior class at our high school, Jean Whittaker Lorimer and Jane Landis Murray.)

But in 1941 we reveled in hovering near The Champions—such Iron Game immortals as John Grimek, Steve Stanko, John Davis, John Terpak, Tony Terlazzo, John Terry, and others whose exploits were described and whose pictures were published in *Strength & Health* magazine. (We sat near Dave Mayor, a 1936 Olympian, and I heard a couple of Philadelphia weight trainers say, "There's Dave Mayor, the former heavyweight champ. He can still lift 200-200-250. Wow! Two hundred press and snatch, 250 clean and jerk! At fifteen I thought I'd be satisfied if I could ever achieve that level and, in fact, after I became able to continental and jerk 250 pounds as a high school senior I never tried more until I went to York to edit *Strength & Health* seven years later and was around people lifting 300.)

My employment at York was somewhat happenstance. One of my college courses, at Rutgers, was in feature writing. We were required to write and submit an article to an existing periodical. If we had an article accepted, we were guaranteed an "A". Most of my classmates submitted articles to leading general magazines of the time, such as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*. I tried *S&H*

and was the only member of the class to make a sale.

As a result of this contact, in 1950 I struck up a correspondence with then-editor Ray Van Cleef and submitted other material, including cartoons. After graduation from college I was employed as sports editor of *The Freehold Transcript* (Freehold, New Jersey), still corresponding with Ray. One of my suggestions was that *S&H* feature a weight trained athlete in every issue, to counter the then-accepted old wives' tales about muscle-binding. (My first publication in *S&H* had been a piece about a training buddy, Frank Thropp, who was an All-North lacrosse player at Rutgers.) Out of the blue one day in 1951, Ray telephoned to ask if I would be interested in taking over the editorship of *Strength & Health*. He was leaving to open his "Gateway to Health" gym in California.

Would I?! Again wow! Visions of sugarplums and dumbells danced in my head!

To make a long story short, I was interviewed at York and got the job. A faint tingle of disillusionment began at that time when I learned that Ray, who had been editing the magazine for some time, had been working for \$75 a week. I had assumed that a person bearing responsibility for the sales vehicle that brought in the York Barbell Company's income would be well remunerated, perhaps as much as the princely sum of (gasp!) \$10,000 a year.

Not so. After negotiation that was mostly a droning monologue by Bob, I was paid \$85 a week (which my wife and I had been earning, total, at our two jobs) and had the use of one of Hoffman's row houses near the barbell company at a rent of \$40 a month. It was during the employment interview that I heard for the first time what was to become a familiar Hoffman refrain: "We didn't get into this business to make money; we got in it to build a stronger and healthier America." I was also very much in favor of a stronger and healthier America, and working in York was certainly a fun job, but there was also a family to support!

Anyway, I took over the *S&H* editorship on August 27, 1951, a week after my first son was born. I had been supposed to start on August 20, so I could work with Ray for a week, but August 20 was the day Jimmy arrived and Ray had left for California before I got to York. No matter. I figured out how to produce the maga-

zine, with much-appreciated help from John Grimek, with whom I shared an office, and John Terpak, whose office was across the hall. Can the reader picture this? Here I was actually working with the men who had been my heroes when I was a teenager less than a decade earlier.

Another of Bob's frequent remarks, tied in with, "We didn't get into this business to make money. . ." was the assertion that he didn't take a salary from the York Barbell Company. How did the man live? I was to find out, at least in part.

Harry Paschall, old-timers will remember, was a regular contributor to *S&H*. He wrote an article every month and drew the "Bosco" cartoons. (Bosco was a fictional superman who, in Harry's lively imagination, was stronger than Paul Anderson, Louis Cyr, Herman Goemer, and Arthur Saxon combined!) Harry had been a topflight lifter and was a real pro as a writer. He met deadlines!

Much to my surprise one month, I was putting *S&H* together and had not received Harry's contribution. I mentioned to John Terpak that I was wondering whether to hold up printing and wait for Harry or to substitute something in Bosco's place. "Just a minute," John said. "Is Bob in?" He looked out the window and saw Bob's car parked in front of the old York Barbell Company building on North Broad street. "I'll be right back," John said, and he went out, down the stairs, and across the sidewalk to Bob's car. In about two minutes he returned with an envelope containing Harry Paschall's regular contribution to *S&H*—an article and Bosco cartoon.

It seemed that Bob regularly went to the Post Office in the morning, picked up the business mail, dumped it on the front seat of his car, and opened everything that looked as though it might contain an order. Much of the business was in small items that sold for from \$1 to \$10. Customers as often as not sent cash payment with these orders. Bob put the cash in his pocket and then took the mail to the office. In shuffling through the mail, Bob had tossed Harry's envelope onto the back seat where, knowing the boss's habit, Terpak had found it. The orders were tilled, of course, but it's understandable that a salary wasn't very important to a man who had several hundred dollars in spending money a week.

Another episode that I found mind-boggling was the "scientific" development of the original Hoffman's "Hi-Proteen." Purely by chance I happened to observe the activities in the "laboratory" as I returned to work from lunch one day. The "laboratory" was a space in the corner of the Swiss Automatic Screw Machine company Bob had installed on the ground floor of the York Barbell Company. It was an area just past a small room where featherweight champs, Dick Bachtell and Yas Kuzuhara packed small orders for shipment. The sight that met my eyes that day was Bob Hoffman standing over a fiber drum half full of finely ground soy flour, stirring the contents with a canoe paddle. (Bob had been an outstanding competitor in canoe racing and he stored his canoe and paddles on the rafters of the machine shop.)

Next to the drum was a container of sweet Hershey's chocolate with a scoop thrust into it. After stirring a while, Bob dipped his

fingers into the mixture of soy flour and sweet chocolate, and tasted it. With a grimace he exclaimed, "Nobody will buy that!" And he shoveled more scoops of chocolate into the drum and resumed stirring. Eventually he achieved a mix that had a satisfactory taste and thus established the formula for Hoffman's original "Hi-Proteen."

The impetus for this nutritional discovery was Bob's learning that Irvin Johnson's "Hi-Protein" was exceptionally profitable. Johnson had been selling his product through *S&H*, but Bob banned him from the magazine's pages and substituted an ad for his own product as soon as he found out how much money Johnson was making.

Later, of course, Bob had other suppliers make his nutritional products and I'm sure that quality control improved. The various supplements continued to be highly profitable, however, and from a business standpoint had great advantages over the manufacture, packing, and shipping of heavy, less profitable barbell and dumbbell sets.

Another thing that bothered me about Bob was his self praise, which, as he said himself, "stinketh." Take his "modern bent press record," for example. Bob could legitimately bent press about 240 pounds, but he wanted to set a "modern" record in Arthur Saxon's specialty. Bear in mind that to lift 240 pounds with one arm was mighty good lifting. The bent press was the one lift in which Bob really excelled, but there was no way he could have exceeded the 371-pound record set by the exceptionally strong and skilled Saxon, a true iron game immortal.

So Bob decided to go for a "modern" record. The trouble was, there were plenty of strong men around who, if they chose to train on the bent press for awhile, could have handled 240 pounds and more on the lift. In order to boost the poundage—the apparent poundage—Bob had constructed a six-foot-long Olympic bar and had some Olympic plates machined down to weigh five pounds less each. The bar was five pounds light, as were the 45s, 35s and 25s. If you had that bar loaded to an apparent 255, with 45s, 35s and 25s, there was a weight advantage to the lifter of 35 pounds: "255" was 220.

I must interject at this point that I didn't personally witness what transpired at the setting of the "modern bent press record." It happened a number of years before I joined the York organization. Nevertheless, what follows was described to me by two exceptionally reliable people who were there and who told me about it independently without being prompted.

Here's how it was told to me: Bob, being a professional, lifted separately from the AAU athletes who were performing at an event in York. He explained that his barbell was specially made for bent pressing, being shorter and thicker than the Olympic standard bar. On this special barbell, he worked up to a lift with a face value of, I believe, 280 pounds and then had the barbell and plates weighed with the weighing witnessed. The scale balanced at 282 pounds! How could this be? One of my informants, who told me he still had the counterweights used, said the counterweights had been

machined to match the weights on the barbell.

But the rest of the story, told to me by a prominent weight trainer who was there, becomes somewhat humorous. When the bent pressing and weighing were finished, the loaded "record" barbell was rolled backstage where several lifters were warming up for the amateur portion of the event. Among them were Louis Abele, one of the three best heavyweights in the world at the time (The others being Steve Stanko and John Davis): Walt Nollenberger, a leading area heavyweight from Philadelphia; and Dave Brinker, a nationally ranked lighthheavy from Easton, Pennsylvania. Nollenberger and Brinker, who could press around 250, were warming up with a somewhat lighter weight.

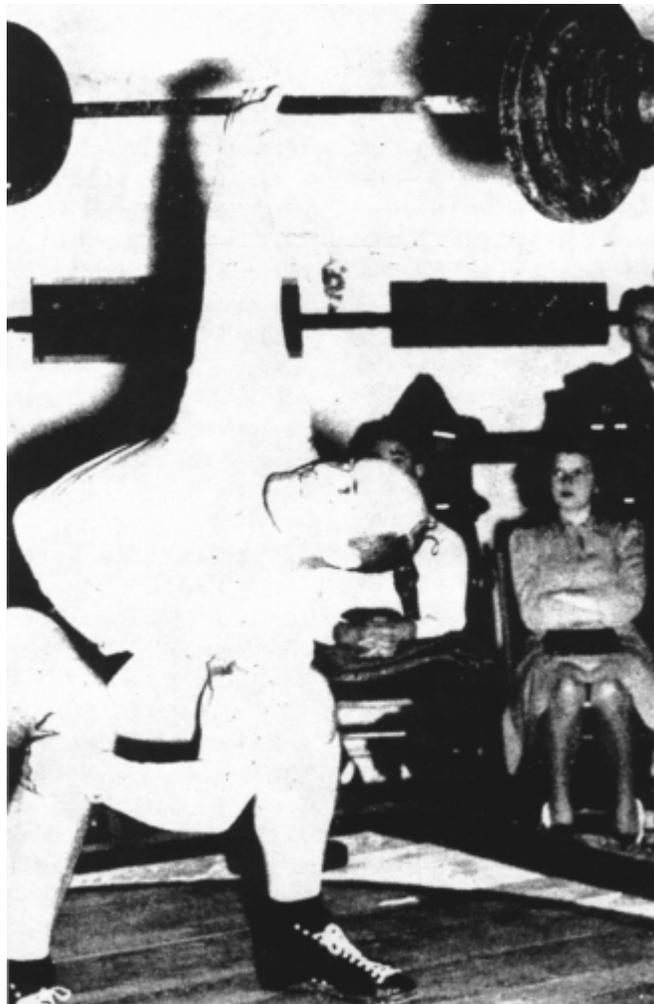
Abele, who could press 300 pounds, was ready for 280 so, rather than change the weight on the warm-up bar, he walked over to continue his preparation with the "modern record" barbell. As it was told to me, he was lucky not to knock his teeth out when he cleaned it, since he had applied a pull sufficient to clean 280 pounds. Recovering from his surprise, Abele quickly pumped out several repetition presses and called his buddy, Nollenberger. "Give it a try, Walt. I'll bet you can set a new record." Nollenberger tried and, sure enough, he also pressed the "280." Dave Brinker joined the fun and he pressed it too, to the accompaniment of much hooting and laughing. Becoming aware of what was going on, Bob Hoffman quickly dispatched some of the York employees to remove the barbell—and the counterweights.

Incidentally, we often used the underweight bar and plates while giving exhibitions before service clubs and similar activities in the York area. We felt this wasn't really cheating, as long as we didn't lift weights we hadn't previously lifted on a standard barbell. It enabled us to make lifts that approximated our personal bests even if we had a cold or a headache or were otherwise indisposed. Unlike what happened when experienced lifters picked up the "282" pounds, when nonlifters would heft the loaded barbell, it felt "heavy," so they had no reason to

question the stated poundage.

Toward the end of 1955 I decided, for a number of reasons, to leave York. I was concerned about writing and editing for an uncritical audience—uncritical as to the technical skills of my craft, that is—and felt the need to prove I could succeed where there was more competition. Another reason was my growing disillusionment with Bob Hoffman. I felt that he was overemphasizing the benefits of his food supplements and that he was doing it, not to build a stronger and healthier America, but to make big bucks.

None of my disillusionment involved the athletes, however, and I never ceased to admire and like such people as John Grimek, Steve Stanko, Dick Bachtell, John Terpak, Yas Kuzuhara Jim Park, Jules Bacon and others who worked for the York Barbell Company and worked in the battered old North Broad Street gym. They were superior athletes and wonderful people to associate with on and off the job.



BOB HOFFMAN RECEIVED CREDIT FOR A 275 POUND BENT PRESS IN THIS EXHIBITION IN SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA. HE SHOWS GOOD FORM.

Leaving York may well have been a poor decision, because the job was, in a word fun. I never really enjoyed working as much again though I greatly improved my financial position in subsequent years. And, in retrospect though Bob Hoffman had feet of clay, he surely did a great deal of good in his preachments about how to be strong, healthy, and happy. His advice on nutrition was questionable, to say the least, but his ideas on exercise were right on me mark. His publishing *S&H* hooked countless young people, as it did Jim Lorimer and me, into a lifetime habit of beneficial exercise. **[Ed. note:** Infomed readers may recognize the name Jim Lorimer; others will be interested to learn that Lorimer also moved up in the world of weights. For quite a number of years he has co-promoted the Arnold Classic in Ohio with Arnold Schwarzenegger.] I have long since forgiven Bob for the exaggerations about his own prowess and his exploitation of "health foods" for profit.

Rest in peace, Bob. Your contributions as a publisher, evangelist and patron of weight training and exercise in general benefitted the world.