



IRON GAME HISTORY



VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2

APRIL 1990

Steroids: An Historical Perspective

Some years ago, during my annual visit to the home of David P. Willoughby, he and I were comparing the lifting and the physiques of the pre-steroid and post-steroid eras. In that discussion, one of several we had on the subject over the years, Dave told me that he found it increasingly hard to take real interest in the accomplishments of strength athletes since 1960. (Many people close to the game know that 1960 was the year in which Dr. John Ziegler convinced Tony Garcy and Bill March of the York Barbell Club and Lou Riecke of the New Orleans Athletic Club to begin using a form of training called isometric contraction and to begin taking a pill called Dianabol, and that the dramatic success of these three athletes ushered in the steroid era.)

Dave explained that he had spent a large part of his life trying to honestly assess the physical power and muscular development of strength athletes of both the past and the present and to produce a trustworthy formula which allowed him to compare men of different periods, bodyweights and lifting styles. But the steroids, he said, made it impossible for him to know how much of what the modern lifters and bodybuilders were producing, in terms of strength and muscle mass, had come from hard work and genetics and how much had come from the anabolic steroids. "I have no way to evaluate the modern competitors and I feel cheated," Dave said, "and I think that as the years pass and the champions of today get a little older and wiser, they'll feel cheated, too, because they don't know, themselves, how much the steroids boosted their size and strength. Steroids have ruined things for me, and in time they'll ruin things for others."

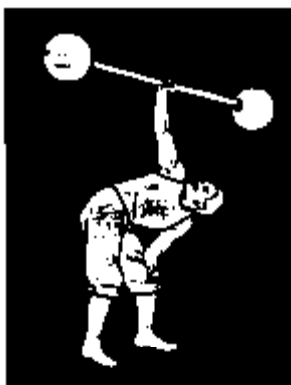
Dave's prophecy is an interesting one, particularly in light of the recent drug testing procedures used at the Arnold Classic on the weekend of March 3, 1990 and the way in which the results of those procedures have been covered in the body-

building magazines such as *Iron Man*. For those who might be unaware of the drug testing procedures, a bit of history might be in order.

Testing for anabolic steroids was first used in 1976, at the Montreal Olympics, and the weightlifting community has the unfortunate distinction of having produced more positive results than any other sport from those first drug tests. (Two of the most famous lifters who tested positive for steroids in 1976 were the Bulgarian, Blago Blagoev, and the American, Phil Grippaldi.) In the ensuing years, athletes from many other sports have tested positive and no longer does the average sports fan believe that the only athletes who use steroids are weightlifters and bodybuilders. But even though literally hundreds of cyclists, swimmers, soccer players and distance runners have tested positive for steroids, lifters and bodybuilders at the elite level are still believed by most experts to be the biggest abusers of these tissue-building drugs.

The reason strength athletes use steroids is a simple one, really. Steroids work. Steroids will make a man, and especially a woman, stronger and muscularly larger; and lifting and bodybuilding depend, respectively and obviously, on strength and muscle size. But even though anabolic steroids produce results, they do so at the cost, in the case of bodybuilding, of the very thing which has always been the bedrock of bodybuilding—a healthy lifestyle. How ironic it

is for a man to take steroids so that he can stand on a posing platform as a symbol of health. One of the things about bodybuilders in the pre-steroid era that stood out—leapt out, really—was their vibrant good health. Men like John Grimek, Bert Goodrich, Steve Klisanin, Armand Tanny, Ed Theriault, John Farbotnik, Bill Pearl and George Paine almost literally glowed with health and it was understood that their physical appearance was a manifestation of the care they took to exer-



cise regularly, eat carefully and take sufficient rest.

These days, by contrast, in order to reach the very top in bodybuilding and to produce the massive, vein-ridged bodies that are winning, it seems to be necessary to violate, not follow, many of the rules of good health. Judging by the many letters we have received about this subject and by the many conversations we've had with veterans in our field, almost all of our elder statesmen feel that things have gone seriously, dangerously awry. The fact that the most recent issue of ***Iron Man*** has on its cover Shawn Ray, the man who "won" the Arnold Classic until the results of the drug test revealed that he had used steroids, illustrates this point in two ways. First, because Ray is smiling, and second, because inside the magazine is a very friendly, almost fawning, interview with him in which Ray asserts that the testing was based on "politics" and that those who passed the test may still have been using drugs. The majority of the interview focuses on how wonderful he looks and what a star he is.

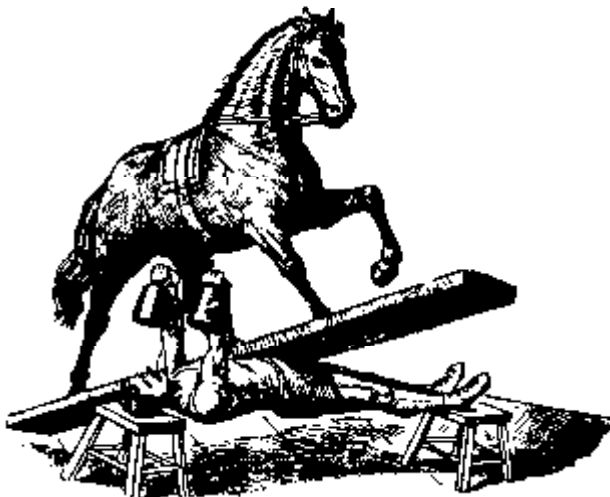
Those who followed the Ben Johnson episode may recall that when Johnson was pictured on the cover of ***Sports Illustrated*** after the news of his positive drug test at the Seoul Olympics the word "Busted" was spread across the page. Nor was the article inside the magazine at all friendly to the Canadian sprinter. In fact, the article—and others which followed—focused on the circumstances of the test and the shameful violation of the rules of sport implicit in such a situation. (It is ironic and sad that the Shawn Ray issue of ***Iron Man*** features a long, positive article about Ben Johnson ["The Fastest Man in the World"] and about the weight training program Charlie Francis [Johnson's coach, who also gave him steroids] designed for the sprinter. The article states that Johnson used "a program that was able to avoid overtraining, maintain, maximize and build strength and speed year after year. This insightful training produced the fastest man in the world." No mention is made of the role steroids and growth hormone played in helping Johnson to run his world record times.)

To be fair, the issue also contains coverage (brief though it is) of the fact that Ray failed to pass the test at the Arnold Classic. It also contains an article called "Coming Clean" and one I wrote about the problems a young, talented

powerlifter, Anthony Clark, is having with his steroid use. But the cover photo of Ray is very important. It is a symbol of the magazine, and for *Iron Man* to have used Shawn Ray, smiling, seems to us an error in judgement. It almost looks as if the editorial policy of the magazine is being bent in order not to alienate the top bodybuilders and perhaps lose the opportunity to take the photographs that keep the magazine afloat financially. One can only hope that the decision to use the covershot and the Ray interview, not to mention the Johnson article, were matters of editorial misjudgement and not matters of cynical calculation. I say all this, by the way, out of affection for the magazine Peary and Mabel Rader began back in 1936. I also say it out of affection and concern for John Balik, who bought the magazine from the Raders and who has been trying to find a pathway through the political and economic minefields so prevalent in the musclemag business. John is a good man and my conversations with him lead me to believe that he understands that steroids are a bane to the body of bodybuilding, but he should use his influential position to hammer away at the physical, psychological and political dangers of steroids, not to feature in a positive way people who have brought shame on themselves and the game they represent.

The purpose of this editorial is to suggest that all of us with a voice should use it to guide the young men and women who are flocking to the weight rooms of this country. We could, of course, approach the young steroid users by reproaching them, but they would probably just turn away. Perhaps a better way is to concentrate not on what they are doing wrong but on what people like Grimek, Paine and Tanny were doing right back before 1960.

What older lifters have is the advantage of perspective, and that perspective tells us Dave Willoughby was right. In the issues of *Iron Game History* which follow, we will try not to harp on the subject. We hope, instead, that our stories of pre-1960 athletes will serve as guideposts the young people in our sport can follow as they search for strength *and* health.



As the second issue of *IGH* goes to the printer, we have approximately 170 subscriptions. Thirteen of our subscribers are in either the Fellowship or the Patron category and the additional money they have provided has enabled us to increase the size of the journal and move to a slightly better paper. We are deeply grateful to these 13 people and we would invite those of you who are regular subscribers to "upgrade" your subscription if you feel able to lift a bit more than your share of the load.

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- Dr. John C. Long
- Bernard Brand
- Bob Peoples
- Jim Lorimer
- Norman Komich
- Ernie Hackett
- Anonymous

Patron Subscribers

- Frank Stranahan
- Dr. Peter George
- Fred Schutz
- Dr. Charles Moss
- Walt Marcyan
- John Coffee

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A Message From The President

Vic Boff

On September 22, 1990, The Association of Oldtime Barbell & Strongmen will hold its eighth Annual Dinner Reunion at the prestigious Downtown Athletic Club in New York City.

It is with profound appreciation that I look back over the years and realize that we are growing slowly, but solidly. Every reunion has been a happy time for remembrance. Some members see old buddies they haven't seen for more than 40 years. The greetings, the nostalgia, the picture-taking and the joking—this is what constitutes our organization. The unforgettable camaraderie and shared emotions are what give us all such beautiful memories to cherish.

We are the only organization that brings together annually the oldtime strongmen, weightlifters, bodybuilders, and distinguished strength athletes. The banquet evening is organized for your enjoyment and entertainment. Not only are the great stars or honored guests saluted and presented with beautiful plaques and paintings projecting their physical prime, but we also provide unusual and extraordinary entertainment either live or through video and film.

Al Antuck, the renowned physique photographer, wrote an excellent article which was published in the December '87 issue of *Muscle Mag International* sums up the congeniality and attitude of our reunion very well:

“Regardless of the ages of the readers of this article, let me encourage all of you to try to attend one of the annual dinners of The Association of Olde Time Barbell and Strongmen. You'll not only experience history first hand, but you'll see and hear many of the men who created that history. You'll livingly learn from these old timers instead of reading about them and their feats in a book. You'll see septuagenarians, an octogenarian, and perhaps even a nonagenarian, who are physically fit and mentally alert. All of these strongmen are of a different era - the pre-steroid age.”

We are anxious to extend membership to those younger enthusiasts who sincerely want to share our ideals of fitness, strength, and health and take part in our wonderful fellowship and nostalgia. They are the ones who will have to be the future torchbearers.

Also, for us to continue to grow successfully, we need your support. I wish to thank everyone personally who has joined and supported our Association.

The need for an organization of our type is important. Get in touch with your old training partners or buddies. Tell them about our Iron Game Fraternity. Do your part. We cannot succeed without you.

In conclusion, let me say how pleased and delighted I am with the publication, *Iron Game History*. Coming as it does from the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection (museum and library) at the University of Texas, it will now serve as a landmark that fulfills an evolutionary legacy, from the past to the present. Please send in your subscriptions.

David Norwood

The Legend of **Louis Cyr**

David Norwood earned his master's degree in Human Kinetics from the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada in 1971. His master's thesis was *The Sport Hero Concept and Louis Cyr*. What follows is an excerpt from that thesis.

On November 10, 1912, at the age of 49, Louis Cyr died. Lengthy illnesses from asthma and heart ailments had left him weak and officially he died of Bright's disease. The latter part of his life had consisted of a diet solely of yogurt and all his nights were spent in a Morris chair. The funeral for Louis Cyr was conducted at St. Peter's church in Montreal and vast crowds turned out to pay their last respects.¹

In steps to honor Louis Cyr since his death, the city of Montreal and the surrounding area has officially named the following after him: Louis Cyr Park, Louis Cyr Street and Louis Cyr School. In addition, a full bust monument of Cyr was erected in the City of Montreal. At a later date, a one-half hour film was produced on Louis Cyr, the French-Canadian strongman. It appears the French-Canadian people are not ready or willing to forget Louis Cyr.

Originally, Cyr's reputation spread quickly in Quebec because strength and power were highly respected. By word of mouth, the name Cyr became synonymous with strength and power. Classic in its example is the poem "Little Bateese" by Henry Drummond:

*But see heem now lyin' dere in bed,
Look at de arm onderneat' hees head;
If he grew lak dat till he's twenty year
I bet he'll be stronger than Louis Cyr²*

As is often the case with famous strongmen, there appears to be substantial discrepancy between many of the sources of data available upon Cyr, his life and career. In some instance these discrepancies are minor in nature and consequence, while others have considerable significance. Probably the most logical and common reason for discrepancy lies in error in communicating information from a primary to a secondary source. Inherent, at least to some degree, in this process is the possibility of conscious exaggeration of the facts. Also a likely candidate is the error accompanying transcription of primary and/or secondary information.

The remainder of this analysis will endeavor to deal point by point with various discrepancies raised in this study. Wherever possible, solutions or logical conclusions will be provided for each situation.

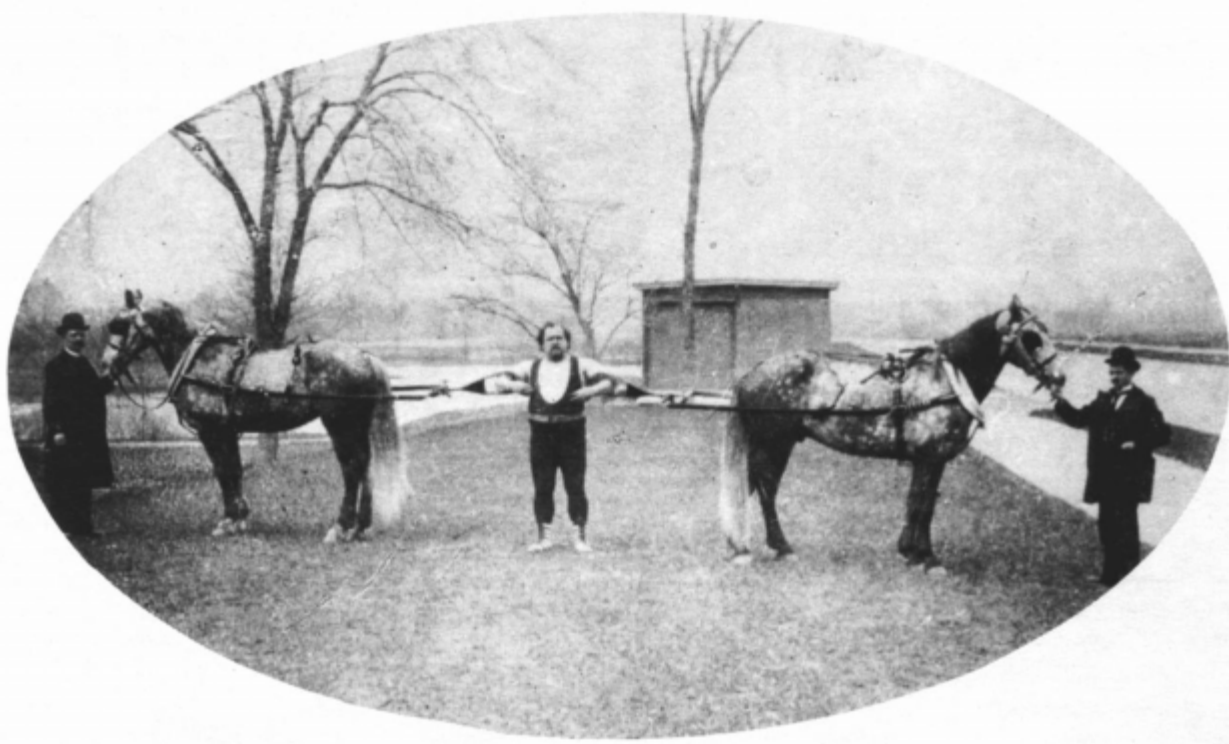
The first situation which presents us with a discrepancy is, unlikely as it may seem, the date of Cyr's birth. It is generally accepted by most secondary sources as well as by Dr. Gerald Aumont, Cyr's grandson, that Cyr was born on October 10, 1863. George Jowett, however, states quite specifically in

his book that Cyr was born on the "eleventh of October, 1863."³ Initially, one would attribute this error to an editorial or printing slip. The fact, however, that the day of birth was written in long form would tend to indicate a more concerted effort by Jowett in establishing this day as being fact. Little can be said on this discrepancy other than to note the true date as the 10th.

The second area of discrepancy surrounds the procurement of Louis' first job at the age of 12. Two different stories predominate. In one case, Cyr finds a neighboring farmer in the woods with a severe injury and proceeds to carry the man either to his wagon or to his farm depending on which version one hears. In the second instance, the young Cyr comes across a farmer in an over-loaded wagon stuck in the mud. Getting under the back end of the wagon Cyr lifted it onto dry ground and was rewarded with a job. In neither instance are primary sources available to substantiate the facts. The second case is supported by Jowett in his book as being fact.⁴ Ben Weider, in his book *The Strongest Man in History :Louis Cyr "Amazing Canadian,"* contends that Cyr received his first job as a result of the version related in case one.⁵ Weider goes on to say that the version related in case two occurred at the age of 15 when Cyr was living in Lowell, Mass.⁶ Since both versions tend to be supportive of Weider's relating of the incident, there is a strong inclination to believe his accounting of the facts.

The third area of discrepancy involves the fact that on November 11, 1912, the Montreal newspaper, *Le Devoir*, in giving a somewhat detailed account of Cyr's life upon his death, recounted that Cyr toured Moncton, New Brunswick in 1883 and put on performances.⁷ In surveying seven newspapers from New Brunswick, three newspapers from Newfoundland, two from Prince Edward Island and one from Nova Scotia for the year 1883, no reference could be found for this tour. It is likely, since only one secondary source has ever mentioned this date and incident, that either it did not happen or if it did an error exists in the date. It is possible, although highly unlikely, that the incident occurred and was not carried in any of the newspapers surveyed or mentioned in any of the secondary sources relating Cyr's exploits.

A major discrepancy involves Cyr and his work as a Montreal policeman. In the year 1885, he joined the Montreal Police Force and was used for the express purpose of helping to clean up the tough Sainte-Cunigonde district. On the evening of September 23 an incident occurred while Louis was on patrol, the publicity from which supposedly caught the attention and interest of R. K. Fox, the editor of *The National Police Gazette*. Several different discrepancies, in fact, surround this one incident. It is Weider's contention that two



Louis Cyr at Sohmer Park, Montreal, 1891

incidents took place with the second and more serious incident occurring on September 23. In the first incident, according to Weider, Cyr was used as a decoy by the police to entrap the criminal element. The brawl that ensued is purported to have seen Cyr subdue “a dozen of them single-handed.”⁸ The second incident saw Officer Proulx being struck on the head with an axe and eventually dying. Cyr, while cut on the arm with a knife, was able to grab one assailant by the waist and one by the collar and use them as battering rams against the remaining toughs.⁹ In Joweu’s version, Cyr, by himself, broke up a fight between two men and ended up taking both men to the police station, one tucked under each arm. One further modification is made in this incident by Frayne and Gzowski. In their rendition, Cyr arrested three, not two, toughs and escorted them to the police station by “taking one under each arm and carrying the other in a vice-like grip in front of him...with all three prisoners off the ground.”¹⁰ What makes the variations especially interesting is that upon surveying four newspapers which carried news of the incident at that time, very little similarity can be found with the later versions. All four newspapers appear to be very similar in their versions. As related by *the Montreal Daily Star*,¹¹ *Ottawa Citizen*,¹² *La Patrie* (Montreal)¹³, and *La Presse* (Montreal)¹⁴, constables Cyr and Proulx were assaulted in the Sainte-Cunegonde district of Montreal. It was reported that Constable Proulx was hit on the head with an axe and subsequently died, and that Constable Cyr was hit in the temple with a stone and then was

struck twice. After being struck, Constable Cyr said he thought he was going to die.¹⁵ Very little coverage was afforded the incident at this time, certainly not enough to attract the attention of the *Police Gazette* editor Fox. Because of the similarity of the newspaper coverage and the dissimilarity of the book and magazine coverage, a logical conclusion is drawn in support of the newspaper as fact. All other reports of the incident, while based on a real incident, appear to be exaggeration of the details in one way or another. The effect of this exaggeration is to heighten the myth surrounding Louis Cyr.

¹ “Louis Cyr est Mort” *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 11 November 1912.

² William Henry Drummond, *Habitant Poems*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1926). p. 20.

³ George F. Jowett, *Louis Cyr “The Strongest Man That Ever Lived”* (Philadelphia, P.A.: Milo Publishing Co., 1927), p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15-16

⁵ Ben Weider, *Strongest Man in History: Louis Cyr “Amazing Canadian”* p. 60-61.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27-28.

⁷ “Louis Cyr est Mort,” *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 11 November 1912.

⁸ Weider, *Strongest Man in History: Louis Cyr “Amazing Canadian,”* p. 60-61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁰ Trent Frayne and P. Gzowski, *Great Canadian Sports Stories*, (Toronto: Canadian Centennial Publishing Co., 1965). p. 108.

¹¹ “Another Constable Assaulted”, *Montreal Daily Star* 23 September 1885, p. 4.

¹² “Struck With An Axe” *Ottawa Citizen*, 24 September 1885, p. 4.

¹³ “*La Patrie* (Montreal), 25 September 1885, p. 4.

¹⁴ “L’Affaire De Sainte-Cunegonde” *La Presse* (Montreal), 24 September 1885, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.



This issue, in place of the usual Iron Grapevine, we are presenting some of the many letters we have received in response to the first *IGH*. In subsequent issues, a “Letters” section will be a regular feature. But since we received so many letters, we wanted to share their information. In fact, we received many others and we will draw on them in later issues. We invite your comments. We also call your attention to the new feature (page 9) focusing on significant birthdays and other iron game events.

The Raders Reply

Just received and read the new *Iron Game History*. It contains articles and features, we believe, that will be of interest to the readers.

I’m sure the magazine was lots more work than you had anticipated. Seems like that’s always the case. Sure a nice little magazine. You did a good job on this first issue and I’m sure you will find more things to do with it as time goes on.

We’d like very much to make a trip down that way, and maybe sometime we will do just that. It would be so good to see some of our friends again and get all the news of the iron game.

Peary & Mabel Rader
Alliance, NE

Naturally, it is satisfying to hear kind words from readers. But to hear kind words from the Raders goes beyond satisfaction.

Pacifico Now Bodybuilding

Your new venture is very interesting. I would like to see more. Enclosed is a check for one year.

Your information on Jack Elder was incorrect. Howard Stupp (you have met him) at the age of 76 pulled 512 pounds at the 1988 Masters Nationals. He will be 78 on April 5th. Howard is an old Olympic lifter who switched to pro wrestling under the name of Chief White Owl.

I’m bodybuilding now and will compete at the Masters Nationals on June 16/17 in Houston. I will weigh 176. I won the Metropolitan title last Sept. weighing 185.

Larry Pacifico
Dayton, OH

Larry—nine time world powerlifting champion—has the honor, at least we hope it’s an honor, of having been the first to send in his subscription. As for Jack Elder’s deadlift, it did exceed the national record in the middleweight division.

News From One of the Loprinzi Brothers

Received your note along with the *Iron Game History*. I think it is great just the way it is and I can’t see where it could be improved.

We are still pumping iron besides swimming and brisk walking. It is such a habit that we can’t quit. Your publication has arrived at the perfect time.

Sam Loprinzi
Portland, OR

Circuit Training in WWII

First of all, thanks for the copy of *Iron Game History*. It was interesting and I appreciate your sending it.

Secondly, I was watching TV last night and saw the program: “The Incident,” starring Walter Matthau. It dealt with German prisoners of war in this country and brought back some memories. Inasmuch as weight training was involved, I thought you might find some of them interesting.

During the latter part of WW2, I was stationed at Camp Forrest General Hospital in Tullahoma, Tennessee. My assignment was Recreation, Reconditioning, Education, etc. for 10,000 German prisoners of war. The hospital was divided into a 2500 bed medical-surgical unit, a 5000 bed convalescent unit, and a 2500 bed protected personnel unit (prisoner hospital employees). I had two Americans (clerk-typists) working with me in the office; the remainder were German prisoner assistants, about 100 in number. None of these were experienced in weight training instruction. To make the Reconditioning program more interesting and productive, I devised a set of exercise apparatus and had it installed on a field behind the hospital. These were patterned after the apparatus developed by Willie Currie at Fort Benning, Georgia. However, to simplify the instruction routine I arranged the pieces of apparatus for each station in units of six, there being 12 different stations.

The 12 consisted of five pulleyweight stations, four barbell stations, one leg press station, one wrist roll station, and one abdominal board or sit-up station. Only one exercise was performed at each station. The exercises used were: 1. two arm curl (pulleyweight), 2. one arm sideward pull (pw), 3. chest forward pull (pw), 4. overhead raise (pw), 5. backward pull (pw), 6. two arm press (barbell), 7. squat (bb), 8. stiff-legged deadlift (bb), 9. rise on toes (bb), 10. leg press (lp), 11. wrist roll (wr), and 12. sit-up (ab). I arranged the apparatus in this manner so that by assigning five men to each piece of apparatus, 30 would be assigned each station and could complete one exercise in a relatively short period of time. One instructor was assigned to each station. The groups were rotated throughout the stations on a given signal. With this arrangement we were able to run 360 men through a complete exercise workout in 75 minutes.

The weights were all concrete and pipe or rope and obviously non-adjustable, so I had to compromise on the resistance. The pulleyweights and wrist rolls weighed 10 lbs. each, the barbells 40 lbs., and the leg press 100 lbs. I don’t

know who established the first circuit with weights. This program was established in 1944, although nothing was ever written about it. I am enclosing a few photographs to give you an idea of the setup. Also, I am enclosing a reprint from the German hospital newspaper, *Das Echo*.

You may not have noticed, but three of the books I sent you—two green hardbacks, one a chest book by Hoffman, one by Willoughby and Weaver, and Inch's book on Strength—have different bindings (all originally were paperback). These were done by German prisoners of war at the hospital.

I had very few problems as far as the German prisoners were concerned. One reason was that I eliminated all those of officer rank and dealt only with enlisted men. A second reason might have been that when I pulled OD (officer of the day) duty, I would meet in the Rec hall with my sports instructors and others where we had one barbell. Fortunately, I was able to outlift them all. Such news travels fast in a camp such as that.

My first assignment on entering the reconditioning field in the Army was to Fourth Service Command Headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, where I was to write a manual of exercises for hospital patients. Just as I finished it, Army Headquarters in Washington ordered all such material forwarded there to be included in an Army manual on the subject. Much of my material wound up in TM 8-292 Physical Reconditioning. This was put together by C. H. McCloy and through this contact he and I became very good friends.

Jack R. Leighton
Spokane, WA

*Dr. Leighton had a long and distinguished career as a writer and professor in the field of physical education. His book, **Progressive Weight Training** (New York: Ronald Press Co, 1961) is a model of clarity. Dr. Leighton was among the first individuals to donate his private collection to the Collection here at UT. Regarding his reference to Bill "Willie" Curry, we will have an article by Curry in a future issue.*

A Better Way of Living

Thank you for thinking of me and forwarding the copy of *Iron Game History* to me. I do hope for your success with this new periodical and its dedication to the iron game. It changed my young life to a much better way of living. One day, I'll jot it down and send it on to you. Much success and good health to you and yours.

Terry Robinson
Century City, CA

We hope all of you take the time to "jot it down" as we'd like to include your stories in future issues of IGH.

Willoughby Dedication

Thank you for your note and copy of the first issue of *IGH*. I am happy to see the history of weight-training documented and memorialized.

I've been threatening to write my autobiography for many years—but find it's the hardest thing in the world for me to do. I'm making progress, though. I've enrolled in a local class "writing your autobiography" starting this next Tuesday.

Your dedication of the first issue to David P. Willoughby surprised and pleased me very much. I didn't know him personally but admired very much both his drawings and his writings. His classic articles in Bernarr McFadden's *Physical Culture* were like a physical training bible to me in those first early years of bodybuilding.

There has never been any reason for me to go to Austin, but now I look forward to visiting there in the near future.

Walt Marcyan
Canyon Lake, CA

*Many readers know that Walt Marcyan was a real allrounder in physical culture besides being the publisher of the magazine **Physical Culture** and one of the founding fathers of the Universal line of weight training equipment.*

Congratulations

Iron Game History is a terrific idea. You have lined up an excellent group for the editorial board. Congratulations on an already outstanding production.

Charles Moss, M.D.
Los Angeles, CA

Regarding Roark

Your new magazine should be a winner. I really enjoyed the *Roark Report*. It was the only thing I subscribed to. I looked forward to getting it.

On April 7, 1990, I will be in Benbrook, Texas as a part of the Strength Training and Athleticism NSCA Event. I don't know how close, or far, I will be from you but if possible I will try to get by to say hello. I will be talking to the directors and get more information and get back with you.

My wife is writing a check for a subscription for your new magazine. I certainly wish you luck. I don't know anyone who could do a better job.

Bill and Judy Pearl
Phoenix, OR

World's Oldest Iron Gamer

Enclosed is my check for \$25 for a two year subscription to your new magazine, along with my sincere wishes for your success.

Now that Milo Steinborn is deceased, I think I am the world's oldest iron pumper—since 1913; oldest competitive swimmer—14 world records from the ages 83 to 96; and one of the oldest tracksters—16 world records.

I was glad to read the article about John Y. Smith—I distinctly recall that when he won that strength test the long-shoremen and loggers began to drop out at about 400 Pounds in the deadlift.

I can barely deadlift a 100 dumbbell for about 15 reps now—presume I could have lifted a 160 or 170 pound dumbbell in my prime.

However, I did lift 340 with one hand—with a locked thumb—once. The price for this was splitting the skin on each side of my thumbnail—haven't ever tried it since.

Collister Wheeler
Portland, Oregon

Dr. Wheeler is a retired dentist and a true physical marvel. He, like Milo Steinborn, was born in 1893 and earlier this year he had his 97th birthday. He enclosed a few of the records he has kept through the years and they demonstrate that although much strength fades with time, much remains. We have included only one lift but later we may devote an article to this remarkable man. He made the lifts while weighing around 155.

Deadlift

Age 55	Age 73	Age 88	Age 97
370x3	320x1	270x1	195x3

Nebraskan Hercules

Enclosed is my membership for your new *Iron Game History*. I find it a special interest that you are using Hercules as your logo. We have a fiberglass statue of Hercules that is 8 1/2 feet tall in our strength museum.

Good luck with your new endeavor. I hope everything works out.

Boyd Epley
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Boyd Epley is, quite certainly, the country's most well-known strength coach, having served in that capacity at the University of Nebraska for well over a decade. A pioneer in his profession, Epley was the prime mover in the establishment of the National Strength Coaches Association (now the National Strength and Conditioning Association).

Greetings from Anderson

Thank you for your recent letter and publication. It is good to hear from you and know that John and Angela Grimek are going to stop by. They are a real joy. They have visited us several times here at the Home. Since Milo Steinborn passed away, they do not travel in this direction as often as before. Wishing you the very best,

Paul Anderson
Vidalia, Georgia

Weightlifter's Newsletter

I had planned to send you a well thought out, organized and typed reply. However, if I wait until I have time for that I may never reply. So here goes.

I like your publication, very much. Sure you're crazy but a few thousand diehard strength fans will be quite pleased. I will be.

I'll put you on my mailing list and I'll give your publication free plugs in future newsletters.

Denis Reno
30 Cambria Road
West Newton, MA 02165

For those who don't know, Dennis Reno is the editor since (gasp, pant) 1969 of a wonderful newsletter about competitive lifting, called Weightlifter's Newsletter— \$15.00 per year at the above address.

Gripes about "Grapevine"

The product is very good—but you must drop those bells out of the "Grapevine." And put in pictures. Old timers are just as vibrant and fun loving as the guys of today. Love it!

Bob Kennedy
Brampton, Ontario

Bob Kennedy is the publisher-editor of Muscle Mag International, one of today's leading "muscle magazines." What do other readers think about the "bells" in "Grapevine" ?

Father/Son Lifting Champions

Congrats on great job with *IGH*. I have followed your careers over the years. Bob Hoffman was always quite proud of you. I have been involved in the game since 1950 and shared the lifting and posing platforms with many of the greats of that era. My son Richard was in the Olympics in '88 and is a four time National WL Champ. We are the only father and son (that I know of) to win the Nationals. (I won in '58.)

John Grimek has got to be the Greatest of all time. He looked wonderful at this year's Oldtime Strongman dinner! Does anyone know how he trains at 80?

Fred Schutz
Chicago, Illinois

Fred and his son are, indeed, quite a team. As for the one and only JCG, perhaps we can coax him to reveal some of the methods he has used to reach (as he will this June) his 80th birthday in such a frisky condition.

On Roark and Accuracy

Enjoyed *IGH*—enclosed is my subscription for two years.

I do believe in the value of accuracy—Joe Roark must not. I suggest he research The All-Round Weightlifting Association and he would find that there are records for all types of "one-handed" lifts—including the one-handed bench press. With respect to the term "clean"—the bar is lifted clean of the floor and brought to the shoulders in a series of movements (as practiced on the continent)—thus you have a "continental clean."

We may know that a barbell, or correctly a bar-bell, and a dumbbell, or correctly a dumb-bell, are used for different types of lifting. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, 1989, defines bar-bell as: "a steel bar weighted with a ball

of iron at each end, used as a dumb-bell.” Perhaps Philippe Harlman, *Marilyn Monroe and the Camera*, may have been guilty of using a dictionary! By the way, is it “weightlifting,” or is it “weight-lifting?”

With respect to Roark it is time to cut the bull!
 Dale E. Friesz
 Fairfax Station, Virginia

Roark Responds

Concerning my mention of the one hand bench press, I regret that it was clumsily put on my part.

Regarding “Continental,” however, let me suggest a look at the following. George Kirkley in *Health & Strength* (July 9, 1953, page 44 and July 23, 1953, page 43) explains the two hands clean and jerk. Then, in the August 20, 1953 (page 41) issue, he explains the two hands “Continental jerk.” Notice he does not call the lift the two hands “Continental and jerk” but the “Continental jerk.”

Keeping in mind that in *Health & Strength*, (September 16, 1933, page 353), John Valentine says of Leo Gaudreau that he is “one of the four men in America who is recognized as an authority on facts and figures relating to strongmen,” I suggest we look next at the only article Gaudreau ever wrote for *Lifting News* magazine (May 1957, page 10) in which he explains some weightlifting terms. The fifth paragraph is here quoted.

“Since the accepted European method of performing a two hands jerk placed no restriction on the methods used to lift the weight to the shoulders, the Austrians and Germans took advantage of this and lifted the bar to the waist and from there pulled it in to the shoulders with another heave, or rolled it up on their big bellies and thick chests. The French frowned on this sort of thing and always qualified reports of German and Austrian lifting by adding that the lift had been ‘incorrectly’ performed. The English speaking world was a little more generous and described it as a ‘Continental pull-in’ which became shortened to ‘Continental.’ It has been misused by saying ‘Continental Jerk’—there is no such thing. In its most abbreviated form it can only be ‘Continental and jerk.’ Another misuse of the term by some present day writers who should know better, is when a Continental pull-in is referred to as a ‘Continental Clean.’”



MAY:

3	1897	Dr. Frederick Tilney (died May 3, 1977)
4	1890(5?)	Clevio Massimo (died 1975)
4	1907	Wilbur (Wib) Schartzberger
6	1874	G. W. Rolandow (died Dec 6, 1940)
6	1884	Katie Sandwina (died Jan 21, 1952)
10	1925	Stan Stanczyk
11	1873	Al Treloar (died Feb 28, 1960)
11	1911	Gord Venables (died May 27, 1975)
14	1910	Bill Good
14	1962	Welder-Hoffman law-suit heard by jury Jules Parent (died?)
18	1863	Joe Assirati
21	1905	Louis G. Dymeck granted curl-bar patent (#2508567)
23	1950	Gene Massey (died Nov 1, 1975)
26	1949	Hermann Goerner married Elsie in Berlin
27	1922	Norb Schemansky
30	1924	

JUNE:

2	1951	Joe DiPietro wed Lorraine Osborne
5	1908	Bob Nealey
6	1890	Ottley Coulter (died Dec 17, 1976)
8	1914	Joe DiPietro
8	1944	Randy Watson
9	1936	Lloyd Lerille
9	1968	Bob Bednarski clean and jerks 486 1/2
11	1911	Chick Deutsch
11	1922	John McWilliams
13	1868	Joseph Vanderzande
13	1944	Elmer Farnham killed in action at Normandy
17	1950	Rudolf Mang
19	1946	Roman Mielec
20	1939	Tony Garcy
22	1910	Ray Van Cleef (died May 26, 1964)
22	1926	Jack Delinger
24	1944	Alan Calvert died, (born 1865)
26	1955	Tom Platz
27	1959	Bob Hasse wed Lily Koonz
27	1975	Arax died
28	1882	Maxick (died May 10, 1961)
28	1942	Frank Zane
29	1929	Pete George

European Corner

Giovanni Belzoni: Strongman Archaeologist

Dave Webster

There has been an unbroken thread from the athletes of Greece and the gladiators of Rome, through the circus and stage strongmen of the Golden Age of Strength at the turn of the last century to the gifted TV competitors vying for the big cash prizes in strength athletics today. This inspiring story is now recorded in seven large files, the basis for a very comprehensive book I've been writing on the subject, but this issue a brief review traces through this EUROPEAN CORNER of the globe the part played by one of our most interesting strongmen.

Some of the professional entertainers who wove this continuing thread through the centuries were strength athletes and few, if any, lived a more interesting life than the wonderful Italian strongman, Giovanni Belzoni. Italy has produced many marvellous professionals but they all, including Belzoni, seem to be the best kept secret since the killing of Cock Robin. One of the greatest problems in producing a definitive work on old time strongmen is the imbalance created by physical culture writers. Systematic research reveals that specialists in our field have mainly rehashed material from earlier journals in their own language and have not ventured far in their search. The earliest physical culture magazines contain much about the Saxons, Sandow has been done to death and Inch's exploits have covered reams of paper; yet very little is known in our field about the exceptional life lived by Belzoni from the time he was born in Padua on the 15th of November 1778 until he died in 1823 en route to the almost legendary Timbuctu.

Living in the Regency period when there was virtually an epidemic of romanticism, the flamboyant Italian stood out in any company. Anybody over six feet in height at that time was considered very large indeed, so when this magnificently proportioned strongman, some 6' 7" tall, mounted the stage his appearance alone created a sensation. [Ed. note: There is some question about Belzoni's exact height. Our own files reveal sources for heights of 6'6", 6'7" and 6'8".]

When Napoleon invaded Italy in 1796, Belzoni, who had studied hydraulics and who may or not have been a priest, set off to travel through Europe. In Germany he encountered a troupe of travelling showpeople which included a strongman who was the base for human pyramids. The strongman also put his head on one chair, his feet on another and held an anvil on his unsupported stomach while two assistants forged a horseshoe, beating it with hammers. Belzoni, with his terrific natural size and strength, realized that he could be successful as a professional performer. Soon he became a fully fledged mountebank known as Gio Batta and with his brother Francesco, who was also a big man, he arrived in London in 1803 with a reasonably polished strength act. Belzoni displayed his enormous strength in the streets and in fair booths before moving upmarket to the famous Sadler Wells.



On Easter Monday, 1803, Belzoni featured prominently as the Italian Goliath in "Jack and the Giant Killer*", or "Fee, Faw, Fum", a pantomime still known to every British child. He also performed his own specialty act billed as follows: "Signor Giovanni Battista Belzoni, the Patagonian Samson, will present most extraordinary specimens of the Gymnastic Art perfectly foreign to any former exhibition (his first appearance in England)." [Ed. note: Belzoni was billed as a "Patagonian" because early explorers to the southern tip of South America reported that the area was inhabited by a tribe of giants.]

This act included carrying and walking with 11 people on an iron-framed harness, itself weighing 127 pounds. There are several excellent accounts of Belzoni's feats and exploits in theaters such as the Drury Lane, at the ancient Bartholomews Fair (first held in 1133) and also in Vauxhall Gardens.

His act usually began with weightlifting and concluded with his carrying feat. An illustrated broadsheet from the period said "He is in every way so perfectly formed that he is considered by artists as the finest model ever seen." After appearing for years throughout Britain, Belzoni left to show his strength in Portugal, Spain, Gibraltar and other parts of Europe in the years 1813-14.

Soon he tired of life on the stage and his adventurous spirit led him to embark on a voyage which was to change his life. The trip began on the island of Malta and ended, for a time, in Alexandria. The year was 1815 and the giant Italian had a chance encounter with Henry Salt, the English consul general of Egypt, who was under orders to collect antiquities for Britain. Together, they decided that Belzoni would travel up the Nile to the site of an ancient temple near Thebes and use his mechanical prowess to lift and load onto a boat for shipment to England a giant stone head, carved from granite. The head was approximately 6' by 8' and weighed over seven tons, but Belzoni's talents were equal to the task and soon the head was on its way to the British museum.

On the basis of his success with the great stone head, Belzoni began a career as an explorer and Egyptologist, defying the curses of the Pharaohs and acquiring priceless treasures which he shipped back to Britain, his adopted home. Another adventure took 18 months of his life, the time required to move, load and then get the bust of Rameses II back to London. During this adventure, much of which took place in temperatures of over 120 degrees, Belzoni's strength and courage saved him on many occasions. Once, when he was attacked by a mob of Arabs, he is said to have grabbed one of his assailants by the ankles as Samson had done and swung him in circles like a club, thus foiling the opposition who, after several abortive rallies, lost heart and backed off.

The former professional strongman made many dramatic discoveries, including the passageway into the second pyramid at Giza, one of Egypt's greatest pyramids. He was a careful taker of notes and his watercolor sketches of his discoveries have helped to preserve his name in the field of Egyptology for all time. Those who would like to read further about Belzoni should consult the readings at the end of this article. Belzoni died as he lived, searching for adventure on a voyage of exploration to the headwaters of the Niger river. Worn down by his years of deprivation in Egypt, he was unable to overcome the amoebic dysentery which finally took his life and he died in Gwato on December 3, 1823, at the age of 45.

Readings:

Belzoni, G., *Narrative of the operations and recent discoveries within the Pyramids, Temples, Tombs and Excavations in Egypt and Nubia*, (By the author. 1820).

Hamblin, D., Behold the amazing, the spectacular, Giovanni Belzoni, *Smithsonian* (June 1988) pp. 80-87.

Clair, Colin, *Strong Man Egyptologist*, (Norwich: Jarrod and Sons, n.d.).

Beston, H., Belzoni, in *The Book of Surprises*, (NY:Harper and Row, 1965).

Books and Magazines

Terry Todd
The University of Texas

Iyer, K.V. *Physique and Figure*, (Bangalore City, India: By the author, 1940) 119 pp.

In this repetitious, yet interesting and honest, book the author discusses his theory of "stock vitality." He wants an improvement in the general health of the people of his nation (India) and the world. He feels that proper exercise and nutrition can achieve this goal. He compares this "stock vitality" to such valuables as gold and diamonds and maintains that they are no less important than material wealth. He also discusses the necessity of maintaining a tranquil mind for purposes of health and successful living. Iyer states: "My purpose in writing this book is to place before (my countrymen) simple exercises with solid iron dumbbells...to lead them to a correct way of performing them and to help them build their physique and health, so as to fit them for healthy citizenship and parenthood. This is the one service I can offer to my fellow men." The book contains a short treatise on the value of progressive training with solid iron dumbbells, which will, Iyer believes, when coupled with proper diet, produce all that anyone could expect in terms of health and strength.

Judd, JR. *Always Strong and Happy*, Third edition. (New York: The Outing Publishing Company, 1895) 204 pp.

This book explains a system the author claimed to have used for 30 years. The system is one which "develops the various muscles of the body by dumb-bells, pulley-weights or other apparatus (that) requires the body or limbs to be placed in different positions, in order that they may be both contracted and expanded." This system, when examined, bears a close resemblance to many weight training programs in use today. The author recommends the use of medium-heavy weights rather than light weights, which were in vogue then, or heavy weights. The exercises which are included are for both special (grip, biceps, neck, etc.) and general (all around) development. These exercises are illustrated by excellent line drawings and are fully explained to the reader. The author also included his personal opinions on such matters as diet, clothing, and training. Many of his opinions would hold true today, almost 100 years later.

Where Are They Now?

Al Thomas Kutztown University



In August of 1944 when Gene Jantzen was featured for the third time on a *Strength & Health* cover, I was a sickly kid who'd been huffing and puffing for almost a year to look like the geezers I admired in "the book." By that time, Gene was already a near-legendary figure. I must confess, however, that until I began reading about Jantzen, the appeal of the Game to this 97-pound weakling was but one: the promise of muscles and strength. Only slowly, very slowly, did the idea dawn on me that muscles and strength were only part of the Game's promise. Indeed, many of the men most famous for muscle and strength were hardly less famous for their feats of endurance. In the forties, the strength world's champion of endurance was Bartelso, Illinois' Gene Jantzen, who taught us skinnies that the mastery of self achieved by endurance feats and training was as heroic and admirable as that achieved by the building of huge muscles and strength.

Today, the seventy-three-year-old Gene Jantzen lives in Carlyle, Illinois (Box 172, zip code 62231), and, in addition to his continuing athletic regimens, is a resort owner and manager (Jantzen's Resort), a corrective therapist, a sculptor, and a poet, with a 'book of verse published in 1985: a real "Renaissance Man."

Recently, for his work on behalf of health and fitness for senior citizens, Gene was one of five winners of the 1989 "Governor's Senior Leadership Award for Health and Physical Fitness" (Illinois), receiving his commemorative plaque from Gov. James Thompson at ceremonies during the Governor's Conference for the Aging Network held in Chicago. The Award was made in recognition of his life-long commitment to a lifestyle that has exemplified the best in health and physical fitness. Gene explains that the honor recognizes the "ultimate exercise," which he developed: "I have tried to sell it to people for years...but because it is so simple...no one believes it. It involves simply lying down [on the floor] and getting back up. This involves every muscle in the body." A great cardiovascular exercise, the "ultimate exercise" is especially adaptable to the elderly: "All they need is a place to lie down and get up."

Muscles built with the old "thousand and one exercises" endure. They don't completely deflate, like the steroid-built variety, when their owner cuts back on the "juice" and his training. About 20 pounds lighter than the 185 pounds of his *S & H* coverman days, Gene still possesses 16-inch arms and chest and waist measurements similar to the "V"-shape girths of those long-gone days: "I always tell people that I have no reason to believe exercise or fitness prolongs your life, but...while you're working out, it makes you feel like you're never going to die. That, to me, is the motivation."

Hard as it is to believe, by the time he was 12, Gene

Gene Jantzen

had earned the nickname "satchel-ass," the result of his parents having fattened him up as part of a rehabilitation from pneumonia. It came as a surprise, then, when the little fatso, who was always the last one chosen for a team, was invited by the neighborhood gang to go ice skating. His disillusionment, however, came swiftly and almost fatally: "They knew if the pond would hold me, it would hold any of them." Unfortunately, "it didn't hold." Encased in ice, Gene ran home and, while warming-up, spied in the kitchen stove coal bucket a magazine advertising a mail-order exercise course. A year later, when one of the gang picked a fight, the now-muscular youngster made it clear that the fatso was history: "I won, and I never had another fight. They realized things had changed."

As a teenager, Gene would run nine miles daily from Bartelso to Carlyle and spend the afternoon swimming and socializing with friends, and then swim 14 miles downstream, before finishing off with another nine mile run. As a result, a "lot of people used to tell my dad, 'Louie, you better watch that kid. There's something wrong with him. He's out there running in the hot sun, and that's not good for the heart.'" The strength of the Jantzen heart, however, soon became legendary. He frequently swam from Alton to St. Louis, a feat which he now shrugs off because it was downstream. In the summer of '36, as a lifeguard at Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri, he swam from Osage Beach to Bagnell Dam, a distance of 20 miles, in a little over 11 hours. In 1938, Gene won foot races of 25 and 20 miles and a 5-mile swim, and in '41, he ran 100 miles, from Jean, Nevada, to McCarren Field, Las Vegas, in, as he recalls, 20 hours: "In those days, that was a world's record." As an Army Air Force fitness instructor in the summer of 1943, Gene set what he was told were world records in the sit-up (5,200 in 3 hours, 50 minutes; and 500 in 14 minutes); in the pull-up (1,000 in 1 hour, 42 minutes, resting after sets starting at 45 pull-ups); and in the Army style push-up, with no rest (1,500 in 1 hour, 35 minutes). At 50, in 1966, as a promotion for his resort, Gene offered a \$3,000 purse to anybody, regardless of age, who could stay with him for eight hours of running, swimming, and exercising. None of the challengers succeeded.

Known in strengthdom almost as much for his classic physique as for his endurance feats, Gene's "most memorable physique success" came in the fall of 1947 when he won the "Finest Physique in America Contest," sponsored by Bernarr Macfadden of *Physical Culture* magazine: "There were 330,000 entries from the U.S. and Canada, and I was featured in several articles in *Physical Culture* because of winning this title." It had all started almost ten years earlier, however, when Gene took fourth in the 1939 Mr. America Contest. In 1938, he had taken a second in the Mr. New York contest, and in 1939, he went on to win that prestigious title. He won the 1941

Mr. California title, and in Memphis, he took third in the 1944 Mr. America Contest. In '47, he was second in the Junior Mr. America and won the Mr. Illinois and Mr. Heart of America titles. In the same year, wife Pat, six-month-old son Kent, and Gene were highlighted in *Look* magazine: "Family Full of Health," a feature triggered by baby Kent's chinning himself at six months. (Future movie director Stanley Kubrick was the 18-year-old photographer for this piece.)

Success in the worlds of endurance and physique aside, Gene has distinguished himself in virtually every "physical culture" endeavor. He played high school football, was a member of the swim and gymnastics teams at the U. of Illinois, and later, as a student at the U. of Southern California ('37-'39), he was on the gymnastics team, posed for art classes, and worked out at Santa Monica's Muscle Beach. He graduated from U.S.C. in 1939 and went to New York City on a drama school scholarship, returning in the summer to work as a physical instructor in California boys' camps. In 1940, he received a contract with Columbia Pictures and managed a gym in Hollywood until he joined the Air Force in April, 1942, where he was a physical and swim instructor and a corrective therapist during his more than three years of service. In 1944, his feats of strength and endurance were brought to the world's attention in Ripley's "Believe It or Not" and in "Strange as It Seems," as well as in *Stars and Stripes and Yank*.

In response to a polio epidemic, Gene opened a corrective therapy clinic in 1950, and it flourished for 15 years. In 1953, he opened a resort, and in 1960 won the first of two awards for lifesaving. The second one, "The Award of Merit," conferred in 1969, is the Red Cross' highest award for bravery. Much press coverage came to Gene when he garnered more than a dozen medals in the Senior Citizens' Olympics of 1976 and 1977. With articles and features on him in all the contemporary American strength magazines, not to mention muscle and general publications around the world — from England and Australia to South America— few men of his day received the media attention accorded the "Bartelso Buzzsaw."

When asked how he had come to see himself after his decades in the Game, Gene replied, "I see myself as a dedicated physical fitness enthusiast, one who believes...that the development of the mind and soul are more important than 18-inch biceps." As a suggestion to the bodybuilders of the 1990s, he observes crisply that "too much is too much"; they should "work toward more naturalness."

Gene's dietary regimen consists of "lots of meat, all kinds of vegetables and fruit, and whole grain cereals." As a corrective therapist for 50 years, he has worked with "every kind of neuromuscular disorder using only resistive exercise and stretching as therapy." He and wife, Pat, have been

married for 45 years and have had ten children, several of whom have been involved in the arts and acting, and at least one, daughter Nina, has followed her father into bodybuilding and endurance running. Gene's current training program includes "running the hills, hard walking, and swimming in the summer months." He also "squats with bodyweight or more and does one vigorous extension and flexion barbell exercise for the arms and upper body in hour to hour-and-a half workouts."

Like the man he named as his "hero" in the Game, John Grimek, Gene Jantzen is, and has been, one of our sport's most distinguished generalists: "I'd like to be remembered," he once mused, "as an all-round endurance athlete, primarily into bodybuilding, marathon running, and swimming." And so —he surely will be.

Consumptive-looking long distance running specialists have come along who can manage to negotiate 100 miles in somewhat faster time than Gene did back in the 40s. Just as seal-shaped beings have swum times that are somewhat faster than his. The two best American marathoners of recent years, however, couldn't do five pull-ups between them: indeed, one laughed about not being able to do even one, though he assured inquiring reporters that his wife could (do one, that is).

A man may be forgiven, I hope, for wondering how many the "seal-shaped beings" could do. Gene, on the other hand, gutted-out his impressive times while sporting enough infinitely versatile wedge-shaped muscle mass to win national-level physique contests, and at the very same time that he was grinding-out endurance records in the pull-up, sit-up, and push-up. It's clear that this Gene Jantzen was an endurance champ for both the books and the ages — and that he is still one impressive hombre.



Jan Todd The University of Texas

The Mystery of

For many years, the *Guinness Book of World Records* contained the following listing in its weightlifting section: “The greatest weight ever raised by a human being is 6,270 lb in a back lift...by the 364-lb Paul Anderson...The greatest by a woman is 3,564 lb with a hip and harness lift by Mrs. Josephine Blatt (nee Schauer) (US) (1869-1923) at the Bijou Theatre, Hoboken, N.J., on April 15, 1985.”¹ While Anderson’s career has been well (though not always accurately) documented, Josephine Blatt—or “Minerva” as she was known to the vaudeville and circus audiences of the 1890s—has received scant attention from iron game historians. Even David P. Willoughby, in *The Super Athletes*, devotes only 13 lines of type to her accomplishments.² Yet Minerva was one of the most successful strongwomen of all time and received more mainstream publicity in her day than any other professional strongwoman ever has, with the possible exception of Katie Sandwina, whose career lasted much longer than Minerva’s.³ During the 1890s, for instance, Minerva is mentioned more than 25 times in *The National Police Gazette*, the largest and most widely read sporting/theatrical newspaper of the day. Furthermore, Richard K. Fox, the *Gazette*’s owner and publisher, presented her with a silver and gold championship belt for being the “world’s strongest woman,” a belt comparable to the one Louis Cyr received earlier from Fox as the “world’s strongest man.”⁴

Unfortunately, almost all of the evidence we have of Minerva’s life and lifting exploits comes from the pages of *The National Police Gazette*—a sensationalistic weekly known for neither accuracy nor subtlety. Considered risqué in many quarters for its illustrations of showgirls in tights and low necklines, the weekly tabloid enjoyed a large circulation and made Richard K. Fox a millionaire.⁵

Professional strongwomen began appearing on the gas-lit stages of America and in the pages of the *Police Gazette* in the early 1890s, at roughly the same time as their male counterparts. Though there was a well-established tradition of professional strongmen and women in Europe by 1890, strength acts were not well known in America prior to that time.⁶ However, the public acclaim afforded the French Canadian strongman Louis Cyr and the German bodybuilder/strongman Eugen Sandow heightened the public’s interest in strength and physical culture and opened the stage doors of many American variety theaters to aspiring strongwomen.⁷

In 1890 the first strongwoman, “Mlle Victorine”—then appearing at the Trocadero Theater in London—was featured in *The National Police Gazette*. Fox described her as the “luscious and robust strongest woman in the world.”⁸ One year later, a letter signed by “Josie Wohlford” appeared in the *Gazette*, challenging Victorine’s claim to the title:

I hereby challenge her to arrange a match to lift heavy-weights and catch cannonballs from 10 pounds to 20 pounds for \$500 to \$1000 a side and the female heavy-weightlifting championship of the world. The \$100 my backer, Mr. C.P. Blatt, has posted with Richard K. Fox, shows that I mean business.⁹

One of the mysteries yet to be resolved about Minerva is that of her maiden name. Though this letter was signed “Josie Wohlford,” an 1893 article in the *Gazette*—no doubt written by a publicist—claims that Minerva was the daughter of a socially prominent physician, Dr. Joseph Schauer of Hoboken, New Jersey, where, according to the article, her family members were leaders in society. The highly suspect article goes on to explain that, unlike her family, “She [Minerva] loathes the emptiness of the social world, and is only happy when juggling with dumbbells.”¹⁰

An interview for *The Mirror*, of Manchester, New Hampshire, is the only reliable evidence this author has found of Minerva’s early life, though it makes no mention of her maiden name. She told the reporter from *The Mirror* that she was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1865 (not in the US or in 1869 as the *Guinness* book states); that she entered a gymnasium at age seven and “took a fancy for lifting;” and that by the time she was 11, she could “manipulate fifty and seventy-five pound dumbbells with ease.” According to *The Mirror*, She was hired to teach gymnastics and exercise at age 15, which she did for three years, but then she met Charles P. Blatt, an American professional strongman, who asked her to return to America with him and go on the stage. This was in 1887. The interview also reveals that shortly after her arrival in America Fox suggested she take the stage-name “Minerva.” She said Fox “put me in a contest between fourteen other strong women and I outlifted them all. He then backed me for \$1,000 and I have been a protege of his ever since.”¹¹

In a 1931 article, *Police Gazette* author Harry Sheldland reminisced about meeting the young Josie Wohlford in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He reports that she was then about 5’8” in height and 165 pounds. He described her as a “mild, sweetnatured woman,” but he added that in later years, whenever she heard anyone refer to women as the weaker sex, “she’d get real mad and it was everybody’s cue to beat it”¹²

In an 1892 interview, Minerva also mentions her temper and relates a story about a heckler:

I warned him to keep quiet and finally [he] dared me down off the stage. I jumped over the railing in front of the stage and went for him. Grabbing him by the throat, I threw him across the tent against a pole. I was so angry.¹³



By the time the first *Police Gazette* illustration appeared on October 28, 1893, [shown above], Minerva was clearly heavier than 165 pounds. In fact, her husband, in an interview following her death, reports that the two almost always weighed exactly the same—generally around 230 pounds.¹⁴

Though some of her bulk came from heavy lifting, a fascinating interview revealed another contributing factor:

Eating is about the principal part of my existence, and I always have the best I can possibly procure. For breakfast I generally have beef, cooked rare; oatmeal, French-fry potatoes, sliced tomatoes with onions and two cups of coffee. At dinner I have French soup, plenty of vegetables, squabs and game... When supper comes, I am always ready for it, and I then have soup, porterhouse steak, three fried eggs, two different kinds of salads and tea.¹⁵

Minerva

In any case, and at any bodyweight, Minerva was an incredibly strong woman. Shelland reported that he visited with Minerva again, when she was 24 and in her physical prime. He claims she was then capable of a “700 pound lift from the floor with two hands, and a one hand press over her head with 100 pounds.” She could also stand, he claimed, with her feet in a bucket and lift a 300 pound barrel of lime to her shoulders. And, finally, he credits her with being able to break horseshoes, and to catch 24 pound cannonballs shot from a cannon.¹⁶

Though it is easy to dismiss Shelland’s story of the barrel lift as just another example of weightlifting hyperbole, available evidence suggests otherwise. For, in a challenge letter published in the *Police Gazette* on January 20, 1894, Minerva requests that this exact stunt be done as part of a competition for her world title.¹⁷ Unless some trick was involved, it would seem doubtful that she would have made such a suggestion had this not been a feat of which she was confident, especially since Fox was putting up \$10,000 on this occasion to back her claim.

In the *fin de siècle* era, nearly every strongman and strongwoman claimed to be the best in the world, but Minerva was always ready and willing to meet all challengers.¹⁸ Furthermore, other lifts claimed by Minerva seem more or less believable when one considers her large size and massive body structure. The most weight she ever claimed in an overhead barbell press, for instance, is 185 pounds.¹⁹ Most of the challenge letters in the *Gazette* include such competitive lifts as “putting up” dumbbells with one or both hands, lifting the heaviest weight with a harness, breaking 12 horseshoes in the shortest amount of time and, last but not least, catching the most cannonballs in 30 minutes.²⁰

Minerva’s most famous feat of strength and the reason for her inclusion in *The Guinness Book of World Records* was a hip and harness lift performed in front of hundreds of witnesses at the Bijou Theatre in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1895. The lift has never been approached by any other woman. It should be noted, however, that the *Gazette* says she lifted 18 men and platform for a total weight of approximately 3000 pounds, not 3564 pounds as quoted by *Guinness*.²¹ In his analytical history, *The Super Athletes*, David P. Willoughby disputes the lift and argues, “Evidently this lift was performed by lifting (inwardly) on the supporting chains rather than directly (straight up) on the platform...she may have been capable of a legitimate Harness Lift of 2800 or even 2900 pounds.”²² [Ed. note: Lifting inwardly would raise the weight just as it does when one pulls inwardly on the chains of a swing.] But Willoughby cites no evidence for his claim and, as the only report of the show at the Bijou appears to be

the one in the *Gazette*, it is unlikely we will ever know the truth. One certainty, however, is that in the retelling of this great lift, five men were added to the platform. The *Gazette* reports are clear that she lifted 18 men at approximately 150 pounds each, which, Willoughby fans will be pleased to note, totals 2700 pounds. As for the harness and chains, according to the coverage of the lift in the *Gazette*, they must have weighed approximately 300 pounds.

Whatever the actual weight, it so impressed Richard K. Fox that following the great lift in Hoboken, he had a solid gold commemorative trophy designed; he presented it to Minerva on April 29, 1895.²³ Earlier, following her victory over Victorine in 1893, Fox had presented Minerva with a championship belt made of golden dumbbells and 17 silver plates, 16 of which contained an engraving of Minerva and the words, "The Police Gazette championship belt, representing the female heavyweight lifting championship of the world...Presented by Richard K. Fox on December 19, 1893." The center plate contained Fox's likeness.²⁴ The whereabouts of Minerva's belt and cup are unknown.

For approximately 20 years, Minerva and Blatt, who reportedly married in 1888, travelled throughout North and South America and Europe giving strength shows. Though a search of the city directories of Elizabeth, New Jersey, reveals that Charles Blatt resided in Elizabeth during 1887-1891, in 1898 and in 1902-1905, there is no mention of a wife, which is unusual.²⁵ Reports in the *Gazette* indicate that the Blatts were in Mexico City with the Orrin Brothers Circus during much of 1891 and that in 1892, they settled for a time in San Antonio, Texas.

Minerva's arrival in San Antonio was heralded by a front page story in the *San Antonio Daily Light*. Headlined, "A Wonderful Woman," it notes that she weighed 185 pounds with a 17 1/2 inch biceps, 44 inch bust and 33 inch waist. It also reports, "Mr. Blatt states that he will take two of the best horses in the city and let her take a strap attached to the swingle tree, one in each hand, and let them pull in opposite directions without letting go."²⁶

Finding that San Antonio suited them "to a T", Blatt soon took over the proprietorship of "Central Park", which was advertised on the front page of the August 25 issue of the *Sun Antonio Daily Light* as a "popular family resort now open under a new management."²⁷ According to the San Antonio city directories, and ads in the *Daily Light*, the Blatt's establishment was located in the heart of the city on Garden Street. Though Minerva always headlined the shows, ads in the *Daily Light* reveal that she shared the stage with the "renowned Nelson family," and "Seleman who can lift a 500 pound rock with one finger." There was also a concert band which performed during each show.²⁸

As for the rest of Minerva's career, it appears that she spent several seasons with Barnum's circus, four years in Europe touring with the Rentz Circus, and that she and Blatt also worked for the Orrin Brothers Circus in Mexico and South America. In between their circus engagements, they worked vaudeville, particularly Benjamin Keith's Orpheum

circuit, which paid the highest salaries and had the best working conditions in the business.²⁹

As the 27 notices in Fox's *Gazette* make abundantly clear, Minerva gave the impression of being ever ready to meet all challengers to her title. She defeated Victorine in 1892 and for the next several years she and another professional, "Yucca," exchanged challenges and counter-challenges through the "Sporting News and Notes" column of the *Gazette*, though a real match never seems to have taken place.³⁰ In 1894, the Belgian strongwoman, Athleta, who had become famous appearing at the Alhambra in London, challenged Minerva, but again no match was ever reported in the *Gazette*.³¹ Other names which surfaced in the *Gazette* as possible contenders for the Fox belt during this era were Roberta, the champion strong woman of Cuba;³² M'lle Madro of France; Madame Robusta, who claimed to be "Champion of Europe"; Beulah, the Champion of Germany; and Myra, the champion of France."³³

Minerva retired in 1910, and reportedly spent her remaining years in Perth Amboy, New Jersey and Tottenville, New York, where she invested successfully in real estate. She died on September 1, 1923.³⁴

Although it may have been the case that, at age 42, Minerva was tired enough of life on the road and wealthy enough that she simply decided to hang up her belt and tights, it is worth noting that she retired at almost precisely the moment young Katie Brumbach (or Sandwina) arrived in America to grace Barnum and Bailey's center ring. Despite her fame, Minerva's life still leaves us with a number of unanswered questions. What was her real name? What happened to her championship belt and her loving cup? Did she have children? What were her actual lifts? How was she perceived by the men and women who saw her?

¹ McWhirter, Norris, ed. *Guinness Book of World Records*, (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1985) p. 462.

² Willoughby, David P., *The Super Athletes*. (Cranbury, New Jersey: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1970) p. 577.

³ Sandwina, whose real name was Katie Brumbach, began performing with her parents, who also did a strength act, while still a child in Europe. She made her American debut around 1907 with the Ringling Brothers Circus and continued performing in circuses and vaudeville halls through the early 1940s. She died in January, 1952. Information on Sandwina's early life is available in Edmund Desbonnet's *Les Rois de la Force*, (Paris: Librairie Berger-Levrault. 1911) pp. 375-377.

⁴ Gaudreau, Leo, The life of Louis Cyr, *Your Physique*, 7(August 1947) pp. 26-28.

⁵ Frank L. Mott, *A History of American Magazines: 1850-1865*. Vol. II. (Cambridge: Belknap Press. Harvard University, 1957) p. 325.

⁶ Desbonnet's *Les Rois De La Force* contains biographies of many European male and female strength athletes who appeared during the Nineteenth Century. A partial list of professional strongwomen appearing in Europe prior to 1890 would include: Madame Gobert, Madame Doublier, Madame Ali Bracco, Madame Stark, "Olga and Kaira", Anna Abs, Madame Montagna, and Athleta. Following 1890, there was an explosion of interest in professional strongwomen, particularly in England, and profes-

sional athletes such as Vulcana, Miss Robinson, Veluga, Athelda and Velua made good livings by giving strength exhibitions. (Strongwomen clipping file. Coulter Collection, Todd-McLean Sport History Collection)

⁷ Louis Cyr, Eugen Sandow, August Johnson, and Professor Atilla were frequently featured in the *Gazettes* and other publications of the 1890s. The peak year for strongman activity in the *Police Gazette* was 1893, the year Sandow appeared at the Chicago World's Fair. In 1894, Fox put up a challenge belt for strongmen and organized an official competition. Though not a complete bibliography, see: *The National Police Gazettes* of January 14, 1893; March 11.1893; May 5, 1894; September 23, 1893; November 14, 1893; October 13, 1894; September 29, 1894; July 28, 1894; May 5, 1894; April 22, 1893; September 23.1893; October 7, 1893; October 14.1893; October 28, 1893; November 25.1893; December 16.1893; January 27, 1894; February 3, 1894; April 7, 1894; April 14.1894; April 28.1894; etc.

Strongwomen mentioned in the pages of the *Gazette* after 1890 are: Victorine; "Yucca." (Mrs. John T. Welsh, of Oakland, California), Minerva's great rival, who toured with a number of America's largest tent shows; "Myra" the champion of France; Beulah the champion of Germany; Athleta; Madame Robusta, "the champion of Europe"; M'lle Madro of France and M'lle Angelo.

⁸M'lle Victorine, *The National Police Gazette*, (January 25.1890) pp. 7 and 13.

⁹ Letter, *The National Police Gazette*, March 13, 1891, p. 10. A copy of the letter is also included in Gene Smith and Jayne Barry Smith, eds., *The Police Gazette*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972) pp. 134-135. Although it is mentioned in several later *Gazettes* that Minerva defeated Victorine, no contest report appears in any of the *Gazettes* which survived from these years.

¹⁰ Reported in *The National Police Gazette*, (March 11.1893) p. 11.

¹¹ This interview was also reported in the *Gazette*, (March 11, 1893) p. 11.

Harry Shelland, who wrote for the *Gazette* in the 1920s and 1930s. remembered meeting Minerva in Elizabeth, New Jersey in the late 1880s before she made her stage debut. He claims that Minerva came to Blatt's attention by carrying a barrel of potatoes up two flights of stairs. (Harry Shelland, "Recalling the great Minerva, *The National Police Gazette*, December 28, 1931, Coulter Collection, Women's Clipping File). A later clipping from a 1974 re-issue of *Gazette* articles states that Minerva was a "native of Hoboken, N. J., and inherited much of her strength from her father, Joseph Schauer, who was so strong that no one would even shake hands with him the second time if they could avoid it." (Minerva: the strongest woman who ever lived, *The National Police Gazette*, (April 1974) p. 16.

¹²Shelland. Recalling. *Police Gazette*, (Dec. 28.1931).

¹³"Minerva" interviewed: a pleasant hour with the strongwoman. *Sun Antonio Daily Light*, August 15, 1892.

¹⁴ Minerva: strongest woman, *Police Gazette*, (April 1974) p. 16. C.P. Blatt's measurements are included in A strongman from Pittsburgh, *New York Times* (March 21.1891) p.8. He is described as being 5'9 1/2" tall "in his stockings" and weighing 205 without "a superfluous ounce of adipose tissue." He measured 43 1/2" around the chest and 17 1/2" around the biceps. Interestingly, this article makes no mention of Minerva even though, according to most reports, he married in 1888. Blatt is described as a native of Pittsburgh, not Hoboken or Elizabeth, New Jersey.

¹⁵"Minerva" interviewed, *San Antonio Dairy Light*, August 15, 1892.

¹⁶ Shelland, Recalling, *Police Gazette*, (December 28, 1931).

¹⁷ Minerva challenges the world, *The National Police Gazette*, (January 20, 1984) p. 11.

¹⁸ One story Shelland tells, for instance, which is undoubtedly press agency, is that Minerva was so fond of horses that she used to stroll New York City and help pull big draft horses out of the mud or help push a loaded wagon up a hill. "This was her manner of being kind to animals and you may be sure, the poor, tired and overworked beasts fully appreciated the assistance..." Shelland Recalling, *Police Gazette*, (December 28, 1931).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Minerva issues another challenge, *The National Police Gazette*, (November 5, 1892) p. 10.

²¹ Although later sources have cited her as lifting 23 men, the May 4, 1895 report of the event in the *Gazette* gives the number as 18. [See: Minerva's wonderful act: lifts eighteen men, combined weight three thousand pounds. *The National Police Gazette*, (May 4, 1895) p. 10.] Rosetta Hoffman in: The world's strongest woman, *Strength & Health*, 5(July 1937) p. 38, gives Minerva credit for 23 men and a total weight of 3564 pounds.

As of April 10, 1990, the author has been unable to verify the source of the often quoted 3564 pound figure. For this article, the author examined every microfilmed issue of the *Gazette* available between 1885 and 1907. While there are a few issues missing from these reels, the majority of the issues are on film. A search of the Hoboken papers from this time period did not turn up any articles citing her lift, though such a citation would have been unusual.

²² Willoughby, *The Super Athletes*, p. 577.

²³Minerva's wonderful act, *Police Gazette*, (May 4, 1895) p. 10.

²⁴The belt was presented to Minerva on December 19, 1893.

²⁵ Telephone interview: Elizabeth, New Jersey, Public Library reference librarian, March 30, 1990.

²⁶A wonderful woman: she lifts heavy weights, horses, etc., as though they were straws, *Sun Antonio Daily Light*, August 12, 1892.

²⁷ *Sun Antonio Daily Light*, August 25, 1892.

²⁸ Appler, Jules A., ed. *1892 General Directory of the City of Sun Antonio*, (San Antonio: Appler Publishing, 1893). Blatt is also listed in 1893.

²⁹Minerva: *Police Gazette*. (April 1974) p. 16.

³⁰Challenges between Yucca and Minerva appear in the *Gazette* on October 22, 1892 (p. 10); November 5, 1892 (p.10); November 12, 1892 (p.10); November 26, 1892 (p. 10); March 18, 1893 (p. 10); March 25, 1893 (p. 10); April 22, 1893 (p. 11); May 20, 1893 (p.10); October 7, 1893 (p. 11); October 28, 1893 (p. 7); November 28, 1893 (p. 10); January 6, 1894 (p. 10); January 13, 1894 (p. 10); January 20, 1894 (p. 11); and April 7, 1894 (p. 11). Though it was agreed at one point that a match would be held in Madison Square Garden on October 18, 1893, no mention of this contest actually taking place ever appears in the *Gazettes* available for this study.

³¹ Biographical information on Athleta is available in Desbonnet's *Les Rois de la Force*, pp. 380-387.

³²"Sporting News and Notes," *The National Police Gazette*, (November 18.1893): p. 10.

³³ "Sporting News and Notes," *The National Police Gazette*, (January 6, 1894) p. 10.

³⁴ Hoffman World's strongest woman, *Strength & Health*, p. 38.

The Roark Report

The Iron Man Hand Grippers

It was small enough to be carried “in the coat pocket”, but effective enough to strengthen your “...hand, wrist, forearm, biceps, latissimus, etc.” — or so the 1904 advertisement in *Health & Strength* magazine claimed for the “Nutcracker Gripper.” The gripper was described as extra strong, was shaped in a “V” with a coiled spring-steel at the vertex. Perhaps buried inside that vertex was the secret of how a hand gripper could aid in developing the lats, much less the “etc.”

Hand grippers have been apart of the physical culture marketplace for all of this century, but no one made much of a fuss about them being extremely difficult, if not impossible, to squeeze shut until December 1964 when Warren Tetting began making an iron-handled gripper for *Iron Man* magazine, and the first of 79 ads began running for their sale. Unfortunately, those ads contributed to the confusion concerning the *Iron Man* grippers. I once telephoned the offices of Peary Rader, trying to determine how many various strengths of grippers were offered. Three or four, I was told, but they had long since stopped selling them through the magazine.

Now, through a study of those ads and through conversations and communications with Warren Tetting and others, the correct, if still confusing, history of this product can be at least partially unraveled.

The December 1964 issue of *Iron Man* magazine announced the “Super Heavy Duty Iron Man Gripper” was for sale at \$4 each. But the “Super Heavy”, so called from the onset, never, in fact, existed. It was actually the “Heavy Duty” version, not the “Super Heavy” as Warren explained — and this is an important distinction. By September 1966, after having been the only gripper offered by *Iron Man* for nearly two years, the ad now announced, “Heavy Duty”, “Extra Heavy Duty”, and “Super Duty”. The “Heavy Duty” —which had heretofore been labeled the “Super Heavy”, was now joined by a harder-to-close pair called “Extra Heavy” and the hardest of all, the “Super Duty” (notice, not “Super Heavy”).

So the original gripper became the easiest of the trio to close. Remembering that *Iron Man* had once described the original gripper as “...so strong that very few of the strongest grips can close them,” you now suspected that only a forceful finger freak could hope for success with the two newest additions. This was a V shape that did not willingly change its taper.

By February 1968, the product was called “*Iron Man Grip Developer*.” The following issue introduced a fourth strength and described the quartet of grippers —incorrectly as it turns out—as “Heavy”, “Extra Heavy”, “Super”, and “Super Heavy”. But the “Super Heavy” did not exist in July 1974 any more than it did in December 1964. What happened is that

Warren had, indeed, manufactured a fourth strength. The problem was that Peary Rader assumed, incorrectly, that it was more difficult than the previous three when in fact it was the easiest of the four. By November 1974 the advertisement was corrected to: “Light”, “Heavy”, “Extra Heavy”, and “Super” (not “Super Heavy”). The “Light” gripper was similar to a gripper you might purchase in the sporting goods section of a department store except that it was all metal. The resistance was too minimal for the iron crowd.

By March 1976, the “Light” duty was omitted from the ad, but reappeared the following issue and remained until September 1976, when it vanished forever.

None of the grippers were advertised after November 1977, because sales became inconsistent and Peary wanted to use the ad space for other items.

So, how hard was it to close the various *Iron Man* grippers? Very hard, excluding the “Light” gripper. The “Heavy Duty” will stop almost 100% of the non-athletic population, and will resist many athletes and blue-collar heavy laborers. The “Extra Heavy” can be closed only by someone who could actually hurt your hand in a handshake if he wanted to do so, and the “Super Duty” may as well have a tongue sticking out at you from the vertex in defiance. I have never personally seen the “Super” closed. Many people are unable to close it with fingers interlocked and both hands at the chest in a “crushing” position.

The largest marketing mistake concerning the grippers was not to identify them in some clear, visual way. I have three grippers and side by side their sizes are apparent, but if I were to offer you the Extra Heavy and tell you it was the Super, you would have no reason to question my claim. No color code was ever used, no initials were ever scribed onto the grippers. No numerical system was ever used (such as #1 for light, etc.).

Warren suspects that in order to close the Super a person would have to be able to close the Extra Heavy 20 to 25 reps. But be careful — after about 6000 reps, the Super may suffer metal fatigue and break. (Wanted to warn you in case you were approaching that mark.)

Lifting News magazine reported in July 1966 that Terry Todd could close the *Iron Man* gripper “five or six reps”. Which gripper? At that time, only the Heavy Duty was being advertised, but Warren assures me that the Extra Heavy and the Super versions existed. Warren says he thinks Todd closed the Extra Heavy, and this fits the scenario because in October 1966 Rader handed a Super to Terry, who, according to Rader, “couldn’t get it half closed”. Even so, there is still confusion. In a recent interview, Jim Witt, former national powerlifting champion and Chairman of the U.S. Powerlifting

Federation, explained that in either 1965 or 1966 he ordered all three strengths from Peary Rader and that the one Todd shut was the strongest of the three. Witt said, "I could shut the easiest gripper and I could come close to shutting the medium gripper, and Wilbur Miller, who held the national deadlift record in the super heavyweight class, could shut it but no-one in the Dallas area could shut the hardest one. So I gave the medium gripper to Wilbur, since he could close it and I kept the hard one in my gym as a challenge. I told everyone that they could have it if they could shut it. And lots of strong men tried it besides Wilbur, like Ronnie Ray and Wayne Coleman and Sid Henry. But when Terry came to the gym one day and I told him about it, he shut it with no trouble for four or five reps. So I gave it to him."

Todd still has the gripper, by the way, and he says that one of the problems in assessing the grippers is that they apparently vary a bit in shape as well as in coil strength. Todd says that the Super he saw in Alliance was wider, which made it impossible for him to reach around it with all four of his fingers and exert his full strength. Todd also thinks that although the smaller size of his gripper fits his own hand perfectly, long-fingered men like Wilbur Miller may be at a disadvantage as their fingers would hit the base of their palms before the handles closed.

In any case, I witnessed the Super being half closed once—half closed meaning the handles being closed to parallel. Scott Studwell, now of the Minnesota Vikings, was a student at the University of Illinois, and on a sunny day atop the hill to the north of the Assembly Hall in Champaign, Illinois, I handed Scott the Heavy Duty, explaining to him that we had not encountered anyone who could squeeze it shut for more than one very difficult rep. Scott closed the handles together so fast and easily that the handles made a clicking NOISE when they closed—a noise loud enough for another friend approaching about five feet behind Studwell to ask what that clicking noise was. Scott gave us a puzzled look that indicated we had been pulling his leg—that such a toy (to him) could not be that hard for others to close. I asked him to try it without using his little finger in the attempt. He succeeded with that. Then I handed him the Super, and he got the handles parallel. Not very long after that, Studwell won the NFL arm wrestling championship.

Were the *Iron Man* grippers the hardest to close that have ever been offered for sale? Ed Jubinville thinks not. He took a Super Duty gripper with him to a spring manufacturer and asked that some springs be made which were stronger than the Super. The manufacturer assured Ed that the gripper that Ed sells is stronger than Tetting's Super. For most of us, this is a moot point. Is one wall stronger than another wall when we

can push neither down? Warren Tetting thinks that to close the Super requires about 220 pounds of pressure.

Tetting still sells all but the Light Duty and can be contacted at 1063 W. 7th Street, St. Paul, MN 55102. Ed can be reached at 89 Harding St., Chicopee, MA 01013. Ed's gripper comes in one strength and is knurled—Warren's come with and without knurling. Please send a self-addressed stamped envelope when writing to these men.

A final thought. Hand strength, in its various demonstrations, seems to be an enigma. Tetting says that in July, 1967, he performed a set of ten wrist curls with 325 pounds, but was never able to close the Super gripper. And Gary Stitch, who was featured in *Muscle Training Illustrated* in April 1984, was able to close with one hand on a weight-loaded parallel squeezing apparatus a stack of plates totalling 310 pounds. Perhaps at that time Gary would have been able to close the Super gripper. Stitch did his grip feat seated so there was no deadlift assistance, just, probably, one of the world's strongest hands. In December 1989, Gary tried the grip machine again and did 230 pounds on it, and feels that he could work up to 250 pounds left-handed. His right, stronger, hand was injured in a skating accident years ago, and arthritis bothers it.

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3. *Altoona Mirror*, Tuesday, April 24, 1984
4. *Muscle Training Illustrated*, April 1984
5. Telephone interviews with Gary Stitch, Ed Jubinville, Warren Tetting, Terry Todd and Jim Witt

