



IRON GAME HISTORY



THE JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

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JOHN GRIMEK: 1910-1998

By now, most readers of IGH will have learned of the death of the iron game's great hero. John Grimek. His passing marks the end of an era, and those of us who have followed, and been inspired by, his career have experienced this loss as we would the loss of a member of our own family. Grimek IS family. As a way to honor and celebrate John's remarkable life, we will dedicate the entire issue of the next IGH to the reminiscences of a group of prominent people who knew him in one way or another.

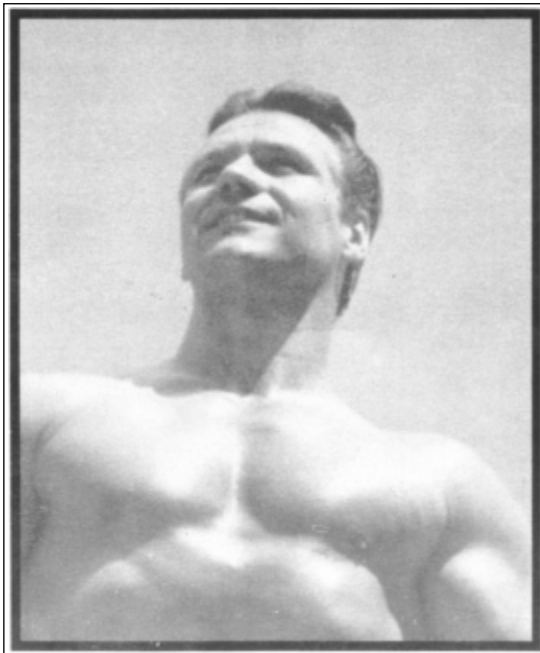
In this issue, we would like to share with you a tribute to John by Joe Weider. Shortly after John's death. Joe called me, and during the conversation I asked him to contribute to the "Grimek Issue." He agreed and within two days I received what follows. In our opinion, Joe's decision to honor John in the way he explains in his tribute is both deserved and appropriate. We suspect you will agree.

On November 20, 1998, at approximately 11 p.m., in York, Pennsylvania, John Grimek passed away. At that instant, a small part of me died along with him.

I first became acquainted with John, albeit

indirectly, when I was an 11-year-old boy, desperately seeking a way to build up my scrawny body. I would head off to a local magazine store in search of the holy grail that would reveal this secret to me, and while rummaging through stacks of magazines late one afternoon. I reached down and grabbed a pair of issues of *Strength*, a magazine published by the Milo Barbell Company. I dropped my penny on the counter—that was enough to buy two back issues in those days!—and raced home with my booty.

That night, I pulled out one of the magazines and anxiously opened its cover. Staring back at me was the most awesome sight I had



ever seen: the most muscular man imaginable emerging from water. He was endorsing Milo barbells, and his name was John Grimek. Like a young man seeing his first hero, I was mesmerized by that picture. I stared at it for hours, and when I finally went to sleep, in dreams I continued to conjure what my eyes had recorded. Sixty-five years later that image, seared indelibly into my consciousness that night, has never really left me. It started me on my

journey, and as I've traveled along this path to a destination yet to be reached, Grimek's legacy has never failed to inspire, encourage, and fortify me, as it has countless others.

What is his legacy? History will record that from the 1930s through the 1960s, John Grimek was the most dominant force in the world of bodybuilding. His was the most massively developed, symmetrical, flexible physique of its day, and he was that era's

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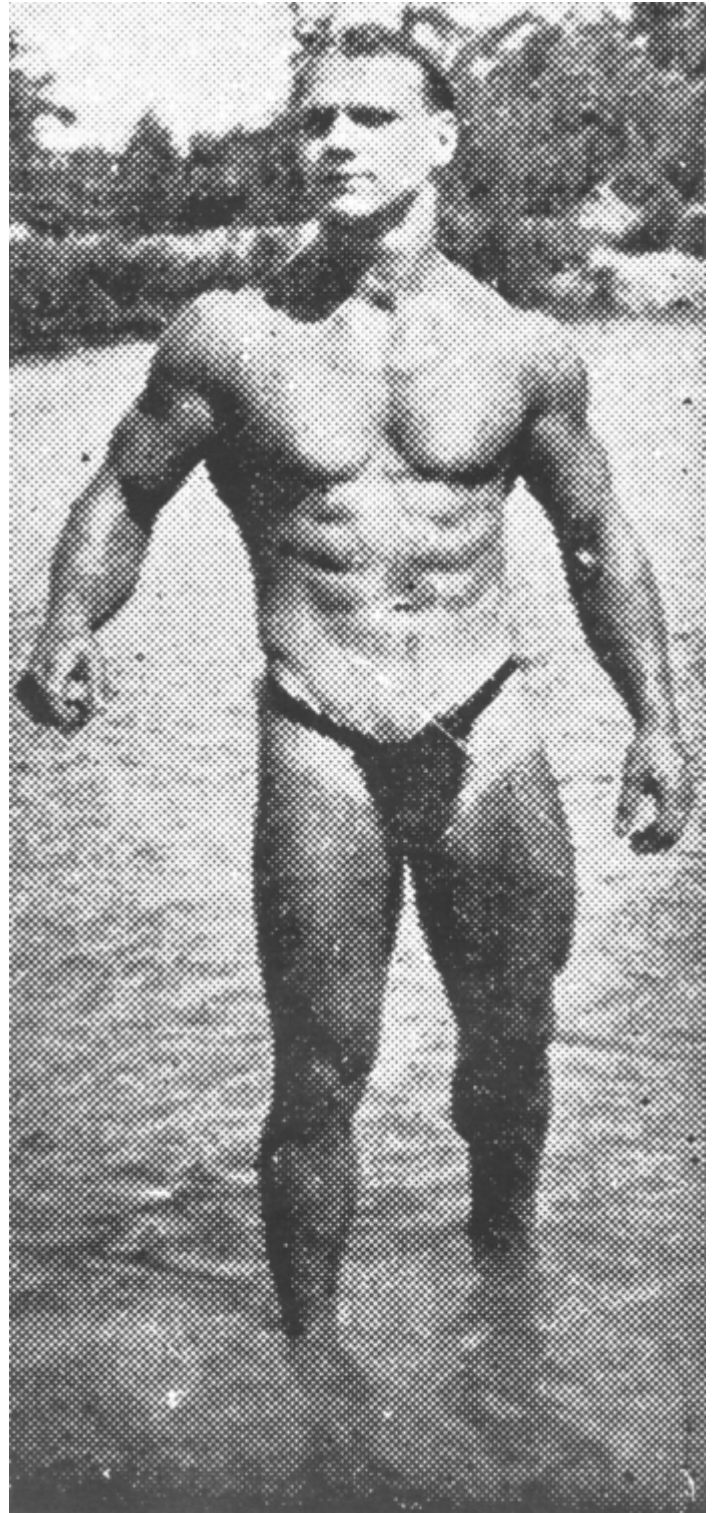
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strongest bodybuilder and most spellbinding poser. (He could pose for 20 minutes without duplicating a shot.) He entered six contests and was undefeated, besting the likes of Steve Reeves and Clancy Ross. Amazingly, those fortunate enough to meet him in person found the man beneath the incredible physique more impressive still. He spoke highly of everyone and always took time to answer the questions of his legions of friends and admirers.

When I first created the Mr. Olympia contest, I chose for its statue the figure of Eugen Sandow, the game's most prominent figure from the 1890s through the 1920s. With his marvelously developed physique, remarkable posing ability, and groundbreaking weight-lifting techniques and training theories, Sandow helped jump-start the entire sport, and I decided that his image would commemorate all winners of the Olympia. Everyone who has held or seen the "Sandow" should remember who and what it stands for. To honor Grimek similarly, I am creating a new contest to take place in Europe a week after the Mr. Olympia. At this new contest, those same Mr. Olympia competitors, along with selected European champions, will again gather to compete on one bodybuilding stage. The winner of this contest, in 1999 and the years to follow, will be awarded a Grimek statue, and it will be the only symbol in bodybuilding comparable to the Sandow.

In retrospect, seeing that first image of Grimek was a revelatory experience, and it instilled in me a message that I have preached to the world ever since with religious fervor. Few men in the history of bodybuilding have inspired such undying love and devotion in their disciples, of whom I am one. Even though John Grimek is dead, his spirit will live on as one of the brightest stars in the bodybuilding firmament. By trying to be their best, by being honorable, and by supporting one another, bodybuilders the world over can best honor legends such as Grimek and Sandow.

Long live the memory of John Grimek. May we all continue to gather strength and inspiration from the knowledge of who he was, what he accomplished, and what he stood for. —Joe Weider



JOHN GRIMEK FROM A MILO BARBELL
ADVERTISEMENT IN A 1934 ISSUE OF *STRENGTH*.

by Jim Murray

Jim Lorimer: The Iron Game's Greatest Promoter

Although some iron gamers know the story of the remarkable friendship of the two Jims, most do not, at least not in sufficient detail. What a curious and wonderful thing it is that two boys whose friendship was cemented over 60 years ago by a mutual love of lifting would grow up to make—each of them—such profound contributions to the field of physical culture.

I've known Jim Lorimer for so long it's frightening—because it reminds me that so many years have passed since we attended Miss Arms' fifth grade class in Morrisville, Pennsylvania's Wm. E. Case Elementary School back in 1937. Jim, who was an active guy, rescued me from being a nerdy bookworm. We became friends right off the bat and because he wanted to be a football player, I decided I did too.

About three years later we were trying to figure out how we were going to get as big and strong as our heroes on the Morrisville Bulldogs' varsity. We wrote to Charles Atlas and some of the other train-you-by-mail guys, but before we invested any Depression dollars (in short supply!) Jim went to visit relatives in nearby Bristol for a few days. When he got back he couldn't wait to tell me what he had discovered—some big, husky guys lifting barbells in a garage. From them he had learned that there was a magazine called *Strength & Health* that told all about building strength and muscular size, so we promptly bought copies.

Based on what I saw in the magazine, I started doing presses with an assortment of sledgehammer heads on either end of a wooden "bar," but then my parents gave me a pair of adjustable York 40-pound dumbbells for my 14th birthday and Jim received a barbell set for his. We frequently combined them to lift "heavy" with some of our other would-be football

player friends. We did the lifts we saw pictured in *S&H* and our exercise routines weren't very well planned, but the activity, haphazard as it was, seemed to pay off. As seniors, in 1943, our team had a 9-1 record and won the Lower Bucks County championship for the second year in a row. We weren't even scored on in the conference for two years and in our senior season we rolled up 246 points to our opponents' 32. Jim and I were the tackles and co-captains in our senior year, and we were dating a couple of cute cheerleaders from the junior class, Jane Landis (Murray) and Jean Whittaker (Lorimer). We married them soon after completing service in the Navy during World War II. It seemed only natural for us to serve as each other's best man.

But then we went in different directions for awhile. Jim completed his undergraduate work at Ursinus College and went on to Dickinson Law School. After that he joined the FBI for several years. I was recruited to Rutgers to play football (but kept re-injuring one knee I'd hurt pretty badly in high school and had to give up that sport—though I was Rutgers' javelin thrower for three years). At Rutgers, majoring in journalism, I had a feature writing class in which we were required to write an article and submit it for publication. We were guaranteed an "A" if we had an article accepted. My classmates were trying *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. I submitted an article about a young Trenton strongman, Jack Walsh, to *S&H*. It was accepted (though never published) and the acceptance letter from Ray Van Cleef got me an "A." I did later sell *S&H* another article and some cartoons and struck up a correspondence with Ray Van Cleef that led to my being offered the editorship of *S&H* and working there from 1951 to 1956. What a blast that was! Working with the guys Jim and I had seen win U.S. lifting

championships in 1941 and give exhibitions in the Lower Bucks County area along with John Fritshe and some of the good Philadelphia lifters. I got to share an office with John Grimek. How about that!

But this is about Jim Lorimer, not me. What was he doing? He had left the FBI (too many transfers for a young father with a growing family) and was working for the Nationwide Insurance Company. His merits were soon recognized and he was transferred from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, to the home office in Columbus, Ohio. This is where his organizational abilities really blossomed. Jim had continued to train with weights and maintained his interest in track and field. In 1959 he attended the first U.S.-Soviet dual meet in Philadelphia, where the U.S. men's team narrowly defeated the Soviet men, but the Soviet women soundly thrashed the American women. The Soviets combined the men's and women's scores and claimed victory for their superior socialist system. Jim was horrified at the obvious lack of technique and training shown by the American women. He noted, for example, that the U.S. girls were still using the long-obsolete scissors style in the high jump.

Returning to Columbus, he attended a Junior Olympics meet and was surprised to find 1500 youngsters competing. Impressed by the kids' enthusiasm, and determined to improve America's women's team performance, he began an Olympic development program, selecting some of the most promising Junior Olympics 13- and 14-year-old girls for special training. He was able to use the Ohio State University indoor track and obtain local sponsors for his team. Two years later, in 1961, his team won the women's national track and field championship. Because of his dedicated support of the sport, he was named Secretary from 1960-64 and Chairman from 1964-68 of the U.S. Olympic Committee for women's

track and field. He staged the women's National AAU Indoor Championship in Columbus in 1961 and the Outdoor Championship in 1962. In 1961 he managed the team on its return trip to the Soviet Union.

During the same period of time, the 1960s he established an exercise facility at Nationwide that would have been the envy of any health club in the country. Jim was selected as one of the top three physical fitness leaders in America by the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce. This was only occupying part of his time. He also was the mayor of Worthington, a Columbus suburb, and was rising through the ranks at Nationwide. (By the time he retired in 1991, he was a vice president in charge of Nationwide's government relations activities.)

More important for the Iron Game, Jim's success in both the indoor and outdoor women's national track and field championships led to his being asked to run the 1967 National AAU Weightlifting Championships and

Mr. America contest in Columbus for the YMCA. Local officials were so impressed with the success of these events that they asked if he would organize a world weightlifting championship meet. Sure he would, and this was the step that led to his present partnership with Arnold Schwarzenegger and the biggest Iron Game promotion of the year—The Arnold Classic.

When Jim agreed to organize the 1970 World Weightlifting Championships, he emphasized to the sponsors that if they hoped to sell enough tickets to cover their costs, they should also include a Mr. World contest. The sponsors agreed and Jim began rounding up a select group of the world's best bodybuilders. One bodybuilder he was particularly interested in having compete was the youthful Arnold Schwarzenegger—but Jim didn't know how to get in touch with him. I can't remember exactly what followed, but I was doing some freelance writing and editing for Joe Weider at



JIM MURRAY (LEFT) AND JIM LORIMER IN THEIR MORRISVILLE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL UNIFORMS IN 1943.

PHOTO COURTESY JIM MURRAY



JIM LORIMER POSES WITH ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER AT THE 1998 ARNOLD CLASSIC. NEXT YEAR'S EVENT WILL BE MARCH 5-7 AT VETERAN'S MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM IN COLUMBUS, OHIO.

the time and Joe was Arnold's U.S. sponsor, so Jim asked if I could help. I was able to determine where Arnold could be reached and Jim called him—at Gold's Gym in Venice, California.

Arnold was in the middle of a workout at the time so he asked if he could call back. Sure, Jim told him, hoping that he really would call. He did, and Jim emphasized that this contest was a real opportunity to publicize bodybuilding and the participating bodybuilders, since it would be the first time ABC's *Wide World of Sports* would cover a weightlifting and bodybuilding championship. The ABC-TV crew hoped to see the big Russian, Alexeev, break a record (They did get to cover the first 500-pound clean and jerk on a barbell that Jim still has in his World Gym). Arnold, recognizing the potential of television to further his own career, was interested, but he had a conflict; he was committed to compete in the Mr. Universe contest in England the day before Jim's Mr. World contest was to be held in Columbus.

This was only a minor problem for Jim. He asked Arnold to go directly to Heathrow Airport in London after his Saturday night competition and catch the late flight for New York. Jim arranged for a private jet from Columbus to meet Arnold in New York and fly him to Ohio in time for the Sunday competition.

That solved part of the problem, but then it

appeared that Sergio Oliva was not going to participate. In fact, although he had been invited, it didn't even seem as though he was going to be there, but Jim saw him enter Veterans Memorial Auditorium and take a seat in the audience. Jim rushed down, greeted Sergio, told him he looked great and urged him to enter. After some discussions involving expense money, Sergio agreed and the two top bodybuilders of the day competed in Jim Lorimer's Mr. World contest. Arnold, of course, won the title and the then magnificent cash prize of \$500. He also got a good look at the packed

PHOTO COURTESY JIM MURRAY

house in the Memorial Auditorium and, being a very bright guy, he recognized the potential for promoting major professional bodybuilding contests. He told Jim that when he was done competing, he would be back to see him and they would co-promote contests in Columbus. Jim was thinking, "Yeah, sure." He figured Arnold would go on his way to bigger and better things and forget about Columbus.

Incidentally, it was during the 1970 Mr. World contest that the first pose-down occurred—spontaneously! During the competition, Arnold and Sergio—each realizing that the other was his top competition—gravitated toward each other. They wound up side by side, matching pose for pose—double biceps, chest, most muscular, and so on. The effect was so dramatic that the pose-down became a regular part of major contest finales.

After his victory in 1970, Arnold won every major physique competition for the next five years. But he did not forget his experience in Columbus and after he won the 1975 Mr. Olympia contest in South Africa, he decided to retire from competition. Being a man of his word, he promptly called Jim, suggesting that they meet and make plans to stage the 1976 Mr. Olympia in Columbus! At that point I got involved when Jim asked me to work up a program for the

contest. I did that and attended the event, won by Franco Columbu. The presentation was spectacular, Jim having enlisted theatrical people from the Columbus area to design and build the stage props and background. It was a two-day event, followed by a seminar given by Arnold with help from some of the other bodybuilders in the two contests—Mr. Olympia and Mr. International. This contest cost about \$50,000 to produce and was a major breakthrough in prize money: \$10,000 for the winner, ten times that which had previously been awarded.

The documentary *Pumping Iron* had just been completed, and we had the opportunity to see the largely unedited footage. In general, although the physique competition was spectacularly professional, we were casual during the two days, hanging around and having fun, going out to dinner with everybody packed into a couple of cars. This was before Arnold became a major movie star and celebrity. At the 1998 Arnold Classic, held in the same venue, Arnold had become so popular that it was necessary to have a squad of off-duty policeman to keep him from being mobbed as he traveled about the big fitness expo. Far from driving around in a couple of cars, Arnold now has a police escort for his stretch limo to go from the hotel to the Convention Center—a motorcycle cop in front and one in back, both with sirens wailing and red lights blinking!

Over the years from the relatively modest start in 1976, Jim had been adding to the Classic, bringing in professional entertainers to add variety on a stage set up in the expo center, and also bringing in powerlifters to assault bench press records, “Worlds Strongest Man” participants to hold a mini team contest, and women’s events—both bodybuilding and “Ms. Fitness.” These days, most of the major health food and exercise equipment manufacturers have booths at the expo. As you walk around the exhibits you see Frank Zane with his books and Zane Leg Blaster, Lou “The Hulk” Ferrigno selling books and pictures, Manfred Hoeberl promoting the organization of standardized strongman contests, and incredibly gorgeous young women representing Bob Kennedy’s *Musclemag International*, John Balik’s *Iron Man*, and the various health food companies.

Jim and his son Bob now operate seven World Gyms in and around Worthington and Columbus. From his office in one of the gyms, the “retired” former Nationwide Insurance executive now works full-time,

all year round, planning and recruiting talent for the next Arnold Classic. All the Lorimers’ friends in Columbus and a lot of their relatives help out at the Classic, in addition to the array of 250 people employed to handle the various jobs required to put on the massive three-day event. For example, in 1998 my wife Jane and sons Jim III and Jay pitched in to help Jean’s sister Adrienne and husband George Chewing fold T-shirts for sale as souvenirs—under the very capable direction of Kathy (Lorimer) Nagel. Jim’s sons, Jeff and Bob, and son-in-law Paul Nagel had other assignments.

In addition to their efforts to bring strength athletes into the program, Jim and Arnold have been broadening the appeal of the Classic and Expo by bringing members of the various martial arts disciplines—a successful marriage of complementary interests. They recognized that the martial arts represent an important and significant sports-fitness movement worldwide. If proponents of the various martial arts could see themselves as part of a larger martial arts community, they would form a sports movement that would be unmatched in the United States, Jim and Arnold believe. Helping to bring together the different martial arts disciplines, on a neutral competitive field, has been a goal of the Arnold Martial Arts Festival held in conjunction with the annual Arnold Fitness Weekend the first weekend in March.

As the years have rolled by in the Lorimer-Schwarzenegger partnership, Jim and Arnold have become very close friends. Jim was a speaker at Arnold’s wedding to Maria Shriver, and he and Jean frequently visit Arnold in California. Jim and Arnold are also dedicated to improving bodybuilding, by attempting to eliminate illicit drug use and seeking to establish judging standards that should improve the aesthetics of bodybuilding and gain greater understanding and acceptance of the sport by the general public.

In view of Arnold’s many interests and the demands his motion picture career make on his time, I asked Jim how long he thought Arnold would want to continue holding the annual Classic contests and expo in Columbus. Jim said he had asked Arnold that very question. The answer: Arnold said he enjoys the event and would continue as long as Jim would. So it looks as though we can look forward to bigger and better Arnold Classics in years to come.

Physical Fitness Magazine: Why Did it Fail?

Andy Kosar, Ph.D.—University of Tennessee
Jan Todd, Ph.D.—University of Texas at Austin

Since the turn of the century, hopeful publishers have launched more than one hundred English-language muscle and fitness magazines.¹ Very few of these publications, however, are still with us. In fact, the failure rate for new magazines is roughly ninety percent.² Still, some magazines do make it. Consider *Iron Man*, for instance. *Iron Man* began in 1936 when Peary Rader, then working as a custodian at a local school, brought home a broken ditto machine that the school had discarded. Rader fixed the machine, turned out a few issues in dittoed purple, and then, as his subscriptions grew, moved to a Gestetner mimeograph machine that printed in black ink. The first couple of issues in black had crudely drawn pictures on the covers. However, Rader soon began pasting a printed photograph on the cover of each issue, and later moved to a fully printed format. From these inauspicious beginnings *Iron Man* grew to be one of the more financially successful and the most widely respected magazine in the field. Peary and his wife, Mabel, ran the magazine for fifty years and, since its sale to John Balik, *Iron Man* has continued to grow in circulation and popularity.³

At least forty other physical culture magazines also appeared for the first time between 1930 and 1940. Klein's *Bell*, Mark Berry's *The Strongman*, Jim Evans' *The Weightlifter*, George Jowett's *The Bodybuilder*, and Harry Good's *Health & Physique* all struggled alongside Bob Hoffman's *Strength & Health* for acceptance in this decade.⁴ Another contender—*Physical Fitness: the Guide to Health,*

Strength and Physique—was edited and published by Lee Birger of Dearborn, Michigan, a well respected and capable man, who published six issues from 1939-40. Recently, a suitcase full of papers and letters related to Lee Birger and the founding of *Physical Fitness* were discovered in a flea market in Tennessee.



LEE BIRGER, FOUNDER AND
EDITOR OF *PHYSICAL FITNESS*,
FROM THE JULY 1940 ISSUE.

Using these documents and the Ottley Coulter correspondence files in the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, we have attempted to trace the history of this short-lived magazine and to offer some insights into muscle magazine publishing in the first half of this century.

Like *Iron Man*, *Physical Fitness* was originally a mimeographed publication with line drawings. The first issue appeared in July of 1939 and each issue thereafter considerably improved in appearance and content as Birger began having it professionally

printed. He also added pages, and expanded his list of authors to include some of the experts of the iron game. David P. Willoughby, for instance, wrote for Birger, as did an obviously generous-hearted Peary Rader, who was already publishing *Iron Man*. Other capable individuals volunteered to serve the magazine without pay to provide technical assistance. But with all of this, the magazine still failed. Why?

One possible reason for *Physical Fitness*' failure was that Birger, and undoubtedly many other would-be publishers of this era, viewed his magazine more as a mission than as a business. Like Bernarr Macfadden and Bob Hoffman, the two giants of the muscle-magazine industry during the 1930s, Birger held strong views on the subject of physical culture.

He believed that physical culture should be practiced by everyone, and that his magazine could become the best means for spreading the “right” kind of physical culture information. In an early editorial, Birger wrote, “We are working in a field that is intensely interesting to us and we know it is for you. We again ask for your help which we need so badly. Do your part to help us increase our circulation. Tell all your friends about *Physical Fitness*.” With enough subscribers, Birger felt he could “put out a nice appearing publication—printed on a regular press and on fine paper.”⁵ Bill Speece, writing in 1941, after *Physical Fitness* had folded, similarly observed, “I feel sorry to see a fellow of your high standards be forced to quit the field of physical fitness. We, the fellows who back the magazines in the small way we can are very happy to see a new magazine come on the market, especially as I said before when a regular fellow such as you are at the head of such a magazine.”⁶

Although no subscription figures survive, it appears from a postcard written by Jim Evans, of Lubbock, Texas (publisher of the *Weight Lifter*) that Birger had planned to start his subscription campaign with a mailing list containing 2500 names. Evans warned Birger, however, not to expect too much from the list: “The 2500 names you have don’t mean 2500 subscriptions, no matter how good your mag. will be. If you get 250 (10%) you will be doing good from the 2500.”⁷

Other friends from the world of physical culture also offered suggestions on how to make the magazine work. Frank McCourt of New York advised Birger to consider establishing some sort of an association that would include a magazine subscription with the membership dues. “Good Luck!” wrote McCourt, “If you hope to seriously challenge *Strength & Health* . . . I need hardly point out that an association at least somewhat along the line of their league is necessary.” According to McCourt, Hoffman was contemplating the formation of his own weightlifting association, modeled after the American Continental Weightlifting Association (ACWLA) founded by David P. Willoughby, George Jowett, and Ottley Coulter.⁸ “Why don’t you get the jump on him—start a Physical Fitness League or Association . . . it would certainly not only more than pay for itself, but boost your circulation tremendously.”⁹

David P. Willoughby also had thoughts about how to improve circulation. He told Birger that “a

number of new weight-lifting magazines are attempting a start in the field at this time . . . (and) it behooves you to make *Physical Fitness* so obviously superior that the subscriber who has to make a choice will pick *Physical Fitness* from the rest of the publications.”¹⁰

Willoughby also advised Birger to try to get the magazine out monthly, or a least bi-monthly, as soon as possible. “Only in this way can you impress your journal on the minds of readers (and) challenge contemporary publications in the field.” In addition, Willoughby offered to produce a regular column for *Physical Fitness*. “It occurred to me that a monthly contribution, entitled perhaps ‘Willoughby’s page for weight-lifters,’ might arouse interest and lead to a demand for such material as a regular feature,” he wrote. The bottom line, Willoughby concluded, was that “all this will take money, and plenty of it, but that’s exactly what’s needed. . . . If I were you I would endeavor to get all the substantial advertising I possibly could.”¹¹

Although Birger apparently lacked capital, he did not lack in good will. The Birger letters reveal, in fact, a surprisingly supportive and non-competitive atmosphere in the physical culture community at this time. Jim Evans told Birger, for instance, “When you get ready to print your magazine I will be glad to announce it free in the W-L [*Weight Lifter*] and I’ll let you advertise with me if you will let me advertise with you.”¹² Peary Rader also gave *Physical Fitness* free advertising. “Let me congratulate you on the marvelous job you did on the last issue,” wrote Rader in 1940. “It must have cost a lot of dough to put that out. . . . Am going to continue your ad in the *Iron Man* and trust that you have received some results from it already. Hope that you will continue mine.”¹³ Despite the stringent economic times, such generosity between magazine publishers was not uncommon. Syed Moshen Alsagoff, editor of *Super-Physique*, wrote to Jim Evans on 11 August 1939, agreeing to Evans’ offer to do reciprocal advertising, “Your suggestion that we should exchange equal space for advertising was an excellent one.” Alsagoff wrote, “I have the pleasure to enclose herewith my advertising material for publication in your magazine . . . I will allow you with half page of space for your advertising in return for half-page of space of my advertisement in your magazine.”¹⁴

Some contributors to *Physical Fitness* got very little in return. Earle Forbes told Birger in May of

1940 that he would be willing to provide him with physique shots simply for being called the "Director of Photography."¹⁵ And in a letter dated 6 March 1940, Ottley Coulter told Birger, "Although furnishing articles without payment is an unusual procedure with me, I will make an exception in this fine magazine of yours."¹⁶ L. E. Eubanks of Seattle traded articles for a subscription. "According to our arrangements," he wrote, "you were to send me the magazine *Physical Fitness* in exchange for my article . . . I'm expecting nothing more in payment; tho later, when you get going, maybe we can make other plans."¹⁷

Ed Zebrowski, who billed himself as New England's Perfect Man, offered to strike another sort of deal with Birger. In a letter to Birger on 2 June 1939, Zebrowski suggested that Birger might use photos of him on the front cover of *Physical Fitness*. "How about giving me a front page display in one of your next issues? I have some unusually fine muscular poses that would be ideal for an attractive front cover," Zebrowski explained. In return, Zebrowski continued, he would guarantee to purchase advertising for his training course on the back cover. "Of course I don't know how well my ad on the back cover will pull," he wrote, "but I think I will risk the next two issues also. Perhaps our enterprise will grow together and we can help each other. Maybe I'll reserve the back cover of your magazine indefinitely."¹⁸

One reason some people were willing to help Birger was because they did not care for Bob Hoffman's approach to publishing or his attempts to take over the weightlifting establishment. Willoughby, for instance, wrote Birger, "Although I am very busy with a number of endeavors, I prefer your publication (and you personally) to the other being launched . . . happy to do all I can to help you "go over" and become a successful and prosperous editor and publisher."¹⁹

While Birger had much support for his magazine, what he ultimately lacked was Bob Hoffman's deep pockets. According to George Jowett, Hoffman was able to publish *Strength & Health* for quite some time without making a profit. Hoffman had managed to get his magazine on the newsstands early on, Jowett observed, but "it does no business. Of course he does not have to rely on it for a living. It is a hobby with him. He is the president of the York Oil Burners Co., Inc. and has a good income which, part of it he spends on the magazine and loses, but he does not care."²⁰

In a later letter, Coulter told Jowett, "(I) saw in a recent copy of *Strength & Health* that Hoffman stated that he was losing a large sum of money each month on the magazine, but will continue anyway. He claims he is doing a large barbell business, but did not mention profits in that connection."²¹

Another factor in *Physical Fitness*' decline was the heavily oversupplied market. Ottley Coulter worried about this in a letter to George Jowett in March of 1940.

Recently, I received a copy of a new magazine, *Physical Fitness*, which is published by Lee Birger of Dearborn, Mich. Mr. Birger recently wrote to me and stated that he would like to have me write some articles for his magazine. He stated that David Willoughby, who is writing for him, had suggested me, as another writer for his publication.

Apparently, there are a number of magazines being published at this time. Has the amateur lifting game become so big, as to be able to absorb all this literature on the subject, or is it just a matter of too many hands in the pie and some of the magazines may have to fail and drop out?

I understand that there is another magazine published by Peary Rader, but I have not seen a copy of it. Another is, or was published by James Evans of Texas; Good Bros, are still publishing their magazine. Berry is, or was putting out one in connection with the Bur Barbell Co. How are these various publications making out? *Strength and Health* appears to be the leader in circulations. At least, it is the only one that I ever see on the newsstands. Is it making any money, or is Hoffman still donating to keep it going?²²

Jowett responded prophetically:

Physical Fitness is just another of those small spotty mags that will never get anywhere. There is a lot of them out, created by the ego of Hoffman, and his antagonism to all who do not do as he wants.

. . . Berry is in Fla, with the barbell concern, or foundry. Just lately Berry was brought back to Phila, on a Federal charge of defrauding in the mails. He is out on parole, on a suspended jail sentence . . . but he is running the business [to get at] Hoffman, selling barbells at prices we have to pay the foundry.

. . . I do not hear anything about Good boys. They can't be doing much. It is a side line with them. Evans is quitting too . . . there are [too]

any in the game now hurting legitimate business. . . MacFadden [sic] is losing heavily the last three years of P.C. [*Physical Culture*]. Atlas is off 60% his normal business. From 22 girls [office personnel] he is down to three now.”²³

Ultimately, Jowett was right. *Physical Fitness* was just one of many “small, spotty magazines” that never quite got off the ground. By the early 1940s, Hoffman had virtually no competitors left from the depression years. *Klein’s Bell* had ended in 1932; Berry’s *The Strongman* lasted only until 1934. Berry’s second magazine, *Training Notes*, and Jowett’s *The Bodybuilder* both died out in 1937. Lee Birger stopped publishing *Physical Fitness* with Vol. 2, No. 2, dated October-December 1940. *Iron Man* would survive, of course, but it would be many years before it would be considered any sort of challenger to *Strength & Health*. As David Willoughby put it in response to Birger’s announcement that he was ceasing publication, “a magazine is usually a “tough” thing to put over, unless one has, and can afford to lose in the beginning, a considerable amount of cash.”²⁴ Unfortunately, Birger’s pockets just weren’t deep enough.

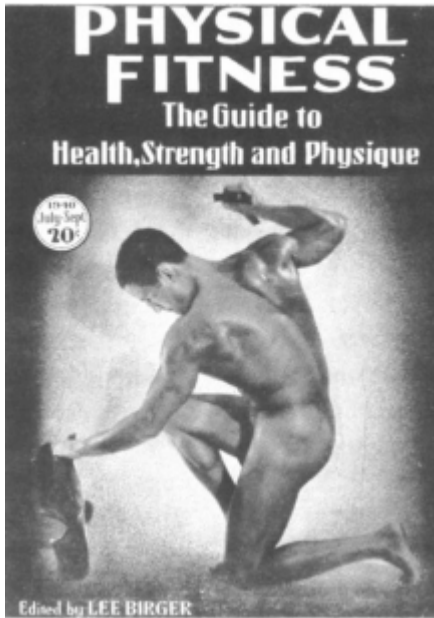
Although Birger’s papers suggest that Jim Grabitz, who’d been heavily featured in the magazine as a physique star, had agreed to carry on the magazine, no evidence can be found to suggest that Grabitz tried to do so. Several letters in the Birger papers, in fact, ask where the new magazine is.²⁵

Ultimately, the Birger papers don’t reveal why he stopped publication, and attempts to discover what happened to Lee Birger after 1940 have not been successful. Did Birger enlist and become involved in World War II? Did he move to another type of work that pulled him away from the world of bodybuilding? Or, having spent his savings, did he simply throw in the towel? We’d like to ask him, if we can find him. Perhaps some of *Iron Game History’s* readers may know if Birger (or Jim Grabitz) is still alive and where he currently lives. If so, please let us know.

Notes

The Birger Papers are in the collection of Andy Kosar, University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

1. See: Jan Todd. Joe Roark & Terry Todd “A Briefly Annotated Bibliography of English Language Serial Publications in the Field of Physical Culture,” *Iron Game History* 1(March 1991): 25-40.
2. “Literary Life: JFK Better Get it Together or it’s Bye George.” *Newsweek* (14 August 1995): 21.
3. Interview with Mabel Rader by Jan Todd, Austin, Texas, October 1998.
4. Mark Berry [*The Strongman*] and Sig Klein both debuted new magazines in June of 1931. Unfortunately, *Klein’s Bell* only survived for nineteen issues. Jowett began the *Bodybuilder* in June of 1936; and Jim Evans’ the *Weightlifter* also began that year.
5. Lee Birger, “The Last Word,” *Physical Fitness* 2(2) (July/Sept. 1940): 8.
6. Bill Speece to Lee Birger, 17 February 1941. Birger Papers.
7. Jim Evans to Lee Birger. 28 March 1939. Birger Papers.
8. See John D. Fair, “George Jowett, Ottley Coulter, David Willoughby and the Organization of American Weightlifting, 1911-1924,” *Iron Game History*, 2(6) (May 1993): 3-15.
9. Frank McCourt to Lee Birger, 20 July 1939. Birger Papers.
10. David P. Willoughby to Lee Birger, 23 October, 1939. Birger Papers.
11. Ibid.
12. Evans to Birger, 28 March 1939, Birger Papers.
13. Peary Rader to Lee Birger. 18 March 1940, Birger Papers.
14. Syed Alsagoff to Jim Evans. 11 August 1939, Ottley Coulter Papers. Todd-McLean Collection, UT-Austin.
15. Earle Forbes to Lee Birger, 30 May 1940, Birger Papers.
16. Ottley Coulter to Lee Birger, 6 March 1940. Birger Papers.
17. L. E. Eubanks to Lee Birger, 29 October 1939, Birger Papers.
18. Ed Zebrowski to Leslie Birger 2 June 1939, Birger papers.
19. Willoughby to Birger, 23 October, 1939.
20. George Jowett to Ottley Coulter. 18 March 1940, Ottley Coulter Papers, Todd-McLean Collection, UT-Austin.
21. Ottley Coulter to George Jowett. 19 October 1937. Ottley Coulter Papers, Todd-McLean Collection. UT-Austin.
22. Coulter to Jowett, 8 March 1940. Todd-McLean Collection. UT-Austin.
23. Jowett to Coulter, 18 March 1940, Todd-McLean Collection. UT-Austin.
24. David P. Willoughby to Lee Birger. 18 February 1941, Birger Papers.
25. Speece to Birger, 17 February. 1941; and Al Cinlowski to Lee Birger, 26 March 1941. Birger Papers.





McGwire's Secret

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In 1935—the year testosterone was first synthesized in the laboratory—the Food and Drug Administration established a unit to monitor the quality of “glandular” products on the market that were supposed to contain bioactive sex hormones. The only “ethical” issue addressed by this group was the possibility of consumer fraud.¹ In fact, by 1941 they had found that more than half of the products they assayed did not meet the requirements of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. But the idea that hormonal drugs might be “abused” outside of the clinic had hardly occurred to the physicians who prescribed them.

Today the controversy surrounding the testosterone precursor androstenedione reaches far beyond the question of product quality, even if this remains as significant a problem as it was in 1935. For the Associated Press reporter who noticed that fateful bottle of “Andro” pills in Mark McGwire’s locker inadvertently confronted American society with the conflicted (and hypocritical) attitude toward performance-enhancing substances that has become an integral part of our pharmacological way of life.

The shock and confusion provoked by the private drug use of an emerging folk hero provided a dramatic demonstration of how far we are from a working social consensus on the ethics of boosting the various capacities of the human organism, whether they be athletic, sexual, or intellectual. Indeed, in recent months the public has had to absorb a great deal of apparently contradictory and confusing news about performance-enhancing drugs of various kinds. The anti-impotence drug Viagra, released in April, became the fastest selling drug in history, in part because its sensationalistic reception blurred one of the pillars of current drug policy—the crucial distinction between “therapeutic” and “recreational” uses. The drug scandal that crippled the 1998 Tour de France finally

destroyed (one hopes) the illusion that the sports officials who run the international federations are interested in effective doping control. Then, alarmed by the spectacle of French gendarmes hauling half-naked Tour riders off to prison cells, the president of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch, previously known for his Papal denunciations of the doping “evil,” proposed medically supervised steroid doping. More recently, anyone looking for the hundredth television replay of McGwire’s sixty-second home run ran the risk of exposure to the Ginkoba ad featuring a memory-impaired woman whose drug use enables her to make it through the day. It is hard to imagine what might prompt this ginseng-addicted housewife to shake a disapproving finger at an Andro-loaded Mark McGwire. For who is to say that his self-medication is any less “therapeutic” than hers?

Hovering over every doping “scandal,” though usually unremarked, is the issue of public response. What about those housewives and others for whom sports is simply entertainment? To what extent do such people care about the use of performance-enhancing drugs by athletes? The fact is that it is very difficult to find reliable information on public opinion about doping. Still, after many years of collecting what material I have been able to find, I have concluded that public interest in sporting success outweighs public interest in drug-free sport. While I find this conclusion personally disturbing, it does reflect the historical record, and it is also compatible with the response to Mark McGwire in his role as a kind of Paul Bunyanesque distraction from the meltdown of the Clinton presidency.

The second essential point about public response is that it expresses itself almost entirely through media personnel who care little about doping and do almost no investigative work in this area.

Media professionals make or break drug “scandals,” in part because they are the gatekeepers of information and opinion, but mostly because they are the principal producers of the information and opinion that fill our newspapers and airwaves. Drug scandals occur because journalists and their editors decide to report the actions taken by sports officials or, in the recent case of the Tour, by the police. The McGwire case is atypical in that it resulted from the wandering eye of a reporter who set in motion an instructive and unsettling chain of events that will continue to unfold long after McGwire hit his seventieth, and final, home run of the 1998 season. But let us not forget that this discovery was an accident, and that being a sports “journalist” in the United States rarely has anything to do with investigative reporting or asking some of the deeper questions about how we should handle performance-enhancing drugs.

The media coverage of the McGwire story was only the latest evidence of our society’s basically tolerant attitude toward doping people in various ways. The prevailing opinion among most sportswriters and professional sports people was that the use of “Andro” was (a) a private matter and (b) irrelevant to the integrity of the game. While these are views about which reasonable people can disagree, both sports and media representatives also demonstrated a striking degree of ignorance about the nature of the drug in question as well as disinterest in the social implications of highly publicized drug use by a charismatic athlete. It was clear, in short, that neither group had done much thinking about these issues.

All of the baseball people circled the wagons in defense of McGwire. The Cardinals’ manager, Tony La Russa, angrily charged that the Associated Press should be punished for violating McGwire’s privacy.² The Cardinals organization issued a statement that supported McGwire’s use of androstenedione: “It has no proven anabolic effects nor significant side effects. . . . Due to current research that lacks any documentary evidence of any adverse side effects, the Cardinals’ medical staff cannot object to Mark’s choice to use this legal over-the-counter supplement.”³ Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig commented: “I just can’t comment. I have no knowledge of it. The Cardinals are a disciplined organization, and I don’t think anything goes on there that shouldn’t.”⁴ Five

days later Selig and the head of the players’ union, Donald Fehr, issued a joint statement that attempted to dampen interest in the drug issue that might distract attention from McGwire’s home run quest: “In recent days there have been press reports concerning the use of certain nutritional supplements by major league players. The substances in question are available over the counter and are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. In view of these facts, it seems inappropriate that such reports should overshadow the accomplishments of players such as Mark McGwire.”⁵

Major League players lined up in a phalanx to defend McGwire’s right to ingest anything he wanted. Joe Girardi, the Yankee catcher, said: “He’s not doing anything illegal. He’s just doing things to help his body. We all do things to help our bodies, take protein. It’s a health-conscious sport.” Chad Curtis, his teammate in the outfield, added: “If a guy wants to improve his game and he feels he can get stronger, and a company comes up with a product that’s legal and they claim that’s going to help him get stronger if he uses it, how can you blame the player for just trying to improve his performance? If the substance is really a



bad substance, don't blame the player—blame the company that's putting it out. They're the ones who should do the research on whether it's good or bad. They're claiming it's a good product, and maybe Mark McGwire or Chad Curtis or whoever else isn't educated enough to judge whether it's good or bad.”⁶ The Boston Red Sox slugger Mo Vaughn spoke in the same vein: “Everybody sees that in today's game, it's a big man's game. Strength is the key. But as long as we're not doing illegal things, and I'm not doing anything illegal and I don't know guys who are, then it shouldn't be a problem.” Vaughn pointed out that he himself uses a muscle-building product called PRO-hGH, which is improbably labeled a “food supplement,” and is a paid spokesman for MET-Rx Engineered Nutrition, which markets androstenedione among other products.⁷

The sportswriting establishment generally echoed these views. Jack McCallum's column in *Sports Illustrated* pointed to the possible medical and role-modelling problems but emphasized McGwire's blameless conduct: “McGwire is an adult who, as far as we know, is playing within the rules. If baseball were to ban androstenedione, then he could be faulted if he kept on using it. To hold McGwire to a higher standard than his sport does is unfair.”⁸ Tom Keegan of the *New York Post* wrote: “McGwire is no cheater, and any attempt to paint him as such is just another example of the build-them-up-so-we-can-tear-them-down mentality poisoning today's society, especially as it relates to today's sports heroes.” Sure, he said, Major League Baseball should “research the devil out of andro,” and try to determine why the NCAA, the NFL, and the IOC had banned it, but until those findings came in the whole controversy was really a nonissue.⁹ Dan Shaughnessy of the *Boston Globe* wrote of “a tabloid-driven controversy” that was misrepresenting McGwire as a cheater and equated Andro with aspirin.¹⁰

The most vocal “tabloid” driving the controversy was, in fact, the *New York Times*. Here one read of “potentially myth-debunking news,” of “artificial flavoring inside the Natural,” of a “tainted” effort even if “the fans don't seem to mind.” and that McGwire's drug use had “cast a shadow over his dream season.” An editorial that ran in the main section of the paper saw “cause for great [medical]

concern” and called for McGwire and other players to stop taking it immediately.¹¹ The Association of Professional Team Physicians called for a ban on androstenedione use by athletes and the revocation of its status as an over-the-counter drug on the grounds that it is an anabolic steroid.¹²

Let us look at some of the major issues raised by this episode. First, is it a “food supplement” or “dietary supplement?” As Charles Yesalis of Penn State University put it: “Regardless of what the Cardinals may say, androstenedione is one honest to God sex steroid: this is not vitamin C.”¹³ When the (German-language) *Journal of Physiological Chemistry* reported the synthesis of androstenedione in 1938, the *Index Medicus* classified it, not surprisingly, as an androgen. The problem is that Federal deregulation of the food supplement industry in 1994 created a wide and expanding niche for substances, hormonal and otherwise, that would have been controlled under the old FDA rules. “Everything I've done is natural,” McGwire claimed after the initial publicity, but this statement just sums up the semantic confusion from which the supplements industry benefits. While the problem of formulating a workable distinction between “nutrients” and “stimulants” has bedeviled the doping issue throughout most of the twentieth century, there is no precedent for classifying a hormonal substance as a “nutrient” or as a “supplement.” A 1939 review article, for example, argues that any discussion of nutrients should focus on “special artificial foods intended for consumption immediately before or after athletic performances,” such as carbohydrates or glucose.¹⁴ It would not have occurred to the author of the 1939 article to label as “food” the testosterone products that had just come on the (medical) market, and there is as little reason for us to do so today. Hormone therapies are rather designated as “substitution” or “replacement” procedures that have their own controversial aspects, quite apart from the food/hormone distinction. Dr. Manfred Donike, the late drug-testing expert, said years ago that steroids should not become a “popular nutritional supplement,” and that is the responsible standpoint from a public health perspective.¹⁵ As a testosterone “precursor,” however, androstenedione is a perfect candidate to test societal inhibitions about making sex hormone boosting a routine, over-the-

counter procedure, and that is why the McGwire controversy deserves our careful attention.

The idea that elite athletes like Mark McGwire (or anyone) should have the unfettered right to ingest any drug of choice is very appealing from a libertarian point of view. But this idea becomes impractical as soon as one accepts that competitive athletes enter into the sort of social contract that (like any social contract) must prescribe values and norms of behavior, in this case norms that enforce limits on health risks and/or the enhancement of performance. The alternative to a sports culture of negotiated limits is a "Promethean" subculture that takes the Olympic motto "Faster, Higher, Stronger" literally and without additional refinements. This is the sort of sports subculture that elite weightlifters and shotputters and Tour de France cyclists would have succeeded in establishing long ago but for the often half-hearted and clumsy efforts of sports bureaucrats to frustrate their plans. This is also, of course, the drug ethos that has flourished among (unregulated) bodybuilders for many years.

One deficiency of the Promethean approach is that it disregards the role-modeling effect of the popular athlete who takes drugs, and this is the most serious objection that has been directed against McGwire's use of androstenedione. Even Patrick Arnold, the American chemist who is reported to have applied an East German recipe to the production of androstenedione in the mid-1990s says that no one under 18 should take the product on account of its unknown long-term effects.¹⁶ The irony is that McGwire, the Herculean idol for kids of all ages, is being asked to renounce a practice he adopted in order to become more Herculean. Which brings us back to Chad Curtis's exasperated question: how can you blame the player for just trying to improve his performance? The striking thing about Curtis's monologue is his apparent unfamiliarity with traditional ideas about sportsmanship and self-restraint. Neither he nor McGwire, he suggests, are "educated enough to judge whether it's good or bad"-a comment suggesting that at least some of America's most celebrated athletes have little or no sense of what is right and what is wrong when they step onto the field. Curtis seems oblivious to the distinction between what is improper and what is ineffective, since he appears to judge the drug entirely in terms of whether

or not it works. It is the responsibility of the company, he says, to make those judgments for us.

It is fair to say that these are judgments the pharmaceutical companies are happy to make when they are given the opportunity to do so. (Doubters need only look at the estrogen replacement industry, or the testosterone ads placed in medical journals during the 1940s.) Indeed, we should assume that the cannier drug company decision-makers out there have been following the McGwire saga with a combination of fascination and trepidation. For by now it should be obvious that the "Andre" episode was an inadvertent market test of a hormonal product that somehow wound up inside the gray zone between testosterone, a controlled substance, and the genuine supplements such as vitamins and minerals. This trial run has confirmed the persisting conflict between two important interest groups, the consumers and the regulators, a conflict that mirrors the bitter feuding over the scope of the FDA's authority that once pitted former commissioner David Kessler against Sen. Orrin Hatch and other Congressional conservatives bent on deregulating therapeutic drugs. Sales of Andro and other supplements have gone up geometrically in the wake of the massive publicity about McGwire and his little helper, and the question now is whether and how the expanding market for male hormone products can be contained at all.

The other major conclusion we can draw from these events is that, despite the demonstrated power of market demand, which is especially evident on the Internet, the regulators of hormone products can still call upon certain acquired cultural inhibitions in their attempts to check the further growth of this market. Juan Antonio Samaranch's trial balloon in favor of legalizing steroids was shot down by his associates only moments after launching, amounting to an unprecedented political humiliation for a man who was once a virtual dictator. But what really counts is commercial inhibitions about offending social standards. General Nutrition Centers halted the sale of androstenedione at its 3500 stores in the wake of the recent publicity; and, in a related development, ESPN cancelled Creatine ads during the Little League World Series.¹⁷ For the fact is that drug companies abhor bad publicity, and there is nothing that stigmatizes a drug like its highly publicized abuse by elite athletes who are

tainted as cheats. While pharmaceutical companies promoted testosterone products in the early 1940s with reckless abandon, it was doping scandals in sport that eventually taught them to be cautious about promoting steroids. In 1982 reports of serious side-effects prompted Ciba-Geigy to stop production of methandrostenolone—the anabolic steroid it was marketing under the name of Dianabol—thereby ensuring that the company would not appear to be promoting drug use in sport. Similarly, in 1988 Searle took its steroid Anavar off the market on account of its “misuse in sport.” And in 1997 Schering executives had the unpleasant experience of reading about their steroid Primobolan 25 in a German magazine article about doping in professional cycling. In a similar vein, Pfizer anxiously told the world several months ago that “Viagra is not an aphrodisiac.” Even Patrick Arnold, for whom the McGwire Affair has been nothing less than a godsend, cautiously assures us that his androstenedione cannot take the consumer where he (or she) presumably wants to go: “You will not reach superphysiological limits.”¹⁸ Caught between commercial ambition and the lingering notoriety of the anabolic steroid, endocrinological entrepreneurs are still waiting to see which way the wind is going to blow.

This wind may well blow us back toward the libertarian pharmacology that was done in by the Food and Drug Act of 1906. For while the sportsworld’s taboo on the promotion of performance-enhancing drugs is still alive, the fact remains that these prohibitions are selective, inconsistent, and inherently unstable, given the combination of foot-dragging sports officials and extramural pressures from the new hormone market that will reportedly include testosterone-boosting chewing gum. It is worth remembering that the fundamental conflict between medical conservatism and marketing ambition also characterized the sex hormone market of the 1940s. At that time, however, the conservatives prevailed by counseling restraint in conformity with the sexual mores of a pre-Kinsey, pre-Starr Report America in which divorce still carried with it a measure of social disgrace. Yet even then pharmaceutical firms were promoting hormone-based rejuvenation as legitimate medicine and pressuring physicians to make sex

hormone products a standard feature of American life. Why that market could not emerge until the 1990s is a story that remains to be told.

Notes

1. Jack Curtis and Ewald Witt, “Sex Hormones: Activities of the Food and Drug Administration in the Field of Sex Hormones,” *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology* 1(1941): 363-365. This article deals with female sex hormone products, perhaps because the testosterone products then on the market (methyltestosterone and testosterone propionate) were widely regarded as potent even if their effects were still poorly understood. See John Hoberman and Charles Yesalis. “The History of Synthetic Testosterone,” *Scientific American* (February 1995): 60-65.
2. “Opponents Don’t Fault McGwire for Pills,” *New York Times* (25 August 1998).
3. “Baseball’s Pandora’s Box Cracks Open,” *New York Times* (25 August 1998).
4. “McGwire Uses Substance Banned In Some Sports,” *New York Times* (22 August 1998).
5. “Baseball Tries to Calm Down Debate on Pills,” *New York Times* (27 August 1998).
6. “Opponents Don’t Fault McGwire For Pills,” *New York Times* (25 August 1998).
7. “Vaughn says Legal Supplements are Fair,” *Boston Globe* (26 August 1998).
8. “Swallow This Pill,” *Sports Illustrated* (31 August 1998): 17.
9. “Slugger’s Little Helper Falls Fair,” *New York Post* (24 August 1998).
10. “This Persecution of McGwire a Crime,” *Boston Globe* (26 August 1998).
11. “The News Is Out: Popeye Spikes His Spinach,” *New York Times* (23 August 1998); “Pandora’s Box Cracks Open,” *New York Times* (25 August 1998); “A Hero and His Shadow,” *New York Times* (August 27, 1998); “Mark McGwire’s Pep Pills,” (27 August 1998).
12. “Baseball Tries to Calm Down Debate on Pills,” *New York Times* (27 August 1998).
13. “Baseball’s Pandora’s Box Cracks Open,” *New York Times* (25 August 1998).
14. Ove Boje, “Doping: A Study of the Means Employed to Raise the Level of Performance in Sport,” *Bulletin of the Health Organization of the League of Nations* 8(1939): 449. See also: John Hoberman, *Mortal Engines: The Science of Performance and the Dehumanization of Sport* (New York: Free Press, 1992): 107-108.
15. The term used by Donike was *Volksnahrungsmittel*.
16. “As Drugs in Sports Proliferate, So Do Ethical Questions,” *New York Times* (31 August 1998). Also: “Questions Surround Performance Enhancer,” *New York Times* 8 September 1998).
17. “Muscle-enhancer called out by nutrition chain,” *Boston Globe* (27 August 1998); “ESPN: No Creatine with Little League,” *Boston Globe* (27 August 1998).
18. “As Drugs in Sports Proliferate. So Do Ethical Questions,” *New York Times* (31 August 1998).



Big Santa

by Jerry Todd



'Twas the night before Christmas,
when all through the gym
Not a member was stirring,
to lift or to swim;

The weights they were nestled
all snug in their racks,
Enjoying a respite
from muscular backs;

The gymbags were hung
in the weightroom with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas
soon would be there;

And Jan in her tanktop,
and I in my tights,
Had just settled down
for a nice Texas night;

When out in the street
there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the steambath
to see what was the matter.
Away to the window
I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters
and threw up the sash.

The moon on the waves
of the incoming tide
Gave the luster of midday
to objects outside,
When, what to my wondering
eyes should appear,
But a humongous sleigh,
and eight monstrous reindeer,
With a muscular driver,
so tall and so thick,
That I had to look twice
to see 'twas St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles
his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted,
and called them by name;
"Now Bosworth! Ben Johnson!
Now, Big Mac and Hogan!
On Coan! Kurlovich!
On Wheeler and Gogan!
To the top of the porch!

To the top of the wall!
Now dash away! Dash away!
Dash away all!"

As leaves that before
the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle,
mount to the sky;
So up to the rooftop
the coursers they flew,
With a sleigh full of 'roids,
and St. Nicholas too.
And then in a twinkling,
I heard on the roof,
The tramping and stamping
of each massive hoof—
As I drew in my head,
and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas
came with a bound.

He was dressed all in spandex
from his head to his foot,
And his gear was all tarnished
with ashes and soot;
A sackful of steroids
he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a dealer
just opening his pack.

His eyes—they were bloodshot!
And dark was his stare,
And I saw, when he nodded,
he was losing his hair!
His prognathous jaw
and his overhung brow,
Both loomed from his face
like the nose of a scow;
The breadth of his shoulders
was frightening to see,
And he tapered right down,
he was shaped like a "V."
He had a hard face
and a flat, wash-board belly,
All rippling and ridged,
not a vestige of jelly.

He was hostile and cold,
a most daunting old elf,
And I quaked when I saw him,

in spite of myself,
A flash from his eyes
and a shake of his head
Soon gave me to know
I had plenty to dread;

He spoke not a word,
but went straight to his deed,
And filled all the gymbags
with steroids and speed;
And in a great basso
profundo, he said,
"I'm always behind now,
I'm never ahead;
In past days, all I
would carry were toys,
But now it's these steroids
for all of the boys;
And my pack got so heavy
with bottles of pills
My eight tiny deer
couldn't handle the hills;
And to carry the bundles,
I took 'roids myself,
And in only a twinkling
I was not the same elf!
And then I decided
to inject the whole team
With Anadrol -50,
how different they seem."

Then he picked up a barbell
and did a few curls,
And said with a wink,
"Hey, I might meet some girls!"
He continued to lift
'til his arms were all pumped,
Then he sprang to the chimney,
and up it he jumped;
He leapt to his sleigh,
to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew,
all thunder and gristle.

And I heard him exclaim,
'ere he drove out of sight,
"Let's go to a strip club,
and then pick a fight!"

LOUIS CYR AND CHARLES SAMPSON: ARCHETYPES OF VAUDEVILLIAN STRONGMEN

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For every person who can, hundreds allege. This holds particularly true in the world of vaudevillian strongmen. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the performances of strongmen began to take a foothold in the popular entertainment industry and many strongmen could perform amazing feats of strength.¹ Many more, however, claimed to be able to perform amazing feats of strength. The prevailing attitude, summed up in P. T. Barnum's immortal assertion that a sucker is born every minute, encouraged charlatans to ascend vaudevillian stages hoping for what Andy Warhol would later call their fifteen minutes of fame.

Of these two categories, those who can and those who allege, two *fin de siècle* strongmen—Louis Cyr (can) and Charles A. Sampson (allege)—can be seen as the epitome of each specific sub-genre. There were many other strongmen in each category; however, many names have been forgotten. Nonetheless, numerous accomplishments (both real and fake) by these two performers are remembered. As each man was in the fore of his respective sub-genre, it is highly probable that other performers of the same style performed in a similar manner.

There are many differences between these two strongmen. Louis Cyr was born Noé-Cyprien Cyr in a small French-Canadian hamlet in Quebec—Saint Cyprien de Naperville—on 10 October 1863.² Charles A. Sampson, who professed that “my name is Sampson, not Samson, as it is often written by those who suppose I assumed a name to suit my profession. . . . [.]” was born in Metz, Loraine, France, on 16 April 1859.³ All similarities end with their common ancestry.

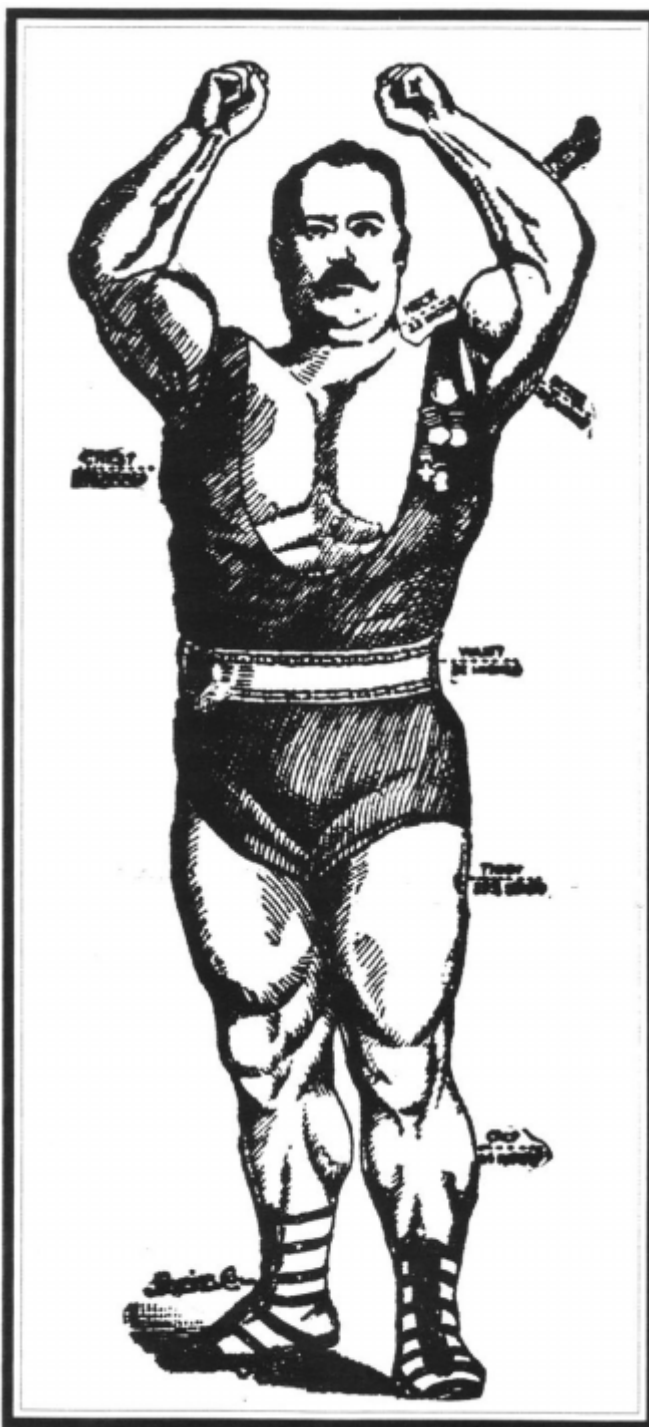
Even the way in which the two performers entered the world of strongmen is different. Cyr was

raised in the traditional rugged and strength-minded mentality of the Canadian woodsmen of the nineteenth century. At that time, many people in Canada were employed as lumberjacks, and “feats of strength in the Canadian forests in those times were a daily and important event.”⁴ Cyr's grandfather, who had been a woodsman in his younger days, inspired within young Noé-Cyprien a love of strength, and this old Canadian was the driving force early in Cyr's life. If legend can be believed, Cyr did not know the potential of his own strength until he lifted a farmer's cart out of a muddy rut in the dirt road. Soon after this encounter the farmer returned to inform the eighteen-year-old Hercules of an upcoming strongman contest in Boston. This contest was composed of only one test: lifting a horse. After much theatrics, Cyr lifted the horse's four hooves off the ground and proved that he was the strongest man at the competition. It was not long before he would prove that he was one of the strongest men in history. There is little doubt that this story, told in most books and articles about Cyr, is highly romanticized.⁵

Sampson, on the other hand, was not amazingly strong as a child and said later that he literally awoke one day to find that he possessed superhuman strength. By his own account, he was a “healthy, high-spirited boy” who enjoyed living life more than school. When the Franco-Prussian War broke out he joined the French Ambulance Corps and was grazed by a bullet early in his military career. From that time his health began to fail and in 1873, while lounging in his house, a bolt of lightning struck him. After about a month of complete paralysis he awoke to find that he could bend an iron ring by placing it over his upper arm and flexing his biceps.⁶ Al-

though it is possible that lightning struck him, it is highly improbable. In any case, gaining superhuman strength as a result of being struck in this manner is simply impossible. Clearly, Sampson fabricated this story for his autobiography. It was popular at that time for vaudevillian strongmen to say that they overcame childhood ailments and weakness.⁷ He also explains in his book that he ran away with the circus several times and it was there that he learned how to use his phenomenal strength.⁸ It is more likely that instead of joining the army at age eleven, Sampson ran away to the circus where he developed his body by performing as a gymnast and acrobat. No matter what the actual story, it is certain that there is more truth in Cyr's account than there is in Sampson's.

Perhaps the greatest difference between Cyr and Sampson, besides their abilities, was their type of performance. Louis Cyr performed pure feats of strength. He would enter onto stage, go through a series of lifts, and then he would exit. Sampson, however, was a true showman and dazzled his audience not with brawn, but with brain. He would enter onto stage and perform amazing tricks that most of



IN 1898, CYR TOURED WITH JOHN ROBINSON'S CIRCUS. THIS IMAGE, FROM A CIRCUS POSTER FOR THAT SEASON, INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING MEASUREMENTS FOR CYR: WIDTH ACROSS SHOULDERS—27"; NECK—23"; FOREARM—19"; BICEPS—21.5"; WAIST—52"; THIGH —29 3/4"; CALF—24"; AND CHEST—58.5."

the audience believed to be real demonstrations of strength. Although it is likely that Cyr faked at least some of his feats, there is far less likelihood that he faked for the same reason as did Sampson.

Cyr began his career as a strongman with contests of pure brute strength. After he supposedly lifted the horse at the contest in Boston, Cyr's name began to be known throughout Canada and it was not long before he found himself matched with David Michaud, then considered to be the strongest man in Canada. The contest was a simple one: whoever lifted the heavier stone won. Michaud, the current champion and quite a bit older than Cyr, was defeated when Cyr lifted a stone said to weigh anywhere from four hundred eighty pounds to as much as five hundred twenty-two pounds.⁹ Ben Weider asserts that when it was officially weighed the stone tipped the scale at five hundred twenty-two pounds.¹⁰ Whatever the true weight of the boulder, Cyr now held the title of The Strongest Man in Canada.

Due to Cyr's victories at the competition in Boston and over Michaud, it was not long before others in the profession caught wind of this young Canadian and began offering and accepting challenges to and from Cyr. This was to become his ma-

jour style of exhibition. Becoming a strongman was not an overnight decision. While he was riding the small wave of local fame, Cyr toured Quebec performing; but he continued with traditional work because the performances were not paying enough to support him and his new wife. Finally, after several jobs working on farms, in the forests, and a stint in the Montreal police department, Cyr became a professional strongman and toured widely in North America and Europe. Everywhere he went he offered challenges to the assumed champion, and everyone who met the “Brawny ‘Canadian Oak’” was defeated.¹¹

Contests of strength are nothing new, and audiences have been attending such performances for centuries. For example, in the Roman era, gladiatorial fights were very popular, and in our own time (beginning in the early nineteenth century), boxing and wrestling have been popular forms of entertainment. All of these spectacles are sport-related, yet the concept of challenging others to competitions was not foreign to vaudeville. Douglas Gilbert states that during the 1880s “an interesting phase” was occurring in variety acts; contests among performers were becoming popular. Gilbert explains that such acts as clog or jig dancers, harmonica players, bone soloists, and pantomimists would compete for titles or even silver cups.¹² There is little difference between contests involving dancers or musicians and contests involving strongmen. It is unknown if Cyr was consciously working within this perspective, but his exhibition style does fit into Gilbert’s “phase.”

Cyr was always challenging the established strongmen or the pompous fakes who claimed to be stronger than anyone else, and everyone who met Cyr lost. The list of challengers reads like a virtual *Who’s Who* of the strength world: David Michaud in Quebec in 1881; Richard Pennell in Philadelphia in 1886; Sebastian Miller in Montreal in July 1891; Cyclops and Sandowe, the False (whose real name was Montgomery Irving¹³), in Montreal in October 1891; Donald Dinnie in Potarch, Scotland in 1892; The McCann Brothers in England in 1892; August Johnson in Chicago in April 1896; Otto Rinaldo in Montreal in April 1899; Hector Décarie in Montreal in February 1906; and others. Professor Edmund Desbonnet asserts that Cyr even faced Eugen

Sandow, the Prussian strongman, while both men were in London, but this match is doubtful.¹⁴ While Cyr was performing in Boston after his return from England, one advertisement read:

Cyr is at all times ready and anxious to meet any of the alleged strong men of any nation—*Sandow preferred*—and will cheerfully forfeit the sum of \$1000 to any of them who can duplicate his feats.¹⁵

Another article on the same day has a similar message: “In naming the men of strength he [Cyr] would be pleased to meet, he mentions Sandow (who is preferred) . . . and many others.”¹⁶ If Cyr had met and beaten Sandow in England as Desbonnet claims, it seems odd that Cyr would use as a promotion a challenge to Sandow; rather, a declaration of Sandow’s defeat would be more apropos. Leo Gaudreau asks why Cyr, who was clearly stronger, felt the need to face Sandow. He conjectures that the strongman who had the most victories over other strongmen received more and better bookings.¹⁷

Charles A. Sampson also worked within this “phase” that Gilbert describes. It seems more likely, however, that Sampson was conscious of the theatricality in such competitions, or at least in offering such competitions. In 1889, Sampson was working at the Royal Aquarium in London with his assistant and protege Franz Bienkowski, who used the stage-name Cyclops. Sampson, like Cyr, proposed challenges to other strongmen, offering £500 to the person who could duplicate his performance. Inasmuch as Sampson’s salary at the Aquarium was only £10 per week, this offer was quite risky.¹⁸ Challenges, however, were becoming common in the world of strength because strongmen offered them as a means of legitimizing their claims to strength. The logic was that the strongman would not offer so much money if there was a chance of losing; therefore, Sampson—offering £500—must truly be the strongest man in the world. Such an offer, otherwise, would not be financially sound. Also, the challenge worked to heighten the theatricality of the performance. There was certainly dramatic tension during the pause in anticipation of an acceptance. Sampson’s plan, however, backfired on 28 October 1889 when Sandow “jumped the stage,”

accepted the dare, and defeated Sampson. Strongmen of Sampson's caliber did not expect their challenges to be accepted; but sometimes people did accept, and many strongmen took precautions.

Sampson had many ways of safeguarding himself from losing his own challenges. Even before facing Sandow, Sampson was protecting himself from the potential of being defeated. One of Sampson's earliest European claims of superhuman strength came while he was performing at the Canterbury Theatre of Varieties, where he stated that he could lift 2,240 pounds (one imperial ton). In order to demonstrate just how impossible this lift was, Sampson would invite members of the audience to the stage to attempt to lift the huge barbell from the two barrels on which it was perched. Everyone who attempted to lift the bell failed. As the audience exited the stage, Sampson's manager launched into a dramatic speech detailing the difficulty of the feat about to be attempted. When the manager finished, a drum roll pealed through the auditorium and, with even more histrionics than the manager's speech, Sampson slowly lifted the bell.¹⁹

The secret was not in Sampson's phenomenal strength; rather, it was in the manager's speech. While the manager spoke, holes in the bottom of the two bells were opened and the sand (or lead) emptied into the barrels on which the barbell was resting. Once the manager finished his perfectly timed speech, Sampson would walk over to the now empty bell and easily lift it, all the while acting as if it were a struggle. Unfortunately for Sampson, one night he was exposed as a fraud on stage, an occurrence that seems to have happened frequently during his career. That particular evening, instead of testing the weight before the demonstration, two audience members jumped onto the stage after Sampson had completed his lift and showed everyone that the bell was now hollow.²⁰

Sampson was resilient, however, and did not give up on his career. Not too long after his exposure in Canterbury he began working at the Royal Aquarium. It was at the Aquarium that Sampson boasted he could lift three hundred forty pounds over his head. After the barbell was wheeled out on its cart, Sampson demonstrated how amazingly heavy this weight was by again inviting spectators onto the stage to attempt to lift the weight. The fact that no one could lift it was not entirely due to the lack of ability within the

audience. Sampson had rigged the barbell so that no one could lift it no matter how hard they tried. The cart was made of lead and said to weigh over four hundred pounds. The barbell was secured to the wagon by two inconspicuous spring-clips. As the audience members returned to their seats, Sampson's partner, Cyclops, would busy himself polishing the audience's fingerprints off the shiny bell. The polishing was merely a deception for his real task—releasing the spring-clips so Sampson could lift the weight.²¹

In a similar manner, Sampson was able to fool most of St. Petersburg in 1898. While he was performing in the Russian capital, George Hackenschmidt, the professional wrestler, had an opportunity to see the strongman perform. Hackenschmidt describes a barbell that Sampson had strategically placed atop a wagon at the entrance to the theatre. The wagon was positioned so that the audience was forced to walk past it. The audience was also invited to attempt to lift the bell. Hackenschmidt, being a strongman himself, "knew by the size of the barbell that even if full of lead I ought to manage it easily but it defied me."²² Upon closer examination, Hackenschmidt noticed that the bell was fastened to the wagon and that the four wheels of the wagon were secured to the wooden floor.²³ Without removing the nails that held the wagon at bay, it was impossible for anyone, including Sampson, to lift the weight.

That same evening, and during the performance, Sampson publicly challenged Hackenschmidt to come on stage and lift a barbell that he, Sampson, had just finished lifting. The challenge seemed safe enough but Hackenschmidt was wise to the trick and exposed Sampson on stage in front of a packed house. Sampson had lifted a hollow bell and, upon replacing it on the stage floor, arranged it in such a way that it was partially obstructed by a curtain. While Sampson was offering his challenge, the stage crew was busy filling the empty bell with lead. Hackenschmidt agreed to the challenge on the condition that Sampson lift the bell once more; obviously, Sampson refused and Hackenschmidt then turned to the audience and exposed Sampson as a fraud. Sampson immediately countered the accusations and offered to meet Hackenschmidt that Friday for a true contest of strength. Sampson, however, never arrived for that match: "When the time came for Sampson's act, a man

stepped in front of the curtain and announced that owing to an accident to his hand Sampson would be unable to fulfill his engagement. Thus ended his appearance as an athlete in St. Petersburg."²⁴

After his encounter with Sandow and Hackenschmidt, Sampson made sure that there was no way he could be beaten again at his own challenges. Shortly after departing the Aquarium, Sampson and Cyclops played the Day's Music Hall in Birmingham, England. In order to "spice up their act," Sampson again offered his nightly challenge; but no one accepted.²⁵ Sampson consulted with Edward Lawrence Levy, a local weightlifter and coach, to find a local strongman who would be willing to accept the challenge. Levy suggested Montgomery Irving. Irving was the perfect person for the match because there was little chance he could win, and if he did prove to be the superior, Irving was willing to throw the match for an extra £5.²⁶ Not long after this match Cyclops and Montgomery teamed up and toured North America.

Contests of strength at this time had no official rules. By tradition, each contestant would select several feats from his repertoire, and the other would attempt to duplicate them. Whoever performed the other's feats better was the winner. Needless to say there was much argument and many contests ended in dispute.²⁷

Louis Cyr, unlike Charles Sampson, did not resort to trickery to win his challenges. Cyr was almost as strong as he claimed and won his matches honestly. He made a respectable career by lifting weights equal to what he claimed he could lift.²⁸ Indeed, he kept a scale on stage to measure any weight should someone in the audience doubt his abilities.²⁹ Two of Cyr's matches have become legendary: one occurring in 1906, because it decided the new Strongest Man in the World; and the other occurring earlier, in 1891, because it spawned an immortal response in the history of the Iron Game.

The match that occurred on 26 February 1906 was Cyr's last competition.³⁰ The contest was with Hector Décarie at Sohmer Park in Montreal, and Cyr came out of retirement, and his sickbed, to maintain his right to the title of The Strongest Man in the World. Louis Cyr neither won nor lost; the match was a draw and allowed Cyr to retain the title. This contest of strength, however, is problematic. A cursory look at the contest shows the possibility that either man (or,

indeed, both men) was guilty of throwing the match. Décarie's first lift was a right arm side press, and he won the point when Cyr refused to match 171 pounds. It seems odd that Cyr would forfeit when just seven years earlier he pressed 273½ pounds using the same technique. The fact that Cyr was dying of Bright's Disease, a debilitating and deadly kidney condition, could account for his early concession; however, Cyr's illness does not explain Décarie's refusal a few feats later. The sixth test (Cyr's third choice) was "the shouldering and jerking aloft, without any leg splitting, of two dumbbells, one in each hand."³¹ In this fashion, Cyr lifted 227 pounds, six pounds more than what had been listed as the record.³² Décarie declined to try to match Cyr's weight at all. Throughout the night, each man conceded the point to his opponent; by the end of the evening, each man won the four tests that he presented. Many of the spectators felt cheated by the highly publicized contest and the headline in the following day's *Montreal Star* declared "Cries of Fake were Heard."³³ The oddest part of the evening was the conclusion. Once the referee declared the match a draw and Cyr still the title bearer, Cyr stepped forward and announced:

Hector Decarie [*sic*] is perhaps the strongest man I have ever met in all my years in the arena. It gives me deep pleasure to recognize him as my successor to the title of 'Strongest Man in the World,' and my championship Belt. I sincerely hope that he will respect and do justice to this, the highest honour that can be bestowed upon an athlete.³⁴

Cyr relinquished the title although he did not lose it, thus raising suspicions that perhaps this contest was little more than a publicity stunt to help establish Décarie. Because Cyr abdicated the title and belt voluntarily, it would be impossible for anyone to argue with Décarie's claim to the title. The two strongmen were friends, and Cyr, given his illness, probably realized that this was going to be his final appearance in public as a strongman. Therefore, it is likely this contest was arranged for Cyr to leave the arena forever as the victor and for Décarie to enter it with the legitimate claim to the title because it was bestowed upon him by the old possessor.

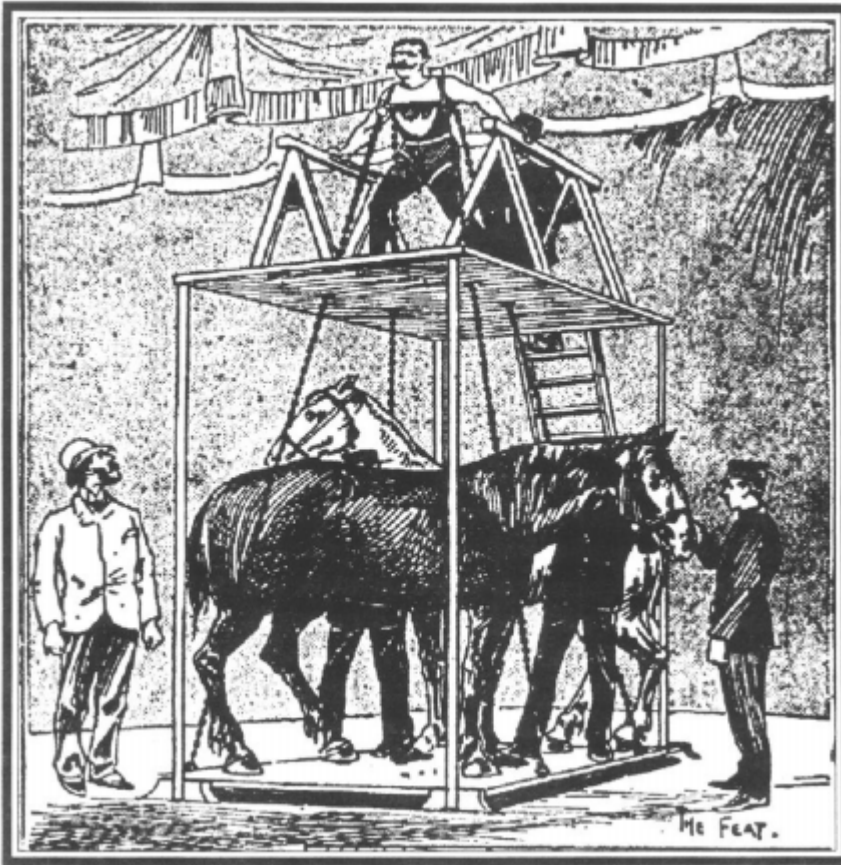
Perhaps the most notorious contest in which Cyr was ever engaged was between himself and the team of Cyclops and “the false” Sandowe on 28-29 October 1891. After their tour of Birmingham, Sampson and Cyclops parted ways and Cyclops teamed up with Irving. Attempting to capitalize on Eugen Sandow’s fame, Cyclops renamed Irving “Sandowe.” The two miscreants arrived in Montreal shortly after Cyr left on a tour of New England. Immediately, they began to challenge Cyr by saying that he was afraid to face their challenge. Learning of this, Cyr broke his engagement in the U.S. and quickly returned to Montreal.³⁵ On the night of 28 October 1891, the curtain rose and Cyclops made the challenge that he had been making for several days: “where was the Canadian Samson who was supposed to be so strong?” From the audience Louis Cyr’s voice could be heard responding with the now immortal reply, “*Je suis ici. Je suis arrivée!*” (“I am here. I have arrived!”) Cyr quickly ascended the stage and beat Cyclops feat for feat.³⁶ The following evening Cyr returned and offered \$1,000 to Cyclops if he could duplicate Cyr’s performance. Cyclops refused to compete, and Cyr was the undisputed winner.³⁷

This contest is problematic as well. Cyclops had a specialty that was never used during this competition. Certainly if he wanted to defeat Cyr in something, he would have used a stunt that he had reason to believe the Canadian could not accomplish. This specialty was breaking coins with his fingers. There is much debate as to whether this particular trick was real or not. Professor Desbonnet swears that Cyclops could truly do it, and that he witnessed Cyclops break a coin in March 1897.³⁸ However, other people feel these claims related to breaking coins are false and are achieved merely by sleight-of-hand.³⁹ Regardless of who is correct, the question of why Cyclops did not use this feat remains. If Cyclops really could break coins, he should have been able to complete the task on stage in front of Cyr. If the stunt was faked, there still should have been no problem as the stage was set for Cyclops’ performance.⁴⁰ Another point of contention is Cyr’s return the next day to counterchallenge Cyclops and Sandowe. There is no reason that Cyr could not have laid the counterchallenge the same night—certainly, he was well prepared to face Cyclops. The answer might be that if the second half was postponed, there would be more time to advertise and thus a larger

box office revenue to split. This is not unprecedented. Many strongmen had clauses in their contracts to assure that they would receive at least a percentage of the box office take.⁴¹

Finally, the way in which Cyclops was promoted leads to questions of his mission in the world of strongmen. When Cyclops was working for Sampson, he was referred to as Sampson’s student and protégé. Several historians argue that it was Cyclops who conceived the idea of touring the United States, thought to change Irving’s name, and engineered the tour of Montreal while Cyr was away.⁴² If Cyclops was the architect of this scheme, then it is curious that his position had not changed. While in Canada, Cyclops was promoted much the same as he was in England, as “The champion pupil of World Champion Sandowe.”⁴³ It is possible that Cyclops was nothing more than a professional villain. Many actors have made a career of playing only criminals; there is no reason to believe that the world of vaudevillian strongmen did not have their crop of “professional” criminals as well. Certainly, if managers were looking to hire winners like Cyr, there had to be people who were willing to be losers. Irving was one such person—having accepted £5 to ensure Sampson’s victory. There were unscrupulous performers available and the evidence suggests that Cyclops was one of these people. [*Editors’ Note: The eminent historian of strength, David Willoughby, accepts the accounts of Desbonnet and Siebert, both of whom saw Cyclops break coins.*]

When not facing other strongmen in competition, Cyr performed amazing feats of pure strength. During the course of his career, he established many records and provided some truly amazing demonstrations of his strength. Although Cyr often competed with other strongmen (either to wrest their titles or to defend his own), by far most of his performances were non-competitive, professional shows. He, like many performers, had trademarks for which he was famous. In a time before television, trademarks allowed performers to ensure that the public would not soon forget them. Many vaudevillian performers relied on trademark songs, dances, skits, or *shlick* to help the audience remember them from tour to tour. When the performers arrived in a city and performed, they were expected to do their trademarks. Many vaudevillians made their careers out of performing the same routine



CHARLES SAMPSON PREPARES TO RAISE TWO HORSES IN A HARNESS LIFT. NOTE THE INCORRECT ARTISTIC RENDERING.

for many years.⁴⁴ Cyr, like these other vaudevillians, had his own trademarks.

One of Cyr's more famous trademarks was that of holding back horses. He performed this stunt officially for the first time at Sohmer Park, Montreal, in 1891; but there is evidence that he was performing this amazing act before then.⁴⁵ While still touring throughout Canada, Cyr seems to have used this display of strength, and according to Hy Steirman, it was usually performed as a bet.⁴⁶ Certainly, the most famous time he resisted the pull of horses was on a bet. While performing in England, Cyr had the opportunity to be the guest of the Marquis of Queensbury, the man who codified the modern rules of boxing and who effected Oscar Wilde's incarceration. Wagering one of his horses, the Marquis challenged Cyr to resist the pull of two dapple-grays. Having performed this stunt with as many as four horses, surely keeping the Marquis' two horses in check should have been easy for Cyr. And, according to George F. Jowett it was. Cyr received one of the horses as a reward and it lived for many years on Cyr's farm in Montreal.⁴⁷

Although this feat seems impressive, there is as much science to it as there is strength. Obviously, someone with little strength could not perform such a test; but Cyr was uncommonly strong. Strong as he was, however, he was not nearly as strong as even one horse, let alone two or four, even though the stunt seemed to imply that he was "stronger" than the horses whose pull he was "resisting." In 1931 *Science and Invention* printed an article describing tricks of the strongmen that anyone could accomplish; among these tricks is resisting the pull of "four husky individuals, each one more rugged than you . . ."⁴⁸ According to the article, all that is needed is a rope tied in a circle with about an eight inch diameter and at least four volunteers. The performer grips the rope and two of the volunteers grip the elbows of the performer while the second two grip the waists of the first two. At the signal, the volunteers begin pulling while the performer remains in the middle.⁴⁹ The technique for resisting horses is the same. and as long as the pull is equal and opposite, and the performer keeps balance between the two pulls, there is less strength

involved than might be imagined. Nevertheless, to the layman "this feat will prove to be an amazing and thrilling exhibition of true Herculean Might."⁵⁰ [Editors' Note: This stunt, which is to a certain degree deceptive, still requires great strength, and is dangerous. if the pull is great enough. Four men are one thing; four 1500 pound horses are another thing altogether. Recently, Greg Ernst, the Nova Scotia strongman, suffered a serious rupture of his pectoral muscle when a group of men whose pull he was resisting in this manner pulled the rope more suddenly than they should have done and caused the injury.]

Another famous trademark of Cyr's, and a feat in which he set records, was the backlift. For this stunt, Cyr would crawl under a platform that had been placed on supports and would raise the platform off the supports with his legs, hips, shoulders, and back. During his career in vaudeville, Cyr lifted mostly pig iron and, of course, people. While performing in Maine, Cyr backlifted a platform weighing 261 pounds upon which he placed twenty men "whose

combined weight with that of the platform . . . aggregated 3790 pounds.”⁵¹ According to *Who's Who in Canadian Sport*, Cyr's heaviest backlift occurred in Boston in 1895 when he lifted 4,337 pounds.⁵² However, if contemporary accounts can be believed, Cyr raised 4,400 pounds of pig iron on his back in May 1895 and again sixteen months later in September 1896.⁵³ *Great Canadian Sport Stories* asserts that Cyr's greatest record was made in 1894 at Sohmer Park, Montreal. At this performance, he supposedly lifted 4,562 pounds of living weight (i.e., “eighteen fat men”).⁵⁴ Regardless of the exact poundage, it is likely that Cyr lifted well over two tons.⁵⁵ [Editors' note: David P. Willoughby notes that Cyr's “performances in this style of lifting are surrounded with confusion.” In most instances neither the people lifted nor the platform were actually weighed. Willoughby contends that Cyr's best in this lift was probably between 3900 and 4000 pounds (*The Super Athletes*, p. 57)].

Cyr had many other stunts for which he was famous and for which he is remembered. He is credited with lifting with only his middle finger 545 pounds.⁵⁶ It has been claimed that he could also lift from the floor to his shoulder, with only one arm, a barrel filled with wet sand weighing 432 pounds.⁵⁷ Cyr also pushed a fully loaded train car up a slight incline.⁵⁸ Melina, Louis Cyr's wife, would sometimes perform with her husband. She would do an equilibrist act in which she balanced herself atop a ladder that Cyr balanced on his chin.⁵⁹ Cyr, like the biblical Samson, wore his hair to his shoulders as a young man, and he would use his hair in his act. At some point in the show three volunteers were chosen from the audience and escorted to the stage where they were each told to take hold of the strongman's mane. Once everyone was secure, Cyr began spinning until all three men were swinging through the air. David Norwood says “while this was not in any way shape or form a legitimate lift it did entertain and please the crowds greatly.”⁶⁰ [Editors' Note: *This stunt seems to defy physical laws.*]

Like all strongmen, Cyr had a tour de force that he would use to conclude his show. A barbell was brought onto stage, which Cyr would immediately shoulder. Once the bell was on his shoulder, Pierre, Cyr's brother, would sit on it while eight men would affix themselves to either side of the bell (i.e., four men to a side). Cyr would then walk around the stage and then spin himself, and his cargo, around like a carousel. The bell weighed 232 pounds, his brother weighed 168 pounds, and the combined weight of the

eight men, the bell, and his brother “would be anything around 1800 lbs.”⁶¹

Charles Sampson also had several trademarks that he was sure to use at many of his performances. However, Sampson was as dishonest as Cyr was honest, and most of Sampson's trademarks were accomplished through trickery and deception. He had three stunts for which he is most famous: breaking coins with his fingers, breaking chains around his biceps, and his supposed records in harness lifting.

After Sampson's defeat at the hands of Sandow, he claims that he could sense change and retired to his home in Detroit, Michigan to train at lifting heavy weights.⁶² He claims that eight months later he set a new world's record at harness lifting by raising 508 pounds more than the old record. Four weeks later, Sampson avers, he broke that record by lifting 4,008 pounds.⁶³ Harness lifting is one of the easiest feats of strength to fake due to the inherent nature of the apparatus usually used.⁶⁴ The weight to be lifted is loaded onto a platform which has chains attached to all four corners. The chains are then brought up to a second platform above the first where they are fitted onto a leather harness that the strongman passes his head through and rests on his shoulders. Once all is ready, the strongman, beginning in a partial squatting position, straightens up to stand fully erect, and thus lifts the weight on the platform below. Because of the large area of stage the platform covers, it can easily conceal machinery.

Once again Sampson was exposed as a fraud while on stage. During his performance, he would lift an elephant by the aforementioned method. The animal was led out onto stage and placed on the platform; Sampson ascended the ladder to the upper platform and donned the harness. Grunting and groaning, Sampson slowly lifted the elephant about six inches off the stage floor whereupon he would fall down on the platform unconscious from the strain, in the process dropping the lower platform and its huge cargo back down to the stage. Assistants would rush to revive Sampson with a glass of brandy.⁶⁵ How he was debunked has been remembered in two different stories.

The first story states that one night when Sampson performed his lift he fell to the ground as was planned, but the platform and elephant mysteriously stayed suspended in mid-air. Apparently, something had gone wrong with the hoisting machinery below the platform and it stuck in the up position.⁶⁶

The second version has the weight never leav-

ing the ground. Many people were present to witness Sampson's harness lifting. Unfortunately, they did not see a champion lift a seemingly impossible weight (ten thousand pounds of stone in this version); rather, they saw a master showman unmasked for the fraud that he was. In this version, after the ten thousand pounds was loaded, Sampson began his routine as always; but the platform refused to rise. In an attempt to mask the backstage error, assistants rushed out and removed one thousand pounds of rock, and Sampson tried once more. Again, his attempts were futile. Again, his assistants came out and removed weight. Finally, after enough failures to enrage the audience (who began hissing and demanding refunds) the journalists in the audience jumped onto the stage to investigate. The journalists discovered that the platform was rigged to an apparatus that was designed to lift the platform from the bottom; the chains over Sampson's neck were merely cosmetic. The stagehand in charge of running the lift had passed out from intoxication with one hand still on the lever of the hoisting machine.⁶⁷

Whichever version of this story is correct matters little. Sampson was again shown for the fake strongman that he was. However, Sampson did not let this discrediting—or any for that matter—slow him down. George Hackenschmidt summed up Sampson's scrapes with exposure thus: "But did such a disastrous defeat faze Sampson? No. He bounced right back in another city with a new bag of tricks!"⁶⁸ For all of the differences between these two strongmen's performances, it is interesting that they performed in the same venues: the circus and the dime museum. It seems that audiences did not know whether authentic strongmen or merely actors portraying strongmen on stage entertained them. Louis Cyr performed at Austin and Stone's Museum in Boston intermittently between 1895 and 1896. It was here, in Boston, that Cyr set many of his backlift records. Every biography that discusses it mentions that Cyr spent time with Ringling Brothers Circus. Unfortunately, these biographers have misled their readers. Cyr actually performed with the John Robinson Circus during the season of 1898; however, Ringling Brothers rented the former circus' property for that year and paid the John Robinson employees' salaries. This agreement between circuses is undoubtedly where the confusion arose. Sampson, in his autobiography, explains that when he first came to the United States in 1875 he performed "in museums and other places of amusement."⁶⁹ Before coming to America, Sampson had worked in a circus that toured

the principal cities of Europe playing, among other famous theatres, the Hippodrome in Paris. Unfortunately, Sampson declined to name the American cities in which he performed or the museums in which he worked; there is, therefore, no way to verify his claims. Cyr, on the other hand, appeared in many advertisements for both Austin and Stone's Museum and the John Robinson Circus.

The time Cyr spent at Austin and Stone's Museum was profitable. He set his backlifting record there and, although the hours were long, he surely made a large sum of money. Dime museums were a place where a vaudevillian could make a lot of money in a relatively short period. Performers could easily make "\$20 to \$30 more a week than the standard minimums on the straight time."⁷⁰ According to Sampson's autobiography, he was making between \$200 and \$300 per week while he worked at unnamed museums.⁷¹ If Sampson can be believed, surely Cyr, who was more famous and still working 30 years later, was making quite a healthy income. The higher wages lit the work, however. Austin and Stone's museum opened at 10:00 A.M. and offered a show ("10¢ will admit you to everything") every hour until they closed at 10:30 P.M.⁷²

While working at the museum, Cyr performed his backlifts many times a day, as well as lifting his famous barrel of water and sand with one arm. The rest of his performance consisted of feats he had been using while touring Canada, America, and Europe. The Austin and Stone show was a family effort. Peter, Cyr's brother, assisted; his wife performed occasionally; and on 20 September 1896, Cyr's daughter made her first Boston appearance.⁷³

Cyr and his partner-protege Horace Barré toured throughout the American mid-west from 27 April to 7 November 1898, beginning in Baraboo, Wisconsin and ending in Rogers, Arkansas. During the seven months Cyr was performing in the circus, he never visited the same city twice and the circus performed every day except Sundays. Cyr was using many of the same feats that had made him famous; but he adapted several into two-man performances. Many of the advertisements for the circus declared that Cyr was "engaged at the princely salary of \$2,000.00 per week."⁷⁴ Unfortunately for Cyr's purse, he and Barre split the more modest sum of \$150 per week; even so, they were the second highest paid performers for that season.⁷⁵ While Cyr was performing under the Big Top, he curtailed his challenge performances; surely

this was due to the schedule he was keeping while employed with the traveling show. Nevertheless, he was always promoted with the famous John Robinson \$25,000 Challenge Feature. One advertisement for the circus bluntly stated, "Cyr's equal does not exist."⁷⁶

Cyr was usually honest with his audience,, though not always. Cyr was capable of legitimately performing most of what he claimed; however, lifting huge weights twelve hours a day for months at a time is impossible, even for someone as strong as Louis Cyr. Therefore, it was necessary to fake his lifts occasionally. Usually strongmen accomplished this by lifting weights labeled with higher figures than they really were. A conversation between Alan Calvert and "a celebrated weight-lifter" that was reprinted in an article explains the mentality of strongmen:

Calvert . . . said, 'you are perfectly capable of handling the amount of weight you claim, so why do you only handle one-third of that weight?' . . .

The reply was: 'What's the use? I make the people think I am working. They would believe I lifted 480 if I said so. . . . What's the sense of lifting 240 if I can get by with 80?'⁷⁷

There is also photographic evidence of another example of Cyr faking a lift. Careful examination will reveal that the dumbbell in Cyr's hand is merely a wooden cutout with the number 273¼ painted on. Again, this was not because Cyr was not able to lift this much weight, but in the 1890s anyone who posed for a photograph had to sit still for a much longer time than today. It would have been extremely hard to hold the weight for that long in that position.⁷⁸

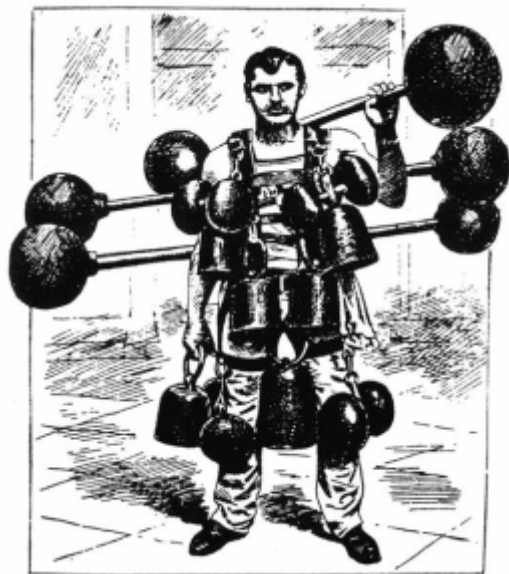
Cyr was truly one of the strongest people in modern times. His contribution to history has been recognized with his induction into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame; what's more, Montreal has named schools, streets, and parks in his honor. Historians, however, have overlooked Sampson. In the few articles written about Sampson, most authors belittle Sampson's place in history by stating that his only significance was being the "stepping stone" for Eugen Sandow's fame.⁷⁹ These two men were much more than a record setting weightlifter and an accomplished showman-fraud, however; they were the essence of *fin de siècle* strongmen. Through their styles of performance, it is possible to see into the past and understand

the different types of strongmen who were performing within vaudeville before the turn of the century.

Notes

1. Today, bodybuilders and weightlifters are capable of lifting heavier weights and possess larger physiques; however, this is due to modern equipment and the introduction of anabolic steroids.
2. There is some argument as to the exact date of Cyr's birth—10 October or 11 October. David Norwood asserts that the correct date is 10 October. David Norwood, "The Legend of Louis Cyr," *Iron Game History* 1, no. 2 (April 1990): 4.
3. C. A. Sampson, *Strength: A Treatise on the Development and Use of Muscle* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, Publishers, 1895), 33.
4. Terence Todd, "The History of Resistance Exercise and Its Role in United States Education" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1966), 118.
5. Ben Weider, *The Strongest Man in History, Louis Cyr "Amazing Canadian,"* with a Foreword by Gerald Aumont and an Introduction by Barry L. Penhale (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, Limited, 1976), 27-30. For more information, albeit highly romanticized, on Cyr's life, see George F. Jowett, *The Strongest Man that Ever Lived* (Montreal: Your Physique Publishing Co., 1949) and Weider, *Strongest Man in History*.
6. Sampson, *Strength*, 34-42.
7. Eugen Sandow and Bernarr Macfadden, for instance, told similar stories of their ill health as children.
8. Sampson, *Strength*, 42.
9. Bob Ferguson, *Who's Who in Canadian Sport* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1977), 62. David Chapman, "Louis Cyr: The Canadian Samson," *Muscle and Fitness*, February 1988, 107.
10. Weider, *Strongest Man in History, Louis Cyr*, 38. Weider does not mention who "formally weighed" the stones.
11. *Boston Globe*, 27 September 1896.
12. Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1940), 24.
13. There is some confusion about Sandow's real name. David Chapman refers to him as "Irving Montgomery" in *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Bodybuilding*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), based on court documents from the San Francisco case. However, an original publicity poster in the Todd-McLean Collection uses the name "Montgomery Irving," as do most press clippings from that era.
14. Edmond Desbonnet, *The Rings of Strength*. trans. David Chapman (unpublished), 275.
15. *Boston Globe*, 19 May 1895. Emphasis added.
16. Ibid.
17. Leo Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horseshoes, and Cannons: The History of Strongmen*, 2 vols. (Alliance: Iron Man, 1975), 1:193.
18. Sampson, *Strength*, 52.
19. Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horseshoes, and Cannons*. 1:165.
20. Ibid. See also: Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*. 24.
21. Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horseshoes, and Cannons*, 1:167-169.
22. George Hackenschmidt, Charles Sampson: King of Showmen and Knave of Strongmen," *Mr. America*, June 1962, 68.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*. 80.

26. E. Lawrence Levy, *The Autobiography of an Athlete* (Birmingham: Hammond, [1913]), 47.
27. Dick Bachtell, "Pennell and Cyr Contest," *Strength & Health*. April 1943, 40.
28. *Boston Post*, 19 May 1895.
29. Ibid. It is conceivable that the scale could have been rigged to read a different weight; however, based on Cyr's official records, it is doubtful he would have needed to resort to such trickery.
30. For more information on the contest see Martin Franklin, "Louis Cyr's Last Match," *Muscle Power*, October 1947, and *Montreal Star*, 27 February 1906.
31. Franklin, "Louis Cyr's Last Match," 35.
32. *Montreal Star*, 27 February 1906. Franklin, "Louis Cyr's Last Match," 35.
33. *Montreal Star*, 27 February 1906.
34. Quoted in Franklin, "Louis Cyr's Last Match," 37.
35. Jowett, *The Strongest Man that Ever Lived*, 25-27.
36. Ibid., 29.
37. Ibid., 30-31.
38. Desbonnet, *Kings of Strength*, 158. When Desbonnet was writing he had a museum in Lille, France where the broken coin was on display.
39. Gordon Venables, *Mighty Men of Old: Being a Gallery of Pictures and Biographies of Outstanding Old Time Strong Men* (York: *Strength and Health*, 1940), 22.
40. It is interesting to note that Cyclops did not use this feat with Sandow in 1889 either. "Strength through the Ages: 'Cyclops' Bienkowski Breaking a Coin," March 1962, in the David Willoughby files in the Todd-McLean Collection, UT-Austin.
41. Sampson, *Strength*, 52. Marjorie Farnsworth, *The Ziegfeld Follies: A History in Text and Pictures* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1956), 14.
42. Jowett, *The Strongest Man that Ever Lived*, 25. Unidentified clipping in the David Willoughby files in the Todd-McLean Collection, University of Texas, Austin. Weider, *The Strongest Man in History*, Louis Cyr "Amazing Canadian," 72.
43. W. A. Pullum, "Louis Cyr, The Strength Colossus: From Siegmund Klein's Scrapbook." [n.d.], clipping in the David Willoughby, Todd-McLean Collection, UT-Austin.
44. Gilbert, *American Vaudeville*, 83.
45. Many history books cite 20 December 1891 as the date that Cyr performed this feat at Sohmer Park; however, David Norwood, through careful research, has proven that Cyr was already in Europe by this time and therefore the date is incorrect. David Norwood, "The Sport Hero Concept and Louis Cyr" (MA Thesis, University of Windsor, Ontario, 1984). 78-80.
46. Hy Steirman, "Mighty Butterball," *True: The Man's Magazine*, May 1955, 78.
47. Jowett, *The Strongest Man that Ever Lived*, 41.
48. Seymour A. Davidson, "Strong Man Tricks Which You Can Do," *Science and Invention*, (April 1931), 1083.
49. Ibid.
50. Super Strength Systems. *Feats of Strength: A Step-by-Step Illustrated Guide in the Practice and Performance of Authentic Feats of Strength* (NY: Super Strength Publishing, 1979). 17.
51. *Lewiston Evening Journal* (Lewiston, Maine), 3 March 1891.
52. Ferguson, *Who's Who in Canadian Sport*, 62.
53. *Boston Post*, 19 May 1895. *Boston Globe*, 27 September 1896.
54. Trent Frayne and Peter Gzowski. *Great Canadian Sports Stories: A Century of Competition* (Toronto: The Canadian Centennial Publishing Company, Limited, 1965), 106.
55. On 17 September 1898, Patrick J. McCarthy supposedly crushed Cyr's record by lifting on his back 6,370 pounds. Although Cyr's record pales in comparison to this astronomical figure, this record is discounted by David Willoughby, David Webster, and other serious historians of strength. Cyr's record was not broken officially until the 1990s when Greg Ernst of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia exceeded 5000 pounds on several occasions. See: Terry Todd, "Gregg Ernst, Bringing Back the Backlift," *Iron Game History*, 3(September 1993): 1-3 and Edwin A. Goewey, "How Good Were the Old-Time Strong Men?" *Muscle Builder*, March 1926, 44.
56. Wilfrid Diamond, "Thomas Inch and the Strong Men He Knew," *Muscle Power*, September 1947, 14.
57. Frayne and Gzowski, *Great Canadian Sports Stories*, 108.
58. David P. Willoughby, "Louis Cyr: 'The Daddy of 'em All'," *Ironman*, January 1961, 30.
59. *Lewiston Evening Journal* (Lewiston, Maine), 3 March 1891.
60. Norwood, "Sport Hero Concept and Louis Cyr," 40.
61. Diamond, "Thomas Inch and the Strong Men He Knew," 15.
62. Sampson, *Strength*, 76.
63. Ibid., 79, 84.
64. For a detailed illustration how this lift can easily be used by a con artist to dupe the public see Goewey. "How 'Feats of Strength' are Faked."
65. Miscellaneous clipping in the Ottley Coulter files of the Todd-McLean Collection, University of Texas: Austin. See also: W. A. Pullum, "Strong Men Over the Years," in *The Amazing Samson as Told by Himself* by Alexander Zass, with a Foreword by W. A. Pullum (London: The Samson Institute, 1926), 30.
66. Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horseshoes, and Cannons*. 1:167.
67. Goewey, "How 'Feats of Strength' are Faked," 43.
68. Hackenschmidt, "Charles Sampson: King of Showmen and Knave of Strongmen," 68.
69. Sampson, *Strength*, 44.
70. Gilbert, *American Vaudeville*, 22.
71. Sampson, *Strength*, 44.
72. *Boston Globe*, 28 May 1895.
73. Pierre seems to have anglicized his name to Peter. Cyr seems to have changed his daughter's name as well: from Emiliana to Miliano.
74. John Robinson advertisement in the Prints and Photographs collection at the Library of Congress, cat. no. LC-USZ61-1285. John Robinson Circus Herald, 1898 at the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, WI.
75. John Robinson Show Payroll Record, *Workmen's Time Book*, Season 1898, no. 1, at the Circus World Museum. Baraboo, WI.
76. John Robinson advertisement in the Prints and Photographs collection at the Library of Congress, cat. no. LC-USZ62-24601.
77. Goewey. "How 'Feats of Strength' are Faked," 41.
78. For more information on early photography see Gus Macdonald, *Camera: Victorian Eyewitness* (New York: Viking, 1979).
79. Hackenschmidt, "Charles Sampson: King of Showmen and Knave of Strongmen," 67.



IRONCLAD

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Regarding Guinness

The second word of the *Guinness Book of World Records*, is "book," not "Bible," though some have presumed infallibility from *Guinness*. But in the 1999 version of the book, for instance, several mistakes appear regarding bodybuilding history.

After correctly ascribing eight Mr. Olympia wins to Lee Haney from 1984 to 1991, we are told that Dorian Yates won five Mr. O titles from 1992 to 1997. That time span was won by Yates, but it encompasses six years, not five. We are then told that Yates' consecutive streak is the longer. When did six begin surpassing eight? A similar situation is given with the Ms. Olympia. *Guinness* correctly notes that Cory Everson won a record six times from 1984 to 1989, but then maintains that Lenda Murray broke the longest streak record with five wins from 1990-1994. Actually Lenda won also in 1995, so her six wins match Cory's. We are also informed that Ben Weider began the IFBB in the 1960s when actually it began in 1946. So, for those of you who think that *Guinness* is goofless . . . Think again.

How Old is *Health & Strength*?

In November 1997 Robert Kennedy presented us with his new magazine: *Oxygen*. No question about when it began. But let's surge ahead one hundred years, and assume that no copies of that first issue exist. The only copies available at that time are those from volume two, and the powers that be at *Oxygen* are insisting that the first issue was published November 1987, ten years earlier than fact.

Is this what happened with *Health & Strength*, the venerable 'Old Mag' of British muscledom? The earliest issue in my collection is March 1900 Vol. 2:1; by March 1903 it was Vol. 6:3, and by March 1906, Vol. 12:3. *H&S* reported in the August 2, 1941 issue on page 24 that enemy action (WWII) had destroyed almost all their stock. This makes the trace on the Old Mag's age more difficult. The paper shortage in Britain during the war, which prohibited the printing of extra copies and required a recycling of the issues already printed, made copies for collectors and researchers difficult to acquire, therefore to study.

The August 28, 1947 issue, page 665, declares *H&S* is in its 55th year of publication! Assuming this means continuous years, a birth year of 1892 can be calculated. But this date follows the clear statement in the June 5, 1947 issue, page 401, saying plainly that *H&S* began in 1899. By June 11, 1953 page 5, the continuous publishing is asserted to be "for over 55 years" [1898?], and a decade later, January 10, 1963, page 4, 65 years [1898?] is claimed.

Anyone having seen, or owning a copy of the first issue of the Old Mag is welcome to help solve this Old Mystery which would be a breath of fresh oxygen.

Anderson's Backlift

On page 40 of the September 1996 issue of *The Iron Master*, Osmo Kiiha attributes to Joe Roark a statement Roark never made regarding Paul Anderson's June 12, 1957 backlift claim of 6,270 pounds. Osmo wrote: "Joe Roark, IFBB historian, states that there is no printed mention of Anderson doing the lift

in the magazines of that time period.”

Roark’s response: “Assuming Osmo means no printed mention in the magazines of that time period of Anderson actually doing the lift, the evidence to the contrary offered by Kiiha changes nothing.” Referring to *Iron Man* magazine, but not quoting it, Osmo wrote: “this lift was mentioned in a magazine of that time period.” The *Iron Man* reference, Vol. 18:4 (Dec 1958/Jan 1959) as Osmo mentions, refers to the backlift claim of 6,200 pounds, not 6,270 pounds. Also not mentioned by Osmo is the wording of that reference: “We hear that Paul has made a 6200 lb. backlift for a new world record.” Notice: this lift was not seen, not documented, but was “heard” about. By the way, *Iron Man* also gets Paul’s age wrong. Osmo adds that this [early mention] proves nothing except “that the lift was already history in the 1950’s.” No, the lift was already rumor, as indeed it remained for another year and a half when in the August 1960 issue of *Iron Man* Peary Rader wrote on page 60: “It is rumored that Paul Anderson has recently succeeded with a backlift of 6,000 lbs.”

Recently? Is June 1957 “recent” to August 1960? And, please note, not 6,270, not 6,200, but 6,000 pounds. How many attempts did Paul make on June 12, 1957, and if not on that date, then on what date, and why report lesser poundages as a new record?

Perhaps the 6,270 pound lift was mentioned in the magazines or elsewhere sometime closer to the June 1957 date. Roark never stated that no such reference exists, only that he has been unable to locate any. Readers are always invited to share such information.

As an aside: for those who think they know about this famous backlift, consider these questions:

1. Paul stated that he performed this lift to get his name in the *Guinness Book of Records*, so what year was the 6,270 pound lift first listed in that book? Were other poundages listed? If so, in which year(s) of publication?
2. Regarding the famed old manganese safe used as the base weight for the backlift: what brand of safe is it; what are the dimensions, what size is its cavity (that is, how much hollow space could Paul “fill in”)? The answers to these questions will amaze you.
3. What was the manufacturer’s listed weight for this safe, without its base (stand)?
4. If the final record attempt was made on June 12, 1957, why does the reported poundage change through the years? Do some homework. And then, if appropriate, criticize those who have already done theirs.



The Sculpture Machine

Reviewed by David Chapman

Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and the Body Politics in the Age of Empire* (NY: New York University Press, 1997), 218 pp. ISBN O-8147-1267-3.

Early steam engine inventor, James Watt, spent his waning years working on a delightfully improbable invention: he attempted to develop a mechanical device for copying the naked human physique. It was supposed to revolutionize the art of sculpture and make records of the body easy and accurate, but the inventor never completed his work. It mattered little, however, since Watt's contraption would have been made redundant by the quickly emerging technology of photography. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the Victorian fascination with the body and of the equivocal relationship that often attends art, life, and sexuality.

According to author Michael Budd, this joining of science and physique is a perfect metaphor for what he terms "body politics," and his book, *The Sculpture Machine*, demonstrates the changing role of the physical body in Regency and Victorian culture. Budd points out that as machines began to define physical worth, humans were bound to come up wanting. It took some time for other yardsticks to be found, but health, strength, and beauty eventually won out over brute mechanical force and soulless efficiency.

Budd also attempts to draw a parallel between political and social events in nineteenth-century Britain and the rapidly forming recreation of physical culture. The author tries to show that physical power and political power began to be joined at this time through

a variety of means, but most importantly by the advent of Victoria's little imperialistic wars or rather by the production of soldiers who were fit to fight them. Music hall strongman, Eugen Sandow, came into this mix at the height of Victorian expansionism, and he came to symbolize the new man who would go out and conquer the lesser breeds beyond the law. It is the route that Sandow and others took on this quest that makes *The Sculpture Machine* so interesting.

Physical culture was linked in several ways to many of the progressive and reformist philosophies of the day, and Budd makes a good case for demonstrating the linkage between Sandow and such advanced thinkers as George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, and the Darwinians. Against this background, there was another force working in Victorian society, and that was the emerging gay culture of the day. Oscar Wilde had been tried and convicted in disgrace in 1895, and ever after he came to represent "the other" against which "real men" could judge themselves. Budd points out, however, that Wilde and Sandow had much more in common than either man might want to admit. Both were media-made men who had learned early in their respective careers how to manipulate public attention to their own causes. In addition, the photos that were so important to physique athletes also became significant to the emerging homosexual subculture since pictures of muscular men posed in nothing but a fig leaf helped condition the public to male nudity and alternate sexuality.

While Britain was dealing with its inner demons, it was also expanding at an unprecedented rate when it came to territorial acquisition. Budd shows quite convincingly how physical culture was used as a tool by the English to steel themselves for combat and to mark their physical differences from the racial "others" just as they had used it to delineate themselves in terms of masculinity. Budd shows how Sandow's tours of the Empire helped press an unacknowledged imperialist agenda. Physical culture in general was used to reinforce the White Man's perceived superiority, but Sandow also gained adherents among the natives of India and the Far East who showed their English colleagues that physical perfection was not the sole domain of the Caucasian race.

Sandow's popularity in the colonies clearly demonstrated that the gospel of fitness was (among other things) cross-cultural in its appeal.

The era of physical culture as opposed to bodybuilding ended, like so many other institutions, in the carnage of World War I. The myth of endurance and physical perfection was exploded when the fit and muscular men were mowed down by modern weapons of mass destruction with the same sickening ease as the weak and frail. Fitness was no longer a shield against death. The postwar world was a vastly different place, and Sandow's grip on the fitness world was surrendered to other more aggressive businessmen. To make matters worse, large segments of the potential audience for exercise publications and gymnasium memberships were either no longer interested in growing muscles or dead. Physical culture and Imperialism both received mortal wounds in Flanders' fields.

Despite the sweep and scope of Budd's story and his skill at getting his points across, there are a few things I have trouble with. I was annoyed by the surprising number of nagging little errors: Sandow's real name was Friedrich Muller, not Ernst; the strongman's mentor was Louis Attila, not Osgood. Sandow never endorsed or advertised Bovril or Spalding products; nor did he wear bronze makeup or pose for *cartes-de-visite* photos (they were cabinet photos). These are all minor errors, but they denote an uncharacteristic reliance on inaccurate source materials in an otherwise well researched book.

Then there are the endnotes, around a hundred of them for each chapter. I found them very interesting, but excessively long and involved. I wish Budd had chosen to incorporate most or all of these into the text itself; it would have made reading his book a great deal easier. Still, the problems are minor and the payoffs are great for anyone reading this book.

Michael Budd's look at the early fitness industry is a masterful work that puts Sandow and others like him in the context of their social, sexual, and imperial milieu. This book is essential to a thorough understanding of the era and it is one of the first to demonstrate that as they were reshaping the map, the British were also reshaping themselves.



Dear IGH:

Hope that this letter reaches you both in the very best of health. With everything else that you guys are doing, you still find the time to put out a really great journal. I see that after the Vol. 5#2 copy, I'm due to renew. Enclosed is my payment to continue the Fellowship Subscription.

I would like to mention a few words about Steve Neece, who wrote an article in your May '98 issue. When I had my gym in Manhattan, Steve came in many times over the years. I enjoyed many hours of conversation with him. We had many friends in common. Especially in the wrestling world. Steve himself was a very impressive looking strongman. The photo of him in your issue doesn't do him justice; his outstanding feature was his tremendous width of shoulders, enormous. In all of his talking with me, I found his information to be truthful and himself to be an honorable individual.

As for myself, the last several months have been hectic . . . had to go to New York as my Mother-in-law passed away. Then I elected to have my gall bladder removed. My lower back is shot. As a matter of fact, Kimon Voyages told me in the late fifties that I would be having problems in years to come with the lower back. God bless him he was right. My best friends, Kimon, Ed Jubinville, and Gene Dubuque have left us, however I'm blessed with the close friendship of Vic Boff. He is the most moral and understanding person that I have ever known.

My (first) novel, *The Man from Verona*, has been in the hands of a literary agent for the last two months. I'm starting to re-write *Manhattan Oasis*; it's a problem for me to continue with a narrative. There are so many stories to tell (after almost thirty years on 42nd Street you could understand).

Tom Minichiello
Ft. Meyers, FL

Readers will recall the two fine articles we ran which were taken from Tom's as yet unpublished autobiography, Oasis in Manhattan.

Somehow, we never printed Ken Rosa's report of the 1997 Heidenstam Trust Awards Banquet. We greatly appreciate Ken's willingness to cover both the Heidenstam and the Oldetime Barbell and Strongman Association Dinners in New York City. Watch for the OBSA story in our next issue.

1997 Heidenstam Trust Awards Banquet

I've come to eagerly look forward to my yearly Virgin Atlantic trips to England for the annual Oscar Heidenstam Hall of Fame awards. After a great flight I proceeded to the Heathrow Marriott where the event is always held. At dinnertime, I walked into the line restaurant prepared to devour all the food in sight and to see who else was there. I heard a cheery hello and there were Mr. and Mrs. Reg Ireland. Food was briefly forgotten as we chatted. Marvin Eder soon became the subject of conversation as we all wondered whether or not he would be there this year.

During the early 1950's, Marvin's muscular physique graced the covers and pages of the muscle magazines and his incredible strength had become legendary throughout the world of weights by the time he was 20 years of age. I was fortunate to have been training in the Abe Goldberg gym on Clinton Street in New York City during the time that Marvin also trained there. I actually saw him do a standing Olympic style press with 355 pounds, bench press around 500 pounds, do parallel bar dips for repetitions with 400 pounds of additional weight, and do repetition warm-ups with 120 pound dumbbells only because those were the heaviest dumbbells in the gym. All that at a bodyweight of 190 pounds. While I was talking, I failed to notice that someone had silently walked up and stood next to me. Reg noticed. I turned and, as if by magic, there was Marvin Eder. I was overjoyed to see him and, of course, I made the necessary introductions. Soon we were reminiscing about Goldberg's Gym. During those golden years Goldberg's was always replete with bodybuilders and weightlifters either working out or just there to visit. People like Leroy Colbert, Artie Zeller, Domenic Juliano, the Yogi, John Rutko, Enrico Tomas, Ray Jimenez, Lou Degni, and myself. Now here we were in 1997, in England, and Marvin Eder's relaxed, vigorously youthful enthusiasm indicated that he had marvelously become the twenty-year-old super strong *wunderkind* again. We listened in open-mouthed awe as Marvin revealed that he had envisioned himself eventually achieving a standing press with 500 pounds! I have

seen Marvin's incredibly massive bone structure, therefore, I had no doubt that it indeed would have been possible for that strongest of all bodybuilders if he had not decided to retire at age 22 after his career was destroyed by the same participants in the Hoffman/Weider feud who had cruelly ruined the careers of so many other young bodybuilders of the era. Myself among them. It's sobering to consider the fact that we never did have an opportunity to see Marvin Eder reach his peak. We can only speculate about what fantastic lifts he might have accomplished. All of this was part of our conversation that evening. Suddenly, Marvin asked me to tense my upper arm in a curl position which I did somewhat hesitantly. Marvin had an expression of benevolence on his face as he said "not bad." Now, "feel this," he said as he tensed his own upper arm. If anyone wondered if Marvin Eder was in shape, don't wonder any more. The arm was massive and felt like unyielding steel. Reluctantly, we all eventually parted company and looked forward to the actual main event next evening.

March 22, 1997. The sixth annual Oscar Heidenstam Memorial dinner and Hall of Fame Awards proved to be particularly inspiring in an unexpected but very welcome way. The Oscar Heidenstam Foundation was launched to perpetuate the memory of Heidenstam who dedicated his life to others, be they able-bodied or disabled, to guide his fellow human beings toward self improvement. Several different types of awards are given at the Heidenstam banquet. Mark Anson of Orpington in Kent received a special award for overcoming a number of physical disabilities and returning to competitive form. Norman Gough, who has devoted over forty years to teaching and helping young people in the sport of gymnastics, was honored for his work in that area. The two main honorees, however were British bodybuilder John Lees and American great, Larry Scott.

Ian MacQueen made the presentation to Lees, who won the Mr. Universe in 1957 before going on to a career in pro wrestling. Next up, was the evening's main event, the award to Larry Scott, the first Mr. Olympia. Malcolm Whyatt did the introduction: "Today we are here to honor Larry Scott, one of bodybuilding's greatest and most popular stars. Larry is a gentleman and is admired throughout the world as an outstanding example of physical culture. Larry was born in 1938 and raised in Pocatello, Idaho. He was raised in the Mormon faith and taught the values of family life. His introduction to physical culture was

via gymnastics and tumbling. By the age of fifteen, inspired by the physique of Steve Reeves, he had graduated to weight training. In 1958, he moved to California to train at Bert Goodrich's gym. A year later, he returned to Idaho to win the Mr. Idaho title. He returned to California under the guidance of Vince Gironda. He made rapid improvement, which is illustrated in his use of 80 pound dumbbells and a 140-pound barbell for repetition curls on the Preacher Bench and repetitions in lying triceps presses with 250 pounds. In 1960 he won the Mr. California and Mr. Pacific Coast titles. In 1962 Larry became the IFBB Mr. America and in 1964 he won the IFBB Mr. Universe title. In 1965 Larry became the first Mr. Olympia by beating Harold Poole. In 1966 he successfully defended his Mr. Olympia title against such greats as Sergio Olivia, Harold Poole and Chuck Sipes. After he won the title for the second time, Larry announced his retirement from competitive bodybuilding. Logical as ever, he reasoned that it was better to leave while at the pinnacle of his career and to devote more of his time to family and business. During the late 1970s Larry reappeared in bodybuilding circles carrying out exhibitions and guest spot appearances. He appeared at the World Cup in 1977 and was guest poser at the Mr. Atlantic Coast USA contest.

"Although his last Olympia title was won over thirty years ago, Larry still retains the magic of those early years and he remains one of the most popular, admired and respected international bodybuilding personalities. We are delighted that Larry and his beautiful wife, Rachel, were able to join us on this occasion to celebrate his great achievements in the bodybuilding field."

Enthusiastic applause greeted Larry Scott as he rose and took the microphone. "Thank you so much. I'd like to tell you a story. I had only been training for maybe a year and I weighed maybe 150 when my training partner and I heard that Steve Reeves and George Eiferman were coming to Salt Lake City. Going to Salt Lake City was a big step for us. We were just kids. So we drove there and we got to speak with Bob Delmontique. Bob said to us 'would you like to meet Steve and George?' We could only stammer, 'Yeah, yeah,' and try to hide the fact that we were so nervous we could have passed out. Well, Bob took us over and the first thing I said was 'How do you get big?' And so, years after that, to be standing on the same stage with George Eiferman—he had just won the Mr. Universe and I had just won the Mr. America—

was just amazing.

"I remember another time. I had won Mr. California, Mr. America and Mr. Universe and I was training in a Vic Tanny gym in Los Angeles. It was in the middle of the day, nobody else working out, and this guy comes over to me and says, 'Hey ah, you got a pretty good build. You ever think of competing?' I was in the process of doing a set of cable rows and I was putting everything into it so I just grunted, 'yeah.'" The audience is giggling. Larry continued, "So the guy asks me 'Did you ever compete?' I'm still doing my set so I grunt again, 'Yeah.' He says, 'In what?' I grunt 'Mr. California, Mr. America, Mr. Universe.'" All the while Larry is simulating the moves of the cable rowing motion as he tells the story. "The guy says 'how'd you do?' So I put everything into the last rep and grunted, 'I won 'em all.'" The audience roared.

Probably very few of us were aware of what Larry was to now tell us. He became suddenly misty eyed and seemed to choke up a bit as he said, "It was in the early nineties that I lost two sons." I think we were all stunned. We could feel great empathy as Larry related his obviously painful story. His sorrow and his spiritual strength I think left a lasting impression on all present. Larry's twenty-three year old son, Derek, was killed in an accident one morning while riding his motorcycle to school. Larry's son Michael, who was two years younger than Derek, was totally grief stricken about losing a brother he adored and took his own life with a pistol while lying on Derek's grave. Larry spoke about the lessons tragedy and grief can teach us. "I have learned how kind God is. There are two basic things we need to learn. We need to learn how to weep and we need to learn how to give. If we learn those two things it's my belief that God will bless us all. Thank you very much."

Every Oscar Heidenstam Awards dinner is special but Larry Scott was truly extraordinary. Of course, as usual, after all awards and prizes were presented, we gravitated to the grand piano where I played requests and Mac Gatley played harmonica. And for those who didn't know, Dave Webster has a great voice. By the way, Ian MacQueen's flexed upper arm is also like steel and I can't believe he's really the age he told me-seventy-six. It appears as though true lifetime physical culturists may have found the fountain of youth.

Ken "Leo" Rosa
Bronx, NY



Dear IGH:

It certainly was good to see you at the get together in New York last fall. I brought my eleven-year-old son, Johnathan, in an attempt to educate the next generation about the roots of the sport. He met Chuck Sipes six years ago when Chuck was living nearby, so some seeds were planted then which the annual get together really sprouted. He was absolutely fascinated by the show, and now trains every morning before school and is already asking me about next fall's show. It is so rewarding to see him smitten by the same iron bug that bit me!

I have a question for your consideration concerning weight and strength training for the older generation. It stems from the two very basic facts that I learned about training, *not* from the magazines or courses but only after training for an extended period with Chuck. They were that the real keys to progress in strength and growth were 1) *regularity* and *consistency* in training: real, productive success did not arise from irregular bursts, but only ongoing vigilance in the gym in terms of years and decades and not the weeks and months that the ads claim and 2) *intensity*: you had to train hard and continuously push for progress; more weight, more reps etc. Truly comprehending intensity only came from watching Chuck work the bench press and then do burns at the end of each set to fully appreciate what intensity was all about. It was sage advice for me 27 years ago but I'm not so sure it is good for me today.

For a variety of reasons. I was out of the weight room for many years and now I want to get back into it but it's not going well. If I attempt to train hard, I am constantly suffering setbacks of injuries, which take *forever* to heal and I am really susceptible to colds and the flu following a hard workout. I wonder how much research has been done on this issue. Specifically, I remember reading in an old *Strength & Health* about a champion who had quit training for many years and then attempted a comeback and had a heart attack. I wonder how much more blockage he had in his arteries at his older age than he did when he was younger? Also, I heard that when you lift heavy weights such as a partial squat on the power rack, your blood pressure goes through the roof. Is that in fact

true? The point of this is that when I go into the gym today, I typically leave feeling somewhat discouraged because I didn't really push like I used to or like I would like to do today. The weights are way, way below my previous best and when I do use lighter weights and then do more sets and reps to compensate, I typically get sick. It is as if my resistance goes right down the drain with any semblance of intensity. Am I just a wimp here or is this typical for someone in his fifties?

Tufts University has been doing a lot of research on weight training for senior citizens but I always sense that they are using extremely light weights compared to what I am talking about here. I spoke with Bill Pearl about ten years ago on this issue and he said he was still using heavy poundages in his fifties but I doubt if he had ever taken an extended layoff. His body has constantly been accustomed to the intensity. Likewise with Chuck; he trained hard and had discussed making a comeback for his fiftieth birthday before encountering all his personal problems. My point is that a select group apparently can continue to train *hard* throughout their life without suffering setbacks. What about the rest of us? I maintain close contact with my three gym mates from college and they all express the same lament: hard training results in too many injuries that take forever to heal. Are we destined to the aerobic machines for our hearts and a circuit on the Nautilus machines or is there any way to recapture the thrill of maxing out ten reps in a heavy squat?

As always, I realize how busy both your schedules are, so if you can squeeze in a reply, I would be grateful. Keep up the GREAT work.

Norm Komich
Beverly, MA

The question about how "heavy" to train as middle age comes and old age follows is as old as the Game itself. Many people have answered the question in many ways, and the only truth we see is that there is no single truth for everyone. Each time you go to the gym it's a bit like Russian Roulette in that by exerting yourself particularly with weights that are heavy for you, you expose yourself to injury. On the other hand, by not exerting yourself you expose yourself to a loss of strength and muscle mass—a loss of what can only be called youthfulness. It seems to us that being able to really push hard, day after day,

against your (obviously declining) limits in the gym as the years pass is largely a matter of genetics and luck. But beyond being able to push so hard there is the question of wanting to push so hard. Some aging iron gamers love to train, or at least enjoy training, but the hunger that drove them to record poundages in their youth has fled with their thick hair and wrinkle-free skin. The secret, if there is one, is to face squarely the realities of aging and then, without being excessively bullheaded, to find a way to train—a routine—you can follow over the long haul. Perhaps you are one of those people who want to and can fight your way forward as a master's lifter or bodybuilder, or perhaps you are one who is satisfied to train as Sig Klein did in his later years—with consistency but without maximum exertion. But train you must. As for the matter of training and blood pressure, it is true that the highest blood pressures ever recorded were taken from powerlifters in the midst of a limit squat or deadlift. It does not follow, however, that such temporarily elevated blood pressures lead to an increase of the lifters' resting blood pressures.



Dear IGH:

As you may know, *Health & Strength* ceased publication in 1997. I am pleased to inform you that it will be re-launched in January 1999 as a quarterly magazine. I would be very grateful if you could pass on the information about the re-launch to your readers. Please ask them to write me at: R.E. Edwards, *Health & Strength*, Austwick-N. Yorks—Via Lancaster, LA2 8BH, England. My e-mail is: roys-