



IRON GAME HISTORY



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A Surprise Gift at the 2005 Arnold Strongman Classic

Last March, on the night before the annual Arnold Strongman Classic, Jan and I had assembled the ten Strongmen, the alternates, the coaches, the officials, the judges, and the television personnel for a meeting with Jim Lorimer, who has directed the Arnold Classic for the past thirty years. We bring everyone together each year so that Jim can explain the many activities that take place over the three-day Sports Festival. This is no easy task as the Classic is so vast and multi-faceted that it is almost beyond description. Even so, Jim does his best to convey what activities will be available over the weekend and to officially welcome the competitors. During the meeting, we also cover matters such as meals, transportation, and medical support, and then Jim usually tells everyone to go downstairs to board the buses which will take everyone to the venues for a look at the implements they will face in the competition over the next two days.

This time, however, just before Jim got to the part about buses, he called David Webster to the front for an "announcement." David has been our chief of officials every year we have had a strength competition at the Classic, so he was well-known to everyone in the room. David said very little, except to



Resistance training illustration from Mercurialis' 1573 edition of *De Arte Gymnastics*.
invite Bill Kazmaier to come to the front for a presentation. At this point neither

Jan nor I knew what was afoot, but as Bill—who, along with David himself, has helped me design the Strongman events—began to thank us for the work we'd done in creating the Arnold Strongman Classic we began to suspect that we were going to be given some sort of plaque or certificate on behalf of Jim and Arnold and perhaps David and Bill, too. But then Bill went on to say that although Jan and I had a very large collection about physical culture we didn't have every book in the world. At that point I began to realize that we might be given something for our collection.

Bill then handed me a small bag, which contained a tin box. And as I opened the box, with Jan at my side and the room as quiet as a church, I saw to my immense surprise that it was the 1573 edition of *De Arte Gymnastica*, Hieronymus Mercurialis' sixteenth-century treatise that was the foundation of much of the physical culture writings which followed. When I realized what it was, I knew that the man behind the remarkable gift had to be our great good friend, David Webster. As we kept looking at this almost unimaginable treasure and shaking our heads in disbelief, David admitted what he had done and the room filled with applause. Jan and I were so overcome by this totally unexpected gift that, for once, I was speechless.

As we embraced David and each

other we learned that the book had come from his own extraordinary collection, and that he had simply decided to pass it on to us. He explained that he had had it for many years and that he hoped we would enjoy it as he had done. We left immediately afterward to board the buses, but all Jan and I could think of the rest of the evening was Mercurialis' wonderfully illustrated book. We spoke often of the book with David over the weekend that followed, and we spoke in even greater detail during the week after the contest, when David came down to Texas with us to spend a few days recovering, looking at our collection, and taking long walks at our ranch.

We went to the university, of course, and met

with several people of interest to David, and we told them all about his gift. One of these people apparently called the university's public relations division, and soon a writer called for an appointment for an interview with David. This was done, and what follows on Page Three are excerpts from the article that was widely published throughout Texas in local newspapers. A version of it was also published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a publication which is seen by most university people in the U.S. This exposure led to several other, related articles in local and national publications, and the outward spread of David's selfless generosity continues to this day. For one thing, the articles helped to establish that the study of physical culture is a growing academic

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field. The publicity also led to several important contacts with people who had materials that they believed should be part of the collection.

Over the years we've been given many wonderful collections and many splendid individual gifts, but we've been personally touched this deeply only once before—when Al Leroux, who was dying of Lou Gehrig's Disease, came to the annual meeting of the Oldtime Barbell and Strongman Association in New York City from Rhode Island in an ambulance three days before he died so he could attend the dinner one more time and personally whisper to us that he wanted his beloved collection to join our own. The unique thing about David's gift is that David, himself, is a very active collector and *De Arte Gymnastica* was one of the crown jewels of his own collection.

In the spirit of David's gift we intend to have this rare volume translated into English so that it can be fully accessible via the internet to scholars and fans of the Iron Game. Those of us who have already lived most of our lives realize that we're part of a centuries-old, unbroken strand of enthusiasts who have received physical strength and psychological satisfaction from the practice and contemplation of progressive resistance exercise. To me, it's comforting to know that four and a half centuries ago—when Mercurialis was thinking about and then writing his masterwork—he was probably comforted by the fact that twenty centuries before his own day there were men and women who thought about physical culture, practiced physical culture, and wrote about it. The mulling of such matters makes some people feel insignificant. I'd argue that being able to play a small role in the large history of the Game should make us all feel very significant indeed.

Fitness Collection Receives Oldest Known Book On Physical Culture and Sports Medicine by Kay Randall

The oldest book on sports medicine, massage and physical culture, written in 1569, has been donated to The University of Texas at Austin's Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, the largest and most comprehensive collection in this field in the world. An illustrated first edition of *De Me Gymnastics*, by Italian physician Hieronymus Mercurialis, was given to the university by David P. Webster, O.B.E., a Scottish writer, sports promoter, world record-holding athlete, collector, Olympic Games official, and the leading historian on Scotland's Highland Games.

"Mercurialis' book was extremely influential when it was

written, and almost all books on gymnastics—which in Mercurialis' day meant exercise—that followed are based on this standard work," said Dr. Terry Todd, co-director of the Todd-McLean Collection, which is part of the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education. "Mercurialis was the first Renaissance writer to address the connection between sport and health, and he was one of the first medical professionals to assert that exercise could be beneficial or harmful depending on its duration and intensity."

Drawing upon the writings of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Galen and Seneca, Mercurialis synthesized their views on exercise into a cohesive volume that also included his own recommendations. His numerous books were among the first to extol the benefits of living a "sober" life and attaining robust health through exercise.

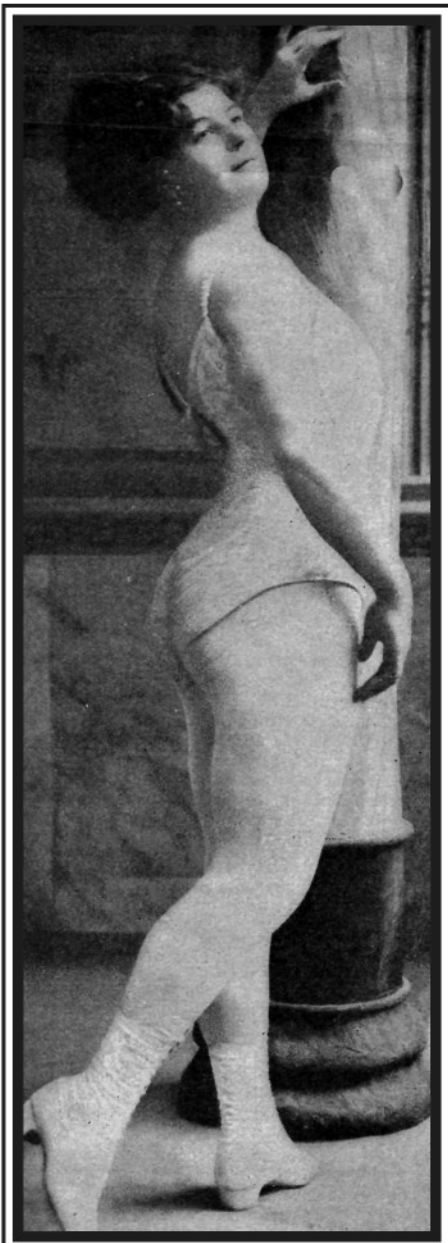
"Mercurialis approached exercise and sport from three different standpoints," says Webster. "He proclaimed that sport in preparation 'for the arts of war' was valid and that sport for the good of the body and for health and fitness was a legitimate aim but that sport done purely for entertainment was not a valid goal." In addition to informing the work of future physicians and scholars on sport and exercise, Mercurialis was also widely cited as an expert on everything from breast feeding... to diet and diabetes.

"Because of the obvious value to researchers that this remarkable book on exercise and sport holds," says Dr. Jan Todd, co-director of the Todd-McLean Collection and associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education, "we are making arrangements for it to be fully translated and digitized. One of the things we feel strongly about is sharing treasures such as this with other scholars—it's meant to inspire and inform, not to be hidden away."

"I have immeasurable respect and admiration for the Todds and the work they're doing here," says Webster. "I've known Terry for over forty years and Jan for over thirty, and we've worked together in competitions around the world, including at the recent Arnold Classic here in the U.S. It's given me immense pleasure to contribute to their world famous collection."

Webster's interest in athletics has led him to organize and promote Highland Games on every continent, serve as Scotland's top administrator for sport and recreation, judge at the Olympic Games, and be chosen as chief UK official at the Commonwealth Games. In addition, Webster has assembled over more than fifty years one of the greatest private collections in the world in the field of strength sports and exercise. He is also a prolific writer, having published almost forty books and hundreds of articles over the past half century.

Webster, who received the prestigious Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) award, given by the British monarchy, in 1994, also held the world record for strand-pulling, an event which involves the stretching of heavy, spring-like cables. Now in his mid-70s, Webster still competes occasionally in Master's weightlifting competitions and maintains a high degree of fitness. He has also participated in and scripted hundreds of television and radio programs around the world, and he provided most of the leading athletes in Ridley Scott's film *Gladiator*.



Kati Sandwina: "HERCULES CAN BE A LADY"

John D. Fair, Ph.D.
Georgia College and University

Few women of strength have attained the fame of Catherine (Kati) Brumbach Heymann. Known to the public as "Sandwina," a distaff derivative of "Sandow," Jan Todd describes her as one of the "super-stars" of professional strongwomen in an essay entitled "Bring on the

Amazons." Kati was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1884, one of the sixteen children of Phillipe and Johanna Brumbach, and began performing in the family-run circus at age two. As a teenager she was taking on all challengers in wrestling, her father offering a handsome prize to anyone who could defeat her. Gracefully proportioned at six feet and a little over two hundred pounds, Kati eventually earned the reputation, as a touring performer, of "Europe's Queen of Strength, Beauty and Dexterity."

Upon coming to the United States in 1909, she joined the prestigious Keith's Orpheum Vaudeville circuit and then became a center ring attraction for Ringling

Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus. For the next three decades, according to Todd, she sometimes earned as much as \$1,500 a week. Her feats of strength were remarkable. An unsigned 1946 article in *Strength & Health*, possibly authored by Ray Van Cleef, credits her with a 264¹/₄ pound continental jerk, a right hand continental jerk of 176 pounds, and a press in excess of 200 pounds on numerous occasions. As a performer she engaged in iron-bending and chain-breaking and, much in the manner of Paul Anderson and other showmen, executed spectacular feats of strength involving human beings on stage. So awesome was this strongwoman that Siegmund Breitbart, who billed himself as "the strongest man in the world" in the 1920s, occasionally cancelled or postponed engagements rather than jeopardize his reputation by appearing in the same city when she was performing.

About 1900 Kati was married to Max Heymann, an acrobat of considerable repute. They often performed together in an act in which Kati would lift Max through the manual of arms positions, with Max being the rifle. Their two sons, Theodore and Alfred, inherited their mother's physical endowments. Theodore (1909-1997) also adopted his mother's stage name and, as Teddy Sandwina, became a professional boxer of note from 1926 to 1932. In later years Kati and Max operated a neighborhood tavern in Ridgewood, New Jersey. She died of cancer on January 21, 1952.

The following article, which was written by Sidney Fields and appeared in the *New York Mirror* on December 15, 1947, is an endearing portrait of their rela-

tionship. With all due allowance for possible error or exaggeration (by interviewer or interviewee), its believability stems from what we already know about Kati's prodigious strength. Most importantly, the article reveals the human side of one of the most important icons of the iron game. For what is often missing in iron game history, amidst a profusion of facts of figures on the greats of the game, not to mention hero worship, is information on the quality of their life experiences. Much as Harry Paschall once entertained and delighted us with his Bosco cartoons, this article (replete with German accents) recaptures a bit of the afterglow of ethnic America during the strongman era.

"Hercules Can Be a Lady" by Sidney Fields, *New York Mirror*

December 15, 1947

Before Kati wrinkled the bar in the picture above, it was six feet long. It's one and a half inches wide and a quarter of an inch thick. Kati's father ran a little circus back in Germany. He was a strong man, too. He had such a big hand you could put a half-dollar through his



Although this yellowed newsprint picture does not reproduce well, Kati's ironbending abilities are readily apparent in this *New York Mirror* photo from 1947.

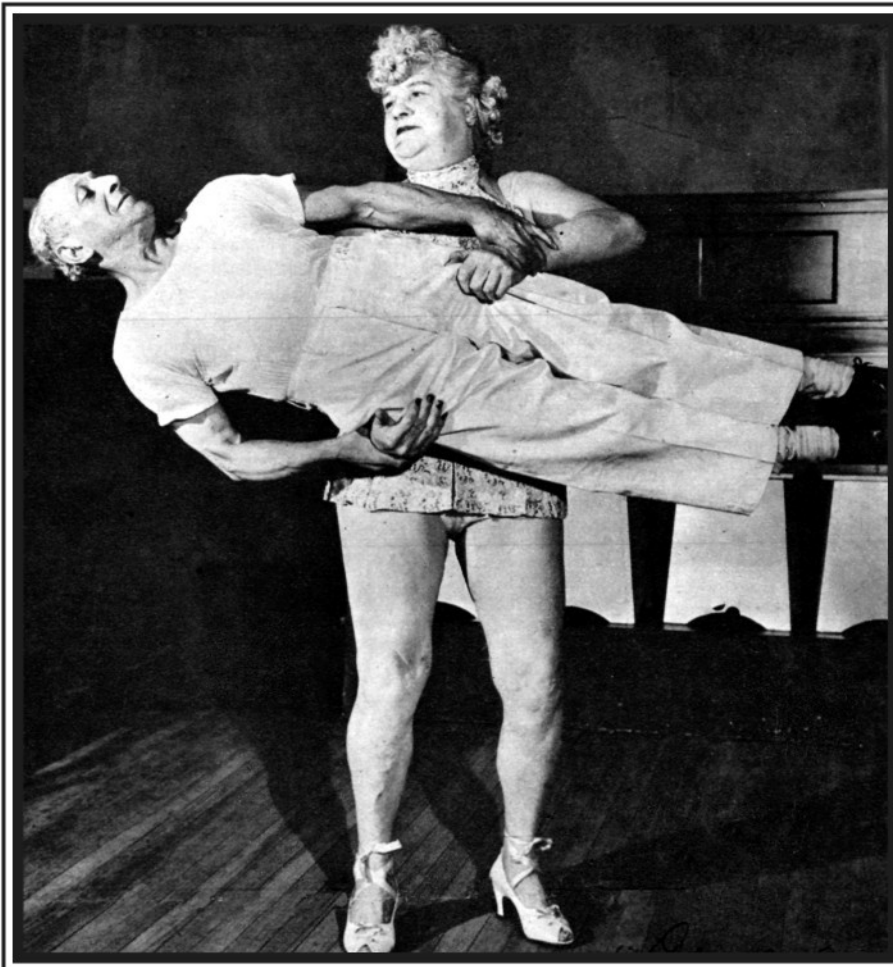


An arrow points the way to Kati's bar in this photograph from *HIT* magazine in 1947. Kati and Max Heymann ran the bar with their two sons, Arthur and Ted, and she prominently advertised the fact that she was the "world's strongest woman."

wedding ring. But Max says Kati is even stronger than her father was . . . "Vy, she's de strongest vooman ever was lifting."

Max was an acrobat out of work 45 years ago when he saw Kati at the circus. Her father had just finished announcing that he'd give 1,000 marks [other accounts say 100 marks] to anyone who could wrestle with Kati and win...

"I show him my



At 64, white-haired Kati Sandwina would occasionally entertain the customers in her Ridgewood tavern by breaking a few iron chains, bending a big iron bar with her hands, or using her husband Max as a human barbell. The New York Mirror listed her as 6'1" at a bodyweight of two hundred pounds. Max Heymann, her husband stood only 5'5".

muscles," Max recalls, "an dey ahksept me und I wrestle mit Kati. She picks me up vuns und trows me on de floor and I say Kati I luv you. Will you marry me?"

"A regular blitzkrieg," Kati smiles proudly. "I say ja und ve get married und run away to Norway. But my vater he tells de police dot Max runs away mit a daughter vot is a minor und we hav to go to da station haus. But Max he vaves de license und ve go home, und vater forgives everyting und alles is hutsy tutsy."

They put together their own act and Kati would lift three men way up with one hand with Max on top. John Ringling saw them in Paris and hired them...

"Ve come to de Yountied Shtates," says Papa, "and Mama is de big attracsun frum de show. Ven de

circus zeusun is over ve are in vaudeville. In Sioux City Teddy our first son ist born. Mama gifs a performance dot same night, den she goes to hav da baby. Teddy Roosevelt vot is a great admirrer frum Mama he iss de god-vater."

They trouped al over the world with their act. In 1911 Kati established the world's record for weight lifting by raising a two-handed 300-pound barbell. That was official. Papa says unofficially she lifts a 312.5-pound barbell.

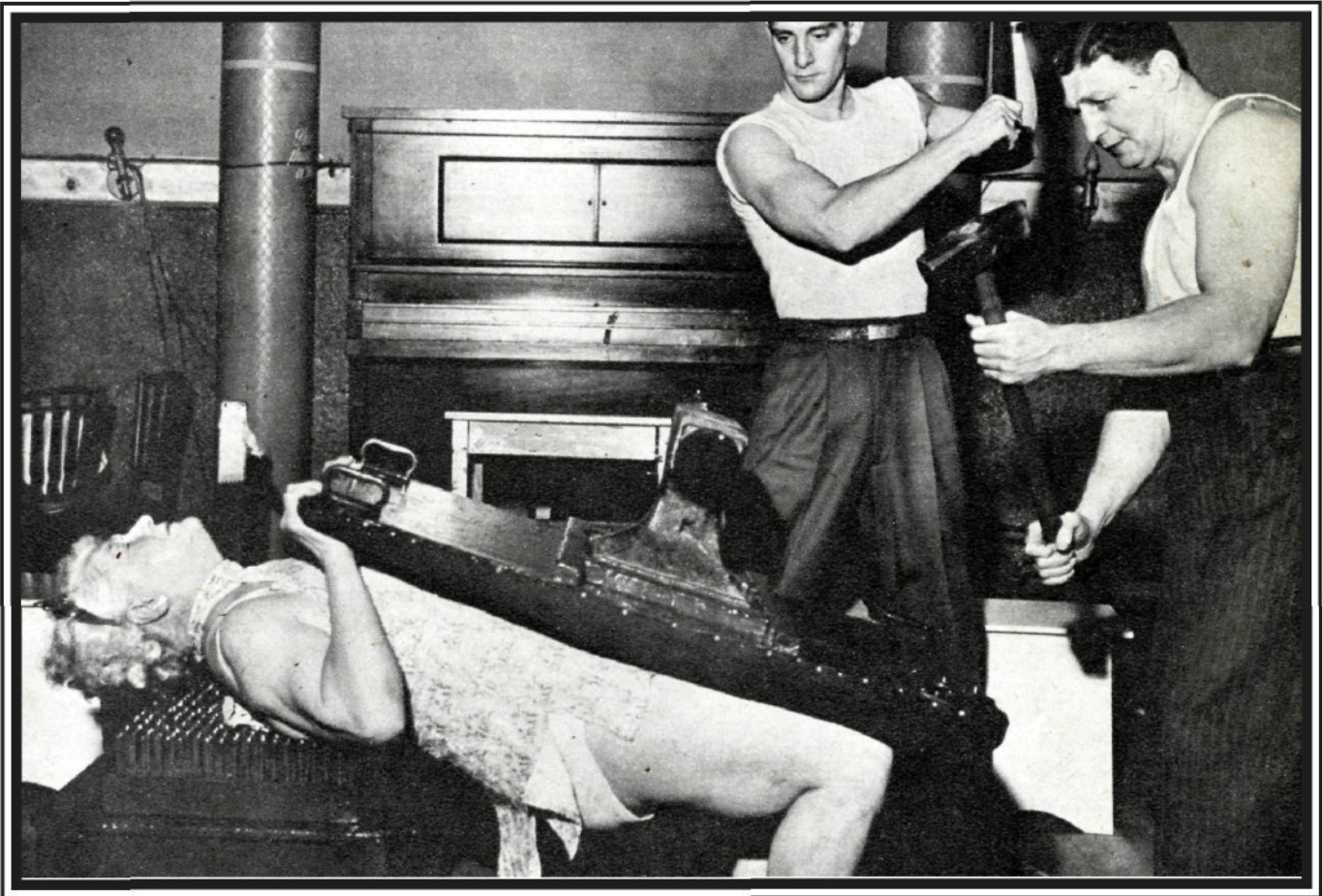
Son Teddy became a boxer, had 84 fights, won 60 by kayos. Max Schmeling was once his sparring partner. Ted works around the bar and contributes to Mama's regular Saturday night show with a burlesque of his own on love, dancing, fighters and fight managers. His act is called "I am a Dope." The Sandwinas' second son Alfred spent five years in the Air Corps and is now a struggling young singer and actor.

When Mama isn't weight-lifting or bending iron, she throws Papa around, al 155 pounds of him, or she lets him bang a 200-pound anvil on her stomach while she lies bareback on a bed of nails. That's the easy life that Kati retired to from the circus five years ago...

"Only ve find out it iss not so easy. Ven it starts here de business de ferst year it iss very tough. Evvery odder day I haf to yell, 'Papa, open da door.' Ve leave a tree-ring circus for a five-ring show."

"But now," Papa smiles contentedly, "dey are al gentlemens. Mama she talks to dem nice. "Go home," she says. "No more drinks for you." Dey go. Ven dey come back de next day dey put dere head in da door ferst und ask, 'Can I come in, Kati?'"

Kati generally sits in the neat little restaurant in the rear and talks to the neighbors. Papa and Ted tend



Katie's sons, pound on her stomach with sledge hammers as she lies back on a bed of nails in a photograph taken in 1947 at her Ridgewood, New Jersey, bar and grill. Ted Sandwina, on the right, was at one time a top heavyweight boxer. Arthur, in the background, worked as an actor.

bar and serve. As soon as anyone starts getting troublesome, Papa always warns ...

"You better scamp or Mama comes in."

One day Mama was sitting in the restaurant when three of the boys got noisy at once. They were trying Papa's patience by complaining about everything from the head on the beer to the free lunch. It started to look like trouble. Mama got up, yelled, "Papa open da door," and tossed them out one by one ...

"Und de next dey stick der head in und apologize und now dey are well behaved."

One afternoon, a bruiser walked in and after berating everyone in sight, started for Papa. That always ends Mama's quiet patience. She didn't bother to yell, "Papa, open da door." She floored the bruiser with one punch for the whole count and gave him a thorough lesson as she tossed him out. And the two cops standing

right outside the door, twirling their nightclubs, cautioned Kati as they always do ...

"Mama, don't hit him too hard!"

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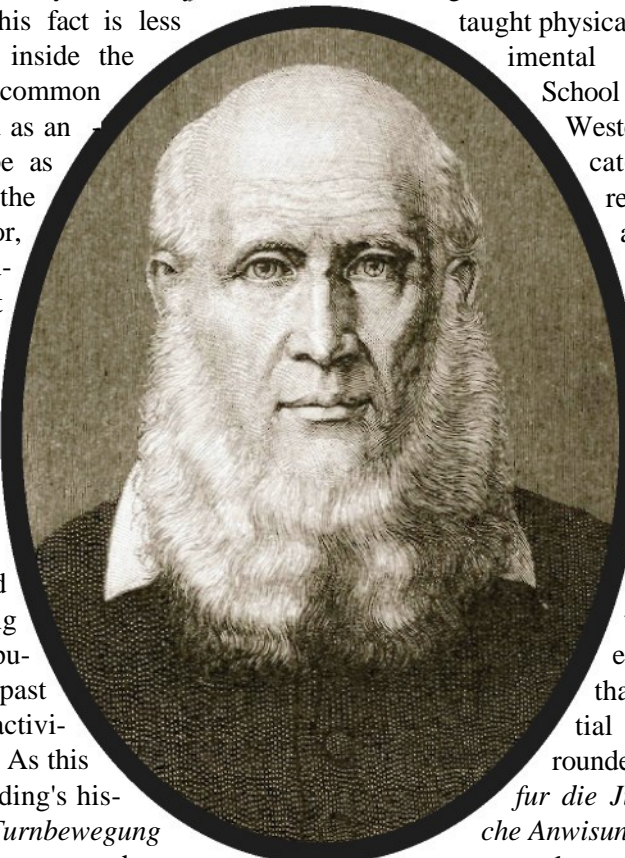
"Teddy Sandwina," viewed at: www.jewsinsports.org/profile.asp?sport=boxing&ID=275

Todd, Jan, "Bring on the Amazons: An Evolutionary History,"

The Origins of German Bodybuilding: 1790-1970

Jurgen Giessing, University of Marburg, Germany &
Jan Todd, The University of Texas at Austin

For readers of *Iron Game History* and those familiar with the history of strength sports it is no revelation to announce that the roots of modern bodybuilding reach back to nineteenth-century Germany. In today's Germany, however, this fact is less well known—even to those inside the sport. In Germany it is not uncommon to find bodybuilding described as an activity that arrived in Europe as part of the fitness boom of the 1980s. One physical educator, in fact, described bodybuilding—or recreational weight training—as a "new Californian kind of sport," equating its arrival in Germany to that of jogging and aerobic dance and speculating that it would enjoy a brief public acceptance and then pass away.¹ However, bodybuilding and recreational weight training have certainly not faded in popularity in Germany over the past two decades. Nor are these activities "new" sport for Germans. As this article demonstrates, bodybuilding's history can be traced back to the *Turnbewegung* (gymnasts' movement) in Germany at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. What is more, in the nearly two hundred years since those early days, Germans have continued to play an important role in the shape and evolution of nearly all aspects of the iron game.



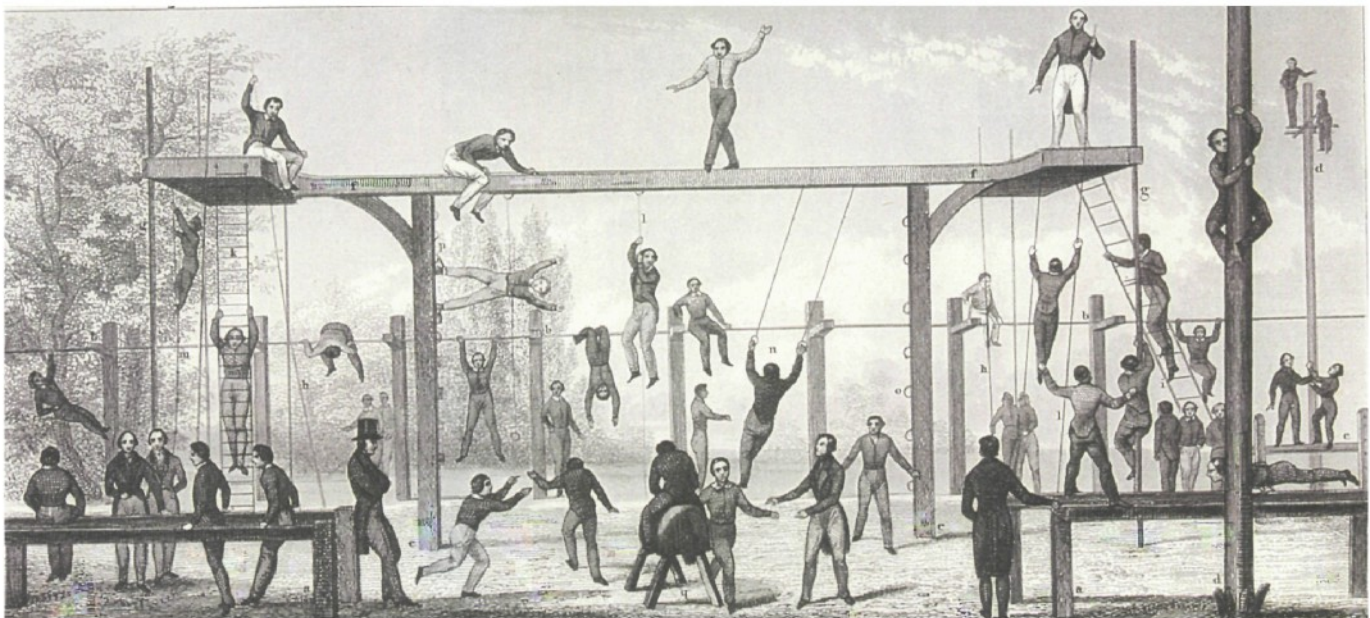
Friedrich Ludwig Jahn
1778 -1852

German physical educator Johann Friedrich GutsMuths (1759-1839) emerged in the late eighteenth century as Europe's dominant theoretician on physical training.² For more than fifty years, GutsMuths taught physical education classes at the experimental Schnepfenthal Philanthropic School near Gotha, making him one of Western Europe's first physical educators. GutsMuths believed in reviving the training methods of ancient Greece, and also felt that hard physical labor was a valuable form of exercise. GutsMuth's system of exercises included rope climbing, throwing the discus, climbing poles, high jumping, and a variety of lifting and carrying exercises to develop the back muscles.³ In 1793, GutsMuths published his influential two-volume work detailing both his exercise regimen and his belief that sport and exercise was essential to the development of well-rounded German citizens. *Gymnastik für die Jugend: Enthaltend eine Praktische Anweisung zu Leibesübungen* was subsequently translated into both English and French which, of course, greatly broadened its influence.⁴ The English version, entitled

Gymnastics for Youth or a Practical Guide to Healthful and Amusing Exercises for the Use of Schools, was published in London in 1800 and, two years later, an American edition appeared in Philadelphia.⁵

GutsMuths' book, and especially the chapter



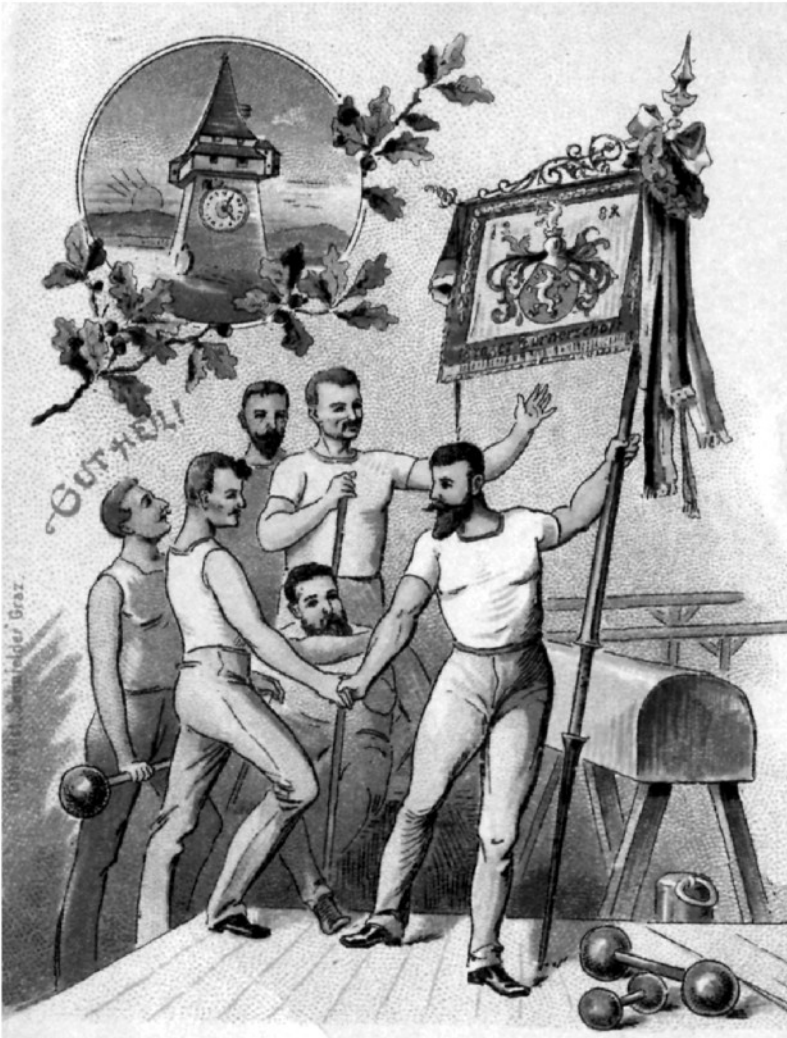


This early nineteenth century engraving shows atypical outdoor *turnverein* of the 1820s. Note the primitive parallel bars and pommel horse and the many ropes and ladders for climbing and balancing. Prior to 1850 most illustrations of *turnvereins*—like this one—contain no dumbbells or barbells.

entitled, "We Are Weak because it Does Not Occur to Us that We Could Be Strong If We Would," proved to be an inspiration for another German physical educator—Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852)—who would later be known as the *Turnvater* or "Father of German Gymnastics."⁶ Jahn, the son of a clergyman, was born in Lanz, Germany, and attended the University of Göttingen around 1800 for a short period of time. Little else is known of Jahn's early life until 1809, when he moved to Berlin.⁷ There, Jahn first did some teaching at what was known as the Friedrich Werdescher Gymnasium and then became a member of the Grauen Kloster Gymnasium. He was also hired to teach at Johann Ernst Plamann's school, where on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons he taught his students gymnastics in an outdoor gym he created near the school.⁸

By this time, Jahn was also deeply concerned about his country's political situation. Following Napoleon's crowning as Emperor of France in 1804, sixteen German princes—who ruled individual states in Germany—split away from the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" to support Napoleon. Their defection left the other German states much more vulnerable to French invasion, and in 1806 the state of Prussia—where Jahn lived—was invaded by Napoleon's armies and placed under French rule.⁹ Jahn worried that his countrymen were losing their German identity under the French, and so he decided to turn his interest in exercise into a form of political action. He believed that he could

help men strengthen their bodies *and* build identity as Germans, and with two of his friends—Karl Friedrich Friesen and Wilhelm Harnich—Jahn established a secret political society known as the German League. The League's aim was to resist the French invaders by using physical education as a means of spiritual renewal for Germans.¹⁰ In 1810, Jahn published *Deutsches Volksthum*, a plea for German nationalism that helped to attract followers to his cause.¹¹ In that book, Jahn decided *not* to evoke Ancient Greece by calling his system "gymnastics." Instead, he called it *Turnen*, to give it a unique German identity.¹² In the spring of 1811, Jahn further widened his efforts by opening what he called a "turnplatz" or outdoor gymnasium on a slightly hilly stretch of land along the Spree River outside Berlin.¹³ He also directed what he called a *turnfest* or gymnastics festival on 19 June 1811 to give men a further reason for their training.¹⁴ Jahn's ideas on exercise and nationalism proved to be particularly attractive to young Prussian men. Membership at the Hasenheide—the name of the outdoor gym he opened—reached eighty members by 1812, topped five hundred members by 1814 and totaled just over one thousand members by 1817.¹⁵ In 1816, Jahn published his gymnastics textbook, *Die Deutsche Turnkunst*, a long, rambling guidebook to German gymnastics and national unity that attracted still more men to his methods.¹⁶ In *Deutsche Turnkunst*, Jahn claimed that more than 150 *turnplatz's* operated in German cities by 1815.¹⁷



By the late nineteenth century, barbell and dumbbell training played a significant role in the exercise regimens of many Turners. This image, on a postcard for the "Grazer Turnerschaft," was printed in Graz, Germany, in the early twentieth century.

In 1813, the war for the liberation of Prussia began, and Jahn and many of his students joined the fight against the French. Jahn returned from the war to find that his *Turnen* movement—now that the French were gone—was finding broad support throughout Germany.¹⁸ *Turnen* became part of most school physical education programs for men in the years following the victory over the French and Turner clubs and gymnastics competitions became common. However, rather than relinquishing German nationalism as a plank in his platform after the war, Jahn became even more German-centric, arguing that "the only true German was a Turner," and that those who did not belong were "false Germans."¹⁹ Jahn's radical politics and the large number of

supporters who followed him did not go unnoticed by the new German government that sought to control the growing "liberal" movement. The Carlsbad Decrees of 1814 largely suppressed the liberal movement in the universities and then, in 1819, *Turnen* was also officially banned because of its connections to radical politics. Jahn was arrested on unspecified charges on 13 July 1819, taken to the Spandau fortress, and then sent to Kustrin prison. On 22 May 1820 he was sent to the town of Kohlberg, where he lived under house arrest until 1825. A condition of his eventual release was that Jahn could not live in any city with a university and that he could not teach or take part in *Turnen*.²⁰

Although he could not participate in gymnastics any longer, Jahn's later life was not totally austere. In 1826, he was invited to join the faculty at Harvard to teach both gymnastics and German. In a letter to Harvard's president, Jahn explained that he would need to be paid at least two thousand dollars a year in order to make up for the guaranteed compensation he received from the German government and that, if he remained in Germany, the government had also promised to pay his wife three hundred dollars a year for life following his death.²¹ Harvard was not able to match his salary request and so Jahn stayed in Germany.

For the next two decades, although nationalistic attitudes were forced underground and the exercises could no longer be called *Turnen*, many men continued to find ways to train and even compete. During this era, competitions

in what came to be called *Gymnastik* evolved in many parts of Germany. A typical competition tested twelve competitive events called the *Zwoelfkampf*, and consisted of exercises using horizontal and parallel bars, vaulting horses, pommel horses, flying rings, and other traditional gymnastics apparatus. The *Turnsperre* (or official ban on *Turnen*) lasted until 1842.²²

Once the government rescinded the *Turnsperre*, competitions and Turner societies again flourished in Germany. The *Hamburger Turnerschaft von 1816*, founded—as the name implies—in Hamburg, Germany, in 1816 was the first voluntary sport association formed to promote *Turnen*.²³ The Hamburg club, which is still

in existence in 2005, opened the *Hamburger Turnanstalt*, a public gymnasium where members paid a small fee in order to train.²⁴ Since "gyms" in these early years consisted primarily of horizontal and parallel bars, a few weights, and enough space to run, jump, and play games, it was not difficult for other cities to follow Hamburg's lead.²⁵ The first *Damenturnverein*, or women's gymnastics club, opened in 1845, suggesting that at least some women also participated; and in 1864, just two decades after the lifting of the ban, there were approximately two thousand *turnvereins* or gymnastic societies in Germany.²⁶

Precisely what role weight training played in the early years of the *Turnen* movement is difficult to discern. Although they were not common, dumbbells were in use in England, France and the United States by the end of the Eighteenth Century. However, when the first Germans trained with implements resembling dumbbells is unknown. Given the intellectual sharing that occurred in Europe at this time, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that the implements would have been known to some physical educators in Germany by the early decades of the Nineteenth Century.²⁷ Although we don't know when dumbbells were first used, other forms of resistance training were incorporated in *turnen* from the beginning. In addition to the back exercises mentioned earlier, GutsMuths' *Gymnastics for Youth* included instructions for an arm and shoulder exercise using a pair of wooden staffs six feet in length that were notched at regular intervals so that one to two pound weights could be hung from the notches. GutsMuths wrote, "The person lifting is to stand upright, with his breast projecting forward; hold one of the instruments in each hand, with a straight arm; raise them slowly, both together, a little above the horizontal line; and let them down again in same manner." GutsMuths' exercise is, in reality, a deltoid raise using a modified Weaver stick. Standing with the arms down at the side, the athlete raised the sticks—with their attached weights—to shoulder height while keeping the arms straight and thus throwing the load on the deltoids. As the man grew stronger, the small weights would be placed further from the hand, as he put it "... as long as the strength of the arms will admit."²⁸ GutsMuths also advised training with heavy sandbags to increase upper body strength. He described holding sandbags either at arms' length in front of the shoulders, with the arms out to the sides in a crucifix position, or

with the arms down at the sides.²⁹

Other evidence of the connection between resistance training and *Turnen* can be found in Charles Beck's *A Treatise on Gymnastics*, an 1828 book largely derived from Jahn's *Die Deutsche Turnkunst*.³⁰ Beck, a follower of Jahn's, had moved to Boston in 1824 to escape the unfriendly political climate of Prussia, and he was hired by the Round Hill School for Boys in Northampton, Massachusetts, where he introduced German gymnastics to America. In his somewhat free translation of Jahn's book, Beck begins a section of dumbbell exercises with the statement that, "these [hand-held dumbbells] are too well known to require a particular description."³¹ Following that revealing statement, Beck included directions for seventeen dumbbell exercises, descriptions of how to perform GutsMuths' exercises using notched sticks and sand-bags, and described two new resistance exercises. The first of these new exercises used a pair of what Beck called "dynamometrons." The dynamometron was a wooden box, three inches high and approximately fifteen inches square inside of which were partitions creating 144 one-inch squares. Identical lead plugs were placed in the small squares of the dynamometron to vary the weight. In the center of these squares an eight-inch handle attached to the box which was grasped during the performance of the exercises—a fact which suggests that these may have been early precursors of the kettlebell.³² The other resistance exercise Beck described was the lifting of a heavy "beam" loaded with weights. A ring was bolted to the beam making this lift function like a one-handed partial deadlift, as the beam was placed on blocks at the beginning of the lift.³³

Another factor that undoubtedly helped weight training find a home in *Turnen* was the motivation shared by nearly all *Turners* to be better athletes. Since the gymnastics events of this era demanded significant upper body strength, the use of dumbbells to help increase upper body strength seems a logical progression. After all, boxer Tom Owens of Hampshire, England, had started using dumbbells as part of his training in approximately 1796, a practice that some other boxers copied.³⁴ And, as noted above, dumbbell use was fairly common by 1830. Although the exact origins are obscure, by the second half of the nineteenth century weight training was increasingly part of the training for *Turnen*. Two books gave instructions on weight training for *Turners*—

Ernst Eiselen's 1883 *Hantelübungen für Turner und Zimmerturner* (*Dumbbell Exercises for Turners and Indoor Turners*) and Maurice Kloss's *Hantelbüchlein für Zimmerturner* (*Little Book for Turners Exercising Indoors*) published in 1886.³⁵ Other evidence of weightlifting's growing importance can be found in some of the posters, photographs and ephemera of the Turner movement that have survived from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The illustration on page ten, for example, is from an early twentieth century postcard published in Germany. Dozens of other postcards depicting Turners with barbells and dumbbells have also survived from the *fin de siècle* era. That the organizers of the Aargau Kanton Turnfest held in Rheinfelden, Switzerland (just across the border from Germany) chose to feature a visibly muscular man holding a heavy block-weight overhead in their 1904 poster suggests the strong links between *Turnen* and weightlifting.³⁶

As Allen Guttman points out in *Sports: The First Five Millennia*, one of the unique characteristics of *Turnen* in the nineteenth century was the keeping of records and statistics.³⁷ Since the lifting of weights is one of the most quantifiable of all activities, this fascination with records and measurements helps to explain why Germans would be so taken with the idea of lifting heavy weights and with the changes such lifting created in their physiques. Although many nineteenth-century Germans believed that "You were either strong or weak. Strength had not been recognized as something which could be systematically and methodologically improved. It was seen as a God-given or inherited gift," the Turner movement disagreed and showed men how to improve on their genetics through training.³⁸ Jahn's philosophy was, thus, tied to a belief in self-actualization. As the movement evolved in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea that strength and enhanced manhood

could be attained through the effort of willpower and discipline was widely acknowledged. The display of a manly physique became important in Germany in the late nineteenth century, being equated in the public's mind with both the resolve and strength of the nation as well as the individual's sexual potency and attractiveness.³⁹ As R.E. Kirchner explained it in *Mein Geheimsystem* (*My Secret System*): "Only the muscular man is irresistibly attractive to women. A shiver of admiration comes over her each time she sees how one of these

strong beings lifts a heavy weight. She loves to see the hefty muscles bulge."⁴⁰

At the turn of the twentieth century, Theodore Siebert provided both systematic methods and philosophical rationale to lead Germany into a new era of strength training. Siebert, who was born in 1866 in Weißenfels, followed his father into the brewing business and had taken a job in 1886 in Vienna, Austria, when he first became aware of weight training.⁴¹ Wrote Siebert, "We had many Bavarians there among the 130 brewers, and the best of them performed and showed off all kinds of strength stunts."⁴² According to historian Bernd Wedemeyer, strength feats and heavy training were especially popular in the 1880s

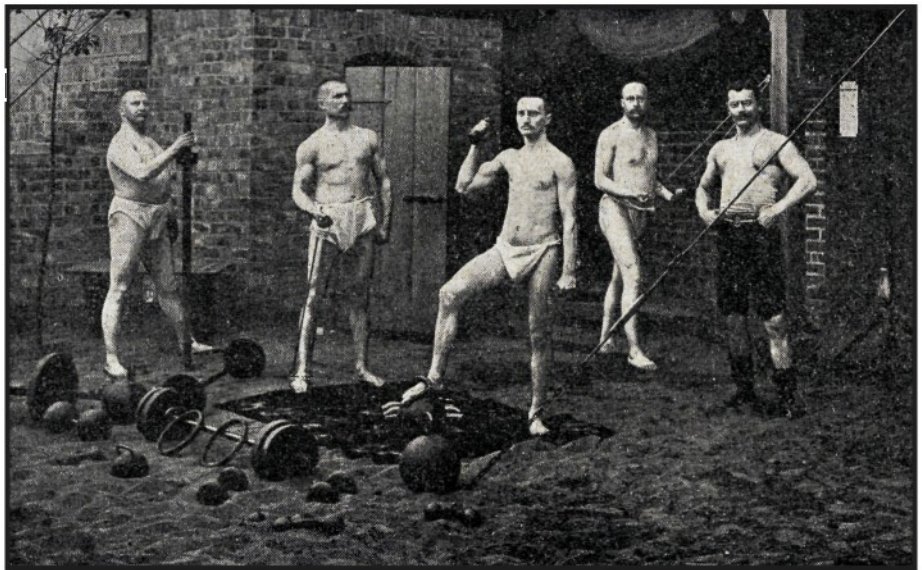


among craftsmen, laborers, and brewers, "and it was precisely the brewing centers of Munich and Vienna that gradually became bastions of strength athletics."⁴³ Siebert left Vienna when his worker's visa expired, returned home, fulfilled his military obligations, and in 1892 opened his own brewery and restaurant with an attached beer hall.⁴⁴ That same year Siebert reportedly met Josef Haupt (1865-1935), the editor of Germany's first sport newspaper: *Munchner Illustrierte Athleten-Zeitung* (*Munich Illustrated Athletes' News*), a newspaper that would play an important role in the acceptance of heavy weight training in Germany.⁴⁵ Following his meeting with Haupt, Siebert began training systemati-

cally with weights, using himself as an experimental subject. "In a lonely little village," he later wrote, "cut of from all sporting life, I procured for myself two old twenty-five kilogram (fifty-five pound) weights and was glad when I could press the same, one in each hand; then after several months, I could go five or six times with both arms."⁴⁶ By 1894 he began publishing articles on lifting in Haupt's *Munchner Illustrierte Athleten Zeitung* and then, in 1898, Siebert published his systematic analysis of strength training entitled *Katechismus der Athletik (Catechism of Athletics)*.⁴¹ That same year, now

increasingly involved with lifting, Siebert attended a heavy athletics festival in Vienna where he met the

Russian physician Dr. Vladislav Krajewski, who was also a contributor to Haupt's newspaper. With Krajewski was his famous protégé, the weightlifter and wrestler George Hackenschmidt, with whom Siebert would form a life-long friendship.⁴⁸ Seeing Hackenschmidt's remarkable physical condition intensified Siebert's enthusiasm for weight training. During 1897, Siebert's beer hall, located in the small town of Alsleben on the Saale River, had served as a meeting place for the town's athletes and as the headquarters for the town's athletic club. Following his return from Vienna, Siebert worked even more closely with those interested in weight training, and in 1901 opened what is considered the "first training school for athletics and physical culture in Germany."⁴⁹ As Siebert's enthusiasm for, and appreciation of, the benefits of weight training increased, he continued to find ways over the next several decades to promote the sport. For one thing he published a number of books: *Be Strong* (1905), *The Way to Strength* (1906-07), *The Strength Sports* (1907), *Under Which System Should I Train?* (1910), *Should I Become a Professional Athlete or Wrestler?* (1919), and, in 1923, *Training Methods: Be Strong!* and *The New Strength Sports*. He also started his own publishing company, sold mail-order courses, and moved his center of operations to the much larger city of Halle. Even so, Siebert was never able to make much money through his



Although primitive by modern standards, Siebert's gym contained the necessary basics—barbells, dumbbells and kettlebells. Note the loose-dirt floor, useful for dropping kettlebells and barbells from overhead. Siebert is the second man from the left.

promotion of weight training.⁵⁰ He clearly inspired many men to take up competitive weightlifting, but unlike several of his countrymen Siebert did not get rich off the muscle game.

Relatively speaking, the man who made the greatest fortune off of bodybuilding was Siebert's contemporary, Friedrich Karl Müller, better known as Eugen Sandow.⁵¹ Sandow's life and importance to the history of bodybuilding have been well documented by historians and will not be recounted in detail here.⁵² However, it needs to be understood that the authors' lack of discussion of Sandow is not meant as an indication that he is in any way unimportant to the story of German bodybuilding. Just the opposite is actually the case. Next to Jahn, Sandow is probably the most significant figure in the history of German physical culture. Sandow was not only an international celebrity whose body symbolized ideal male perfection, but his entrepreneurial and promotional skills brought weight training into wide acceptance, even to the highest ranks of society.⁵³

Sandow's impact was particularly felt in the United States and in the countries of the British Commonwealth, where he toured extensively. Although born in Germany, Sandow did not return to his homeland when he decided to retire from the stage. Instead, he settled in London and devoted himself to working with the British military, teaching the upper classes of British



society, and promoting his books—all of which were first published in English. Sandow had good entrepreneurial instincts and made considerable money selling his signature products—spring grip dumbbells, Sandow's Cocoa, his training courses, and *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*.⁵⁴ No doubt part of Sandow's international celebrity came from the fact that in many instances Sandow was speaking to people who were somewhat familiar with weight training. This is because thousands of *Turners* left Germany in the nineteenth century to emigrate to the United States and other parts of the world, and many of them formed new *Turnvereins* once they were settled.⁵⁵

In Europe and the United States, the emergence of the circus and variety theater in the nineteenth century fostered the growth of professional strength performers to the point that no circus seemed complete without a strength act. Hans Steyrer, for instance—known as the Bavarian Hercules—worked in both the circus and variety theater during the last three decades of the Nineteenth Century and was

The young Siegmund Klein had this photo taken at the Aldene photographic studio in New York City, shortly after his arrival in 1924. Inscribed to "My friend Joe Lambert," Sig closed his salutation with the German phrase "Kraft Heil," meaning hail to strength. On the back, Sig wrote for posterity, "This photo was given to Joe Lambert in 1925. Only one I have of this pose."

featured on the cover of the *International Illustrierte Athleten Zeitung* more times than any other athlete. Other German professionals from the late nineteenth, and first decades of the Twentieth Century included Louis Durlacher, known as Professor Attila; Carl Abs from Mecklenberg; Arthur, Hermann, and Kurt Saxon; Max Sick, known as Maxick; Kati Brumbach, known as Sandwina; Josephine Blatt, known as Minerva; Josef Strassberger; and, of course, Herman Goerner.⁵⁶

In the early Twentieth Century, as new waves of immigrants arrived in America from Germany, several men who'd learned about heavy lifting in the sport clubs of Germany would play influential roles in helping American weightlifting grow. For example, Karl Moerke, the 1920 world weightlifting champion, arrived in the United States in 1923 and garnered considerable publicity by leg pressing the front end of a fire engine—complete with crew—in an exhibition in Hoboken, New Jersey.⁵⁷ Moerke found the spotlight again in December of 1925 when he outlifted another recent German immigrant, Heinrich "Milo" Steinborn, in a contest sponsored by the newly formed American Continental Weightlifting Association.⁵⁸ Moerke, at 5'2" and 220 pounds, lacked the more graceful physique of his countryman, Steinborn, who can be credited for bringing heavy squat training to America. When Steinborn squatted, however, there were no racks to hold the bar at shoulder height. Instead, he began the lift by standing the bar on end and then rocking it over onto his back and shouldering it while he was in the full squat position. Steinborn's record of 553 pounds remains unbroken.⁵⁹

One of the most important German immigrants in America was Siegmund Klein, whose entire adult life was dedicated to the advancement of strength training. Klein was born in Thorn, Germany, on 12 April 1902. There has been some confusion about Klein's birthplace because in his training course, *Super Physique*, published during World War II, he claimed that he had been born in Cleveland. This piece of misinformation was then repeated by other authors who wrote about Klein's life.⁶⁰ Undoubtedly, Klein feared that his German heritage would adversely affect sales of the course during wartime. In 1947, when a new edition of the course appeared, Klein listed his birthplace as Thorn.⁶¹ So, although Klein wasn't born in Cleveland, he spent almost all of his childhood there as his parents left Germany when he was only a year old.⁶² As a teenager, Siegmund, or "Sig" as he was known, belonged to a

turnverein in Cleveland where he began training at age fifteen. He developed a close relationship with Carl Hein, a *turnverein* instructor, who helped him learn gymnastics and handbalancing. Sig took up barbell training at age seventeen. His interest deepened as he began reading *Physical Culture* and *Health and Strength* magazines, and by the time he reached young manhood, he possessed a remarkably muscular physique and an ardent love of the iron game.⁶³ Historian David Webster describes Klein as the "first advanced bodybuilding specialist." Webster bases his claim on the fact that Klein's motivation for training—and what he later taught in his gym—was that training should create a shapely physique rather than simply focusing on performing specialized feats of strength or skill.⁶⁴ In 1924, Klein traveled to New York City hoping to meet Professor Attila, whose training methods and gymnasium had become famous through articles in the *Police Gazette* and the New York newspapers.⁶⁵ When Klein arrived, he found the gym closed and learned that the Professor had recently passed away. Deciding to pay his respects to Attila's widow, Klein stopped by the Professor's house where he met Attila's daughter, Grace—a young woman he subsequently married. Sig—with the blessing of Attila's wife—then re-opened the Professor's gym in 1927 and over the next half century built it into an elite center for serious bodybuilders and strongmen. Adopting the motto "train for shape and strength will follow," Klein made no secret of his German roots. In the September 1931 issue of his new magazine, *Klein's Bell*, he claimed, "I am happy that I was born in Germany, the home of strong-men."⁶⁶ In his short-lived magazine Klein featured dozens of bodybuilders and strongmen of German heritage.⁶⁷ Klein argued that the connections between *Turnen* and weightlifting were easy to understand. In an article on Friederich Ludwig Jahn, for example, Klein wrote,

Shortly after the *Turnvereins* became well established in Germany, it became evident that many of the members were unable physically to do some of the required feats. A number of the leaders resorted to the use of weights to build up their pupils' strength. It proved successful in almost all cases and to the surprise of many found an enthusiastic reception on the part of a large number of those who



The founding members of the German Bodybuilding Union—*Deutscher Koerperbildungsbund*: Harry Gelbfarb, Elly Gelbfarb, Gustav Woerner, Lorenz Breier, Karlheinz Rued, Heinz Barth, and Ingrid Breier.

Photo courtesy Harry Gelbfarb.

were so trained. These men found a fascination in this ancient sport and many of them drifted away entirely from the gymnastics which they had originally taken up. Thus weightlifting became one of the leading sports among the German physical culturists.⁶⁸

Although bodybuilding flourished in the United States and Great Britain during the 1920s and 1930s, it did not make much progress in Germany as new light-weight systems of exercise found greater favor. In 1905, J. P. Muller published *My System*, which advocated a light regimen that took less than fifteen minutes and could be done in the privacy of one's home.⁶⁹ The ease and simplicity of Muller's system was a great draw, and his book was eventually translated into twenty-four languages.⁷⁰ Unlike Siebert and his followers—who were interested in maximizing muscle—Muller advocated training to create a slender bodily ideal and even mocked those who trained with heavy weights and wanted large muscles.⁷¹ Historian Arnd Krieger argues that Muller's popularity came from the fact that "he was in complete concurrence with the ideals of neoclassicism and health reform," both movements of importance in Germany in this time.⁷² Hans Surén continued this "aesthetic" approach to training in a series of books

in the twenties and thirties that featured his slender and heavily-oiled nude body. An ex-army officer, Surén published *Deutsche Gymnastik* in 1924, a book that advocated a light-weight exercise system and "air bathing" or nudity.⁷³ As with Muller's books, the German public was drawn to the apparent ease of Surén's system.⁷⁴

It is interesting that during this same era, competitive weightlifting grew steadily as the Olympic movement provided a focus for training and "world" championships were held on a yearly basis in Europe.⁷⁵ In 1891 the *Deutscher Athleten Bund* formed to help sponsor weightlifting contests and training and by 1900 Germany had three

hundred registered clubs and more than eleven thousand members.⁷⁶ During the 1920s, when German weightlifter broke eighty-six world records and frequently dominated the world championships, the newly named *Deutscher Schwerathletik Verband* had approximately 130,000 members.⁷⁷ Recreational weight training or bodybuilding, however, enjoyed no such growth. In fact, during the 1930s and 1940s—when America was holding its first Mr. America contests and Muscle Beach was in full swing, almost no one in Germany considered himself a bodybuilder, and there were no gyms specializing in physique training. Long-time bodybuilding and weightlifting official Oscar State wrote about Germany's lack of bodybuilding activity in 1961, arguing, "Although they must have had the material, Germany showed no inclination towards the bodybuilding field and physique contests. Only once in 1939 did I ever meet any German bodybuilders in a Mr. Europe contest. There were four on this occasion, and by 1939 standards they had great physiques."⁷⁸

Bodybuilding's rebirth after World War II can be laid at the feet of a peripatetic Austrian, Harry Gelbfarb. Following the war, Gelbfarb immigrated to the United States, settling in New York City in 1947. There, he joined a boxing club and discovered a copy of a muscle magazine with Steve Reeves on its cover. Reeves'

physique inspired Gelbfarb to become more serious about exercise, and so he added chin-ups, push-ups, and dips between two chairs to his boxing workouts. On a walk in Manhattan one day, he discovered Sig Klein's gym. Gelbfarb met Klein that day and spent a considerable time talking about training with Klein who was happy to have a chance to practice his German. Gelbfarb was inspired with Klein and impressed by his gym: "I would have loved to train at Sig Klein's gym but I could not afford the fee."⁷⁹ A short while later, however, through a friendship with another man, Gelbfarb visited the Eastside Barbell Club—home to three of the top bodybuilders in America at the time: Artie Zeller, Marvin Eder, and Leroy Colbert. Gelbfarb was reportedly so thrilled with what he saw on his first visit that he became a member the very same day.⁸⁰

Gelbfarb's interest in bodybuilding was cut short, however, when he enlisted in the army and found himself stationed in Schweinfurt, Germany. As a Jew he had worried about living in Germany but found the after-War atmosphere completely different. There was only one problem: there was no place to train. After completing his tour of duty, Gelbfarb moved to California to study physiotherapy. There he discovered Muscle Beach—where he became a regular—and also took a job at the Beverly Hills Health Club.⁸¹ By this time Gelbfarb was convinced he wanted to own his own gym and he kept thinking about the lack of bodybuilding gyms in Germany. So, in 1955, he took his savings, went back across the Atlantic, and returned to Schweinfurt, where he'd been stationed during his Army days. He found a building and then set about the daunting task of having equipment made from scratch—as there were no equipment companies in Germany selling what he wanted.⁸² Gelbfarb's gym was a modest success and served to inspire Leopold "Poldi" Merc, another Austrian who had become acquainted with bodybuilding in the USA, to open a similar gym in Berlin. In 1958 Merc placed fourth in the NABBA Mr. Universe contest, which he eventually won six years later.⁸³ The third bodybuilding gym in Germany was opened by Peter Gottlob, who later won the Mr. Germany title in Stuttgart, in 1959.⁸⁴

In 1959, when the first Mr. Europe contest was announced, Gelbfarb and several of his gym members wanted to enter. Their entry was returned, however, because Germany didn't have a national governing body

for bodybuilding that officially designated him as a representative for Germany. So Gelbfarb, his wife Elly and five members of his gym (Gustav Woerner, Lorenz Breier, Karlheinz Rued, Heinz Barth and Ingrid Breier) founded the *Deutscher Körperbildungsbund* (German Bodybuilding Union), which enabled Gelbfarb and two of his gym members—Hans Glaab and Fritz Stephan—to enter the first Mr. Europe contest in Turin, Italy.⁸⁵ The next year, Gelbfarb and his new *Deutscher Körperbildungsbund* sponsored the first Mr. Germany contest. Although Gelbfarb worried that there wouldn't be enough bodybuilders, the contest, won by Reinhard Smolana, was a success and has been held every year since.⁸⁶

During the 1960s, bodybuilding continued to grow in Germany, helped by the advent of muscle magazines in German and an increasing number of bodybuilding gyms. The first of these contemporary muscle magazines appeared in 1960—*Der Muskelbilder*, a German edition of Joe Weider's *Muscle Builder*. Three years later, a German magazine, *Kraftsport Revue*, began publication.⁸⁷ By 1965, Germany had twenty-four bodybuilding gyms, according to Gelbfarb, who had moved his own base of operations to Nuremberg, and a second bodybuilding contest entered the annual calendar that year. The first *Bestgebauter Athlet* (Best Built Athlete) contest was held in Stuttgart with both open and junior divisions. Helmut Riedmeier, who also won that year's Mr. Germany contest, took the open title while the junior class was won by the very young Arnold Schwarzenegger.⁸⁸

Schwarzenegger, though an Austrian, was also one of the original eleven members of the *Deutscher Bodybuilding und Kraftsportverband* (German Bodybuilding and Strength Sport Union) founded in 1966, which replaced its predecessor—*Deutscher Körperbildungsbund*. The other original members were Gernulf Garbe, Peter Streich, Dieter Heiber, Franz Dischinger, Helmut Riedmeier, Jürgen Petrick, Wolfgang Simon, Erich Janner, Rolf Putzinger and Albert Busek.⁸⁹

Since 1970, the evolution of bodybuilding in Germany has closely paralleled developments in the United States and other parts of Europe.⁹⁰ Gyms continued to open throughout Germany and weight training became an accepted activity in the "average" person's fitness plans.⁹¹ The competitive aspects of bodybuilding

also continued to grow. The first national women's championships were held in 1981 amid considerable skepticism that the sport would catch on with women. Sponsored by the *Deutscher Bodybuilding und Kraftsportverband*, the women's contest has continued on an annual basis. The appearance of a German translation of *Pumping Iron* in 1984 also contributed to a rapid growth in both gym memberships and gym openings. By 2001, for example, Germany had more than five million gym members training at no less than six thousand clubs.⁹²

In looking at the modern German bodybuilding scene, it is not immediately apparent that IFBB professional champion Marcus Ruhl's many victories owed anything to an early nineteenth century physical educator known as *Turnvater* Jahn. However, if Jahn had not created *Turnen*; if *Turnen* had not embraced weightlifting; if Sig Klein hadn't become a *turnverein* member and then gym owner; and if Harry Gelbfarb hadn't wandered into Klein's gym one day and begun to learn about bodybuilding; then Gelbfarb might never have returned to the Fatherland and launched the modern era of this sport in Germany.

Notes:

¹ Wolf-Dietrich Brettschneider, Wolf-Dietrich Miethling, "Entwicklungs-tendenzen im Sport-, Spiel- und Bewegungsalltag von Jugendlichen. Eine Herausforderung für den Schulsport" (*Tendencies of Development in Every-day Sport, Game and Activities of Juveniles. A Challenge for Physical Education*), *Sportpädagogik* 1(1989): 7-11.

² Richard Mandell, *Sport, A Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 157-161; Fred E. Leonard, "Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths: Teacher of Gymnastics at Schnepfenthal, 1786-1835," *Mind and Body* 17(January 1911): 321-326; and Ellen Gerber, *Innovators and Institutions in Physical Education* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1971), 115-121.

³ Robert A. Mechikoff and Steven G. Estes, *A History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002), 140-141.

⁴ J.C.F. GutsMuths, *Gymnastik für die Jugend: Enthaltend eine Praktische Anweisung zu Leibesübungen*. (Schnepfenthal: Buchhandlung der Erziehungsanstalt, 1793).

⁵ C.G. Salzmann [J.C.F. GutsMuths], *Gymnastics for Youth: Or a Practical Guide to Delightful and Amusing Exercises for the Use of Schools* (London: printed for J. Johnston, 1800). The Philadelphia edition had the same title and was published by William Duane in 1802.

⁶ Mechikoff and Estes, *History and Philosophy*, 156.

⁷ Ibid., 156-157.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 157.

¹⁰ Horst Ueberhorst, *Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and his Time, 1778-1852* (Munich: Heinze Moos Verlag, 1978), 35-36.

¹¹ F.L. Jahn, *Deutsches Volksthum* (Lubeck, Germany, 1810).

¹² Allen Guttman, *Sports: The First Five Millennia* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 274. Interestingly, *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 497, suggests that Jahn adapted "turnen" from the French word, "tourner," which means "one who turns or makes a circuit," p. 191.

¹³ Hans Ballin, "Biographical Sketch of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn," *Mind and Body* 1 (October 1894): 1-7; Fred Eugene Leonard, "Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and the Development of Popular Gymnastics (Vereinsturnen) in Germany, Part One," *American Physical Education Review* 12 (July 1905): 133-139.

¹⁴ Ueberhorst, *Jahn and His Time*, 103.

¹⁵ Christiane Eisenberg, "Charismatic Nationalist Leader," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 13(1) (March 1996): 14-27; and Metchikoff and Estes, *History and Philosophy*, 157.

¹⁶ Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and Ernst Eiselen, *Die Deutsche Turnkunst zur Einrichtung der Turnplätze* (Felbach: 1816), 2; and Fred Eugene Leonard, *Pioneers of Modern Physical Training* (New York: Association Press, 1915), 37.

¹⁷ Mechikoff and Estes, *A History and Philosophy of Sport*, "156-157; and Jahn and Eiselen, *Die Deutsche Turnkunst*, 2.

¹⁸ Ueberhorst, *Jahn and His Time*, 102-103.

¹⁹ Heinrich Von Treitschke, *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1 (New York: Ams Press, 1968), 359.

²⁰ Ueberhorst, *Jahn and his Time*, 64; Leonard, *Pioneers*, 38; and Dieter Langewiesche, "Für Volk und Vaterland Kraeftig zu Wirken" *Zur Politischen und Gesellschaftlichen Rolle der Turner Zwischen 1811 und 1871*. Ommo Gruppe, ed. (Tuebingen: Kulturgut oder Koerperkult, 1990), 22-61.

²¹ Erich Geldbach, "The Beginning of German Gymnastics in America," *Journal of Sport History* 3(1976): 245.

²² Guttman, *Sport*, 274; Hans Langenfeld, "Wie Sich der Sport in Deutschland Seit 200 Jahren Organisatorisch Entwickelt Hat," in: Helmut Digel, ed., *Sport im Verein und im Verband*. (Schomdorf: 1988), 20.

²³ Helmut Digel, "Sportverein (sport clubs)," Hans Eberspächer ed., *Handlexikon Sportwissenschaft*. (Reinbek, 1992), 427-431.

²⁴ G. Seehase and H. Reip, "Anatomie eines Vereins. Hamburger Turnerschaft von 1816 - der Weg durch Fünf Generationen," *Hamburger Turnerschaft: Der Verein. Standort, Aufgabe und Funktion in Sport und Gesellschaft* (Schomdorf, 1966), 29-57.

²⁵ Jahn called the new exercises *Turnen*, and over time the words *Turners* (people who did gymnastics) and *Turnverein* (place for gymnastics or society for gymnastics) were also commonly used.

²⁶ By 1911 the *Turnverein* had more than one million members. Edmund Neuendorf, "Geschichte der Neueren Deutschen Leibesübungen vom Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart." *Die Zeit von 1820 bis 1860*, vol. 3. (Dresden: 1930).

²⁷ Jan Todd, "The Strength Builders: A History of Barbells Dumbbells, and Indian Clubs," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 20 (1) (March 2003): 65-90.

²⁸ GutsMuths, *Gymnastics for Youth*, 316.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 317.

³⁰ Charles Beck, *A Treatise on Gymnastics, Taken Chiefly from the German of P. Jahn* (Northampton, MA: Simeon Butler, 1828).

³¹ Beck, *Treatise on Gymnastics*, 123.

³² *Ibid.*, 121.

³³ See Todd, "The Strength Builders," for a more complete description of this lift.

³⁴ Joseph R. Svinth, "A Chronological History of the Martial Arts and Combative Sports: 1700-1859," viewed on 6 July 2005 at: <http://ejmas.com/kronos/NewHist1700-1859.htm>.

³⁵ E. Eiselen, *Hantelübungen für Turner und Zimmerturner*. (Berlin 1883); M. Kloss, *Hantelbüchlein für Zimmerturner*. (Leipzig 1886).

³⁶ "Aarg. Kantonturnfest, Rheinfelden, peting in the German National Heavyweight Lifting Championships. Moerke man-30, 31 Juli, 1 August 1904." Poster, Todd-aged two repetitions with 418 pounds while Henry "Milo" Steinborn finished with si McLean Physical Culture Collection, The single at 533 pounds.

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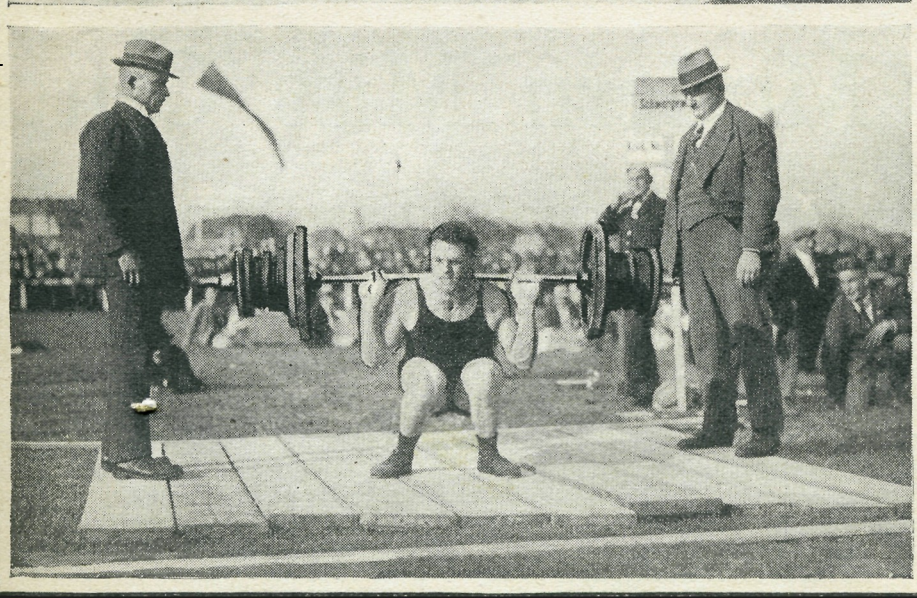
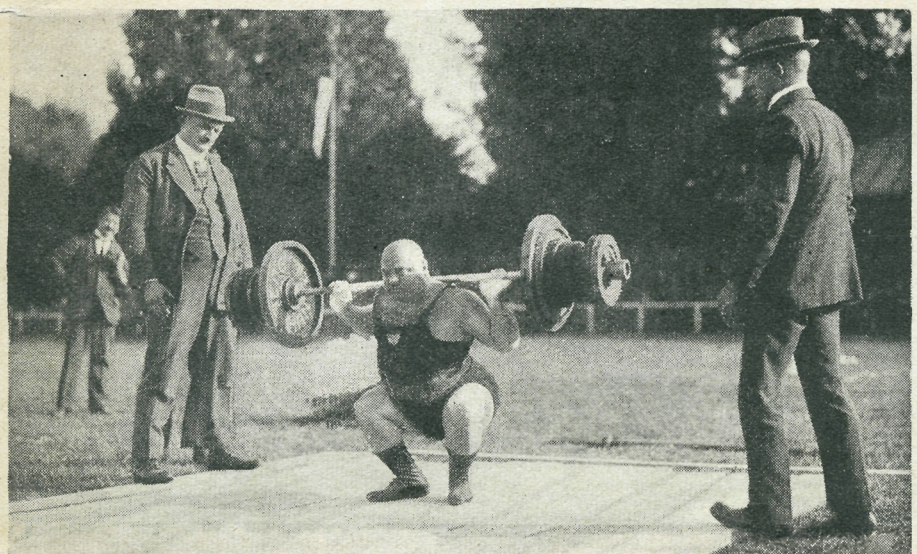
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³⁷ Guttman, *Sports*, 276-277.

³⁸ Eberhard Hildenbrandt, "Milo, Marx und Muskelpille- Anmerkungen zur Kulturgeschichte des sportlichen Trainings," in: Helmut Gabler/Ulrich Gohner (Ed.) *Für einen besseren Sport. . . Themen, Entwicklungen und Perspektiven aus Sport und Sportwissenschaft*. (Schorndorf, 1990), 267.

³⁹ Arnd Krüger, "There Goes this Art of Manliness: Naturalism and Racial Hygiene in Germany," *Journal of Sport History* 18(1) (Spring

Weight Lifting as a Sport in Germany



This double newspaper photograph shows Karl Moerke and Milo Steinborn competing in the German National Heavyweight Lifting Championships. Moerke man-30, 31 Juli, 1 August 1904." Poster, Todd-aged two repetitions with 418 pounds while Henry "Milo" Steinborn finished with si McLean Physical Culture Collection, The single at 533 pounds.

1991), 139.

⁴⁰ Ralph Eugen Kirchner, *Mein Geheimsystem*. (Leipzig: Maximilian Wendsl, n.d), 8.

⁴¹ Bernd Wedemeyer and David Chapman, trans., "Theodor Siebert: A Biography," *Iron Game History* 6(3) (May/June 2000): 5-6.

⁴² Theodor Siebert, "Wie ich 'Athletenvater' wurde," part 2, *Die Athletik: Illustrierte Monatsschrift für Volkstumlichen Sport* 9(2): (1921-1922), 17.

- ⁴³ Wedemeyer and Chapman, "Theodor Siebert," 6.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Quoted in Wedemeyer and Chapman, "Theodor Siebert," 8.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., and Theodor Siebert, *Katechismus der Athletik* (Chatechism of Athletics), (Leipzig: 1898).
- ⁴⁸ Wedemeyer and Chapman, "Theodor Siebert," 8-10.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 9.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 9-10.
- ⁵¹ The best biography of Sandow's life and cultural significance is David Chapman's *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Modern Bodybuilding* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
- ⁵² For Sandow's importance see: Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*, John F. Kasson, *Houdini Tarzan and the Perfect Man* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); David P. Webster, *The Iron Game* (Irvine, Scotland: by the author, 1976), 16-24; David P. Webster, *Bodybuilding an Illustrated History* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1979), 29-39; and Josh Buck, Sandow: No Folly with Ziegfeld's First Glorification," *Iron Game History* 5(1), (May 1998): 29-33.
- ⁵³ Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent*. 11.
- ⁵⁴ Books authored by Sandow include: *Sandow's System Of Physical Training* (London: Gale and Polden, 1894); *Strength and How to Obtain It* (London: Gale and Polden, 1897); *Body-Building: Man in the Making* (London: Gale and Polden, 1904); And *Life is Movement: The Physical Reconstruction and Regeneration of the People* (London: Gale and Polden, 1919).
- ⁵⁵ Elliott J. Gorn and Warren Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1993), 77.
- ⁵⁶ For information on Attila and professional strongmen in the late nineteenth century see: Kim Beckwith and Jan Todd, "Requiem for a Strongman: Reassessing the Career of Professor Louis Attila," *Iron Game History*, 2(3) (July, 2002): 42-55. See also: Webster, *The Iron Game*, 152-153.
- ⁵⁷ Webster, *The Iron Game*, 35.
- ⁵⁸ John D. Fair, "Father Figure or Phony? George Jowett. The ACWLA and the Milo Barbell Company, 1924-1927," *Iron Game History* 3(5) (December 1994), 17.
- ⁵⁹ David P. Willoughby, *The Super Athletes* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1970), 219. See also: Siegmund Klein, "Word Picture of Henry Steinborn," *Klein's Bell* 1(1931)9, 4.
- ⁶⁰ Siegmund Klein, *Super Physique. Body-Building Bar-Bell Course* (New York: 1943).
- ⁶¹ Siegmund Klein, *Super Physique*. (London: 1947).
- ⁶² Vic Boff, "Sig Klein (1902-1987): A Legend Passes On," viewed at: <http://www.naturalstrength.com/history/detail.asp?ArticleID=314>.
- ⁶³ David Webster, *Bodybuilding*, 67.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Beckwith and Todd, "Requiem for a Strongman, 44.
- ⁶⁶ Siegmund Klein, "Did you know that..." *Klein's Bell* 1(9)(1931) 9, 5.
- ⁶⁷ See for example: Siegmund Klein, "Word Picture of Henry Steinborn," *Klein's Bell* 1(6) (1931): 4; Siegmund Klein, "Herbert Seelig Proves that Small Men Can Have Perfect Proportions" *Klein's Bell* 1(9) (1931):1-2; G. Jowett, "The Three Jolly Germans," *Klein's Bell* 2(9) (1932): 3-4; and Siegmund Klein, "Adolph Pitz. At Fifty Years Still a Strong Man." *Klein's Bell* 1(12) (1931): 8.
- ⁶⁸ Siegmund Klein, "Friederich Ludwig Jahn. Founder of the Turnvereins," *Klein's Bell* 2(1932): 5, 6.
- ⁶⁹ Jens P. Muller, *Mein System* (Copenhagen: Tilge, 1905).
- ⁷⁰ Kruger, "Naturism and Racial Hygiene," 144.
- ⁷¹ Muller, *Mein System*, 86.
- ⁷² Krüger, "Naturism and Racial Hygiene," 144.
- ⁷³ Hans Sureñ, *Deutsche Gymnastik* (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1924).
- ⁷⁴ Krüger, "Naturism and Racial Hygiene," 144.
- ⁷⁵ See Webster, *Iron Game*, pages 80-87 for a discussion of the various world championships held in the early Twentieth Century.
- ⁷⁶ Webster, *Iron Game*, 152.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ Oscar State, "Leopold Merc - Germany's Bodybuilding Ambassador," viewed at: http://www.classicbodybuilders.co.uk/bio_merc.shtml.
- ⁷⁹ Harry Gelbfarb, personal communication. 2 February 2003.
- ⁸⁰ Harry Gelbfarb, "Die Wurzeln des Bodybuilding in Deutschland," *Sportrevue* 31 (12) (1993): 140.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 141.
- ⁸² Harry Gelbfarb, personal communication, 2 February 2003.
- ⁸³ Classic Bodybuilders Collection, viewed online at: <http://www.classicbodybuilders.co.uk/m.shtml>.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Gelbfarb, "Bodybuilding in Deutschland," 142.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ In 1969, this magazine changed its name to *Sportrevue*. Andreas Krägermann, Florian Schneider, "Die Geschichte der Deutschen Kraftsportliteratur." *Sportrevue* 31 (1993) 12, 51-60.
- ⁸⁸ Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Karriere eines Bodybuilders*. (Munich 1986).
- ⁸⁹ Albert Busek, "Vom unbedeutenden Kleinverband zum erfolgreichsten nationalen Amateur-Bodybuilding-Verband der Welt," *Sportrevue* 29 (1991) 10, 4.



The Quest for the Quarter Master

Terry Todd, The University of Texas at Austin

*Dateline: Oklahoma
December 11, 2003*

Two carjackers got a big surprise when they jumped an elderly man who was waiting peacefully in his car for his wife and grandson to return from shopping at a Dallas mall. As the 83-year-old retiree settled into his seat for his wait, a red-haired woman suddenly appeared at his window and began hitting him with her purse as her companion stuck a gun through the passenger-side window. "They shouldn't have done that," said the retiree, who has a reputation of being able to tear quarters with his bare fingers. The intended victim disarmed the gunman by breaking his arm and sent the two crooks running for their lives. The "victim" waited for the right moment to fight back. It came when the gunman glanced away. "I grabbed his arm and broke it over the door," the "victim" said of his response, speaking literally. "The bone was sticking out of his arm." Disarmed and crippled by a compound fracture, the man "fled like a possum," according to the "victim." Although the would-be carjackers were apprehended by police, the "victim" didn't want to return to Dallas for a court appearance.¹

—*Amarillo Globe News*

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Dr. Joe Hood, a long-time lifting friend of mine from Alabama who now lives and practices in Austin, saw this item on the internet and was immediately struck by the reference to the "victim" having the reputation of being able to tear a quarter in half. Joe shares my interest in odd feats of strength, and so he quickly forwarded the item to me, adding that, "it was heartwarming to an

old Alabama mountain boy like me to read about a proud old man prevailing against long odds, with the criminals getting a bit more than they bargained for." Joe had heard me talk about having seen Jesse Wood, a legendary Texas powerlifter who was in his prime in the 1970s, place about 50% of a dime in his jawteeth and bend the coin by pressing upward on the exposed half. Apparently, this inspired Joe, who was soon duplicating this feat with dimes and, on occasion, quarters, to the unending dismay of his dentist. I should add that Joe has been a very strong man for about 30 years. He was the national champion in the 220 pound class twice in the American Drugfree Powerlifting Association, and he held the national ADFPA record in the deadlift in the 220 pound class for several years, with 792 pounds. Physically, he's a dead-ringer for Hermann Goerner.

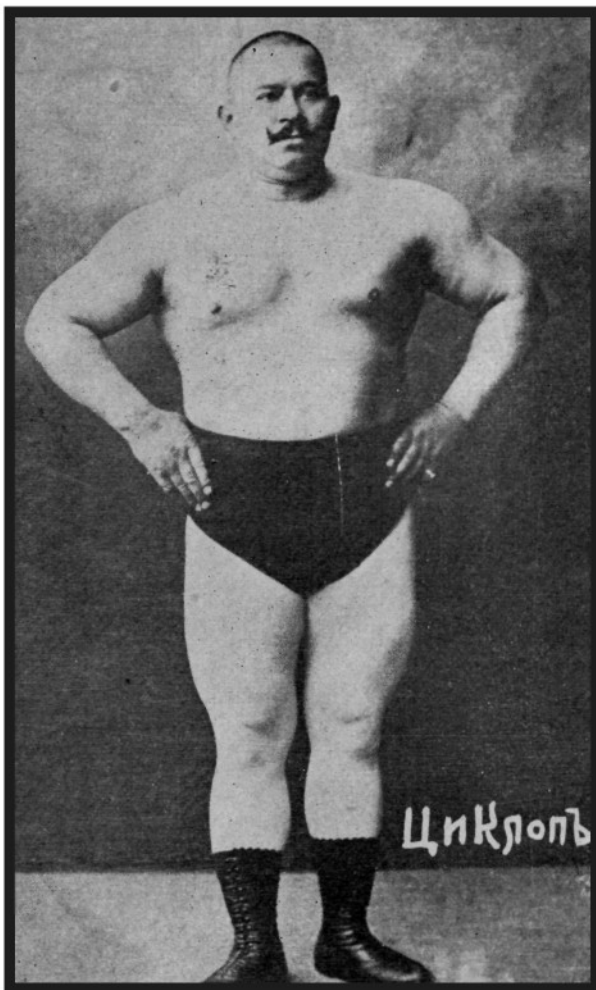
As Joe and I discussed the story about the old man and the quarters, we both concluded that although we couldn't believe such a feat was possible for anyone, much less a man of 83, we were still sufficiently intrigued to want to know more. We suspected that the old man must have claimed he could tear, or perhaps bend, quarters when he was young—maybe 40 or 50 years before, a claim that couldn't be disproved. In any event, Joe agreed to delve into the background of the story, and after he reached the man who wrote the original article for a small paper in southern Oklahoma he explained to the writer why he was calling. The writer said that the old man was quite well known in the area and that everyone up there had "gotten a kick" out of what happened to the carjacker down in Dallas who pulled a gun and had his arm broken. During the conversation, Joe asked the writer how long ago it was when

the old man was supposed to have been able to tear quarters, and the writer said, "Well, as far as I know he can still do it. I know he was doing it a couple of years ago." Trying to contain his excitement, Joe kept talking until he got the old man's phone number.

Joe phoned me immediately with the news, and I urged him to call the old man and ask him in a very nice way if he'd be up for a visit from some Texans who had a long-time interest in physical strength. When Joe made the call he found the old man to be personable and quite willing to talk about what had happened in Dallas as well as about his tearing of quarters. He told Joe that he didn't separate coins much anymore, and that he wasn't as strong as he'd been when he was younger, adding that it hurt his fingers more now than it used to. "But I can still tear 'em," he said, "and if you boys want to come up I'll tear one for you." After Joe gave me this remarkable news, it was clear that we had to have

a road trip to see this old man for ourselves. Joe agreed enthusiastically, and I said that I wanted to take several people along who would enjoy such an opportunity and who would also be able to add their observations to ours in the extremely unlikely event that the old man could actually perform this seemingly impossible feat.

The first person I called was Dennis Rogers, the professional strongman who lives in Houston. Dennis is justifiably famous for his ability to bend a crescent wrench into an "S" shape, break standard handcuffs, tear small chunks out of decks of cards, tear in half a Houston phone book that has been covered both vertically and horizontally with duct tape, and perform other similar feats. Dennis is probably the best-known and most successful performing strongman in the U.S. at this time,



Polish strongman Franz Bienkowski, known professionally as Cyclops the Coin Breaker, reportedly broke coins in front of both Edmond Desbonnet and Theodore Siebert. Massively built, Bienkowski weighed 250 pounds at only 5'6".

and he's also a very serious student of the great performing strongmen of the past—such as Joe "Mighty Atom" Greenstein, who, like Dennis, was smaller than the average man. When I explained to Dennis what was up he said he'd even re-arrange his schedule to be able to come along. The other person I called was Joe McCoy, a man who lives in a small town below Dallas, which would be on our way to Oklahoma. McCoy has been organizing, promoting, and videotaping various sorts of iron game events for many years. He's seen a lot over the years, has a deep interest in all aspects of strength, and has a real knack with a camera.

As for me, I've had a particular fascination with hand strength ever since I was about ten years old and saw my maternal grandfather show me how he could place an uncracked hard-shell pecan between his thumb and bent fore-finger and break the shell of the pecan. (A "hard-shell" is a small native pecan—not one

of the larger, "paper-shell" pecans developed by scientists over the years.) I asked "Papa" to do this quite a few times over the years, until I had entered college, and he broke every pecan I gave him. Every time he did it he'd always smile and quietly repeat what he'd told me that first time—when we were sitting together in a river-bottom pecan grove, hunting squirrels—"Bud, very few men can do that...and no boys." What Papa did and what he said created the sort of ongoing bond between us that binds boys to their grandfathers. I've wondered many times if my own hunger to be strong began that long-ago day in the pecan grove.

By the time I got to college I'd begun to develop what's turned out to be a lifelong interest in strength, and I'd learned that when he was in his prime my Grand-

father Williams, who was about 5'10" and 215 pounds, was reckoned to have been the strongest man in his part of Texas. Unfortunately, I never got to see him lift and carry bales of cotton, but many men from his community told me that he could do it easily, almost casually. All I saw was the breaking of the hard-shell pecans, and all I know is that as I grew to well over 300 pounds and developed a fairly strong pair of mitts myself, I was never able to break a native hard-shell pecan like Papa could.

In the first years of my lifting career I read all of the back issues of *Strength & Health*, *Iron Man*, *Muscle Power*, and *Muscle Builder* that had been published, and those wonderful old magazines flooded my mind with tales and images of hard-handed men who could do remarkable feats of bending, tearing, and breaking. At first, I believed almost everything I read, but in time—as I read more and more and had a chance to talk to mature men with years of experience in the game—I became skeptical of certain claimed feats of hand strength. One of the feats that I began to doubt was the bending—and particularly the tearing or "breaking"—of coins with the bare hands. My father had a vise, and using a pair of strong pliers, I bent and broke a few coins of different sizes that were held tightly in the vise. These "experiments" made me even more skeptical.

As I got ready to make the trip to Oklahoma with Dennis and the two Joes I decided to have a look at our university's book, file, and magazine collection so I'd be up to speed on the matter of coin-bending and tearing. Although my "look" was certainly not an exhaustive one, I reacquainted myself with many of the stories I'd read—and often re-read—in years past. I started, as I often do, with David P. Willoughby's masterwork, *The Super Athletes*. Willoughby, in his book, argued that even though many top strongmen took the position that the tearing of a U.S. quarter or fifty-cent piece with only the bare hands was beyond human capability, he believed that it had been done in the past by a number of men. He cited, in particular, the most famous of these men—Poland's Franz Bienkowski, who performed under the stage name of "Cyclops, the Coin-Breaker." In support of Bienkowski's ability, Willoughby cites Professor Desbonnet, the French physical culture authority, who wrote that he had personally seen the Polish strongman break a *ten-centime* piece, which is a coin made of copper or bronze with a slightly larger circumference than that of a U.S. half-dollar, although

somewhat thinner. Willoughby also cites—in support of Cyclops—Professor Siebert, Desbonnet's German counterpart, who said that he saw Cyclops break several tenpfennig coins "solely with the thumb and forefinger of one hand!"² Clearly, this is an example of both Siebert and Willoughby either letting their imaginations run away with them or being careless with language. I say this because it is obviously impossible to bend or break any sort of coin with only one hand, as their language implies, unless the coin is pushed against something. The only way that such a bend could even theoretically be done would be for the strongman to use that one hand to grip the coin and then press it against a solid object of some kind until it bent or, if it was made of brittle metal, broke. In that regard, I recently asked Joe Weider if he'd ever seen anyone bend a U.S. or Canadian coin with bare hands, and he told me a story about 1953 World Heavyweight Weightlifting Champion Doug Hepburn, who worked for him briefly in the mailroom when Doug was in his lifting prime. Joe went on to say that he also had several women working there who opened mail from people who had sent in some change to pay for one of his training courses, and that the women would keep the dimes and quarters in a receptacle until they accumulated enough to be rolled up in a special paper and then taken to the bank. Where Doug Hepburn comes in is that one day Joe got a call from the bank complaining that some of the dimes coming in had been slightly bent and asking Joe if he knew what was causing it. So Joe went to the mailroom, and when he asked the women who worked there what was happening their eyes went immediately to Doug, who admitted, sheepishly, that he sometimes got bored and bent dimes. Joe said Doug acted like a little boy with his hand in the cookie jar, but that when he was asked how he did it he put a dime between his thumb and index finger and, with about half of it extended past the tip of his thumb, pushed it against a wooden doorjamb until the dime bent over his index finger—and then smiled.³

Willoughby also lists Cyclops' partner Charles Sampson, Charles Vansittart, Leon See, William Caswell, and John Grunn Marx as having apparently been able to break either U.S. or British coins. He also asserts—incorrectly, I believe—that "a considerable number of strongmen" could "bend a dime by holding it between the front teeth [and] then pushing upwardly on the coin with the thumb." He also maintains that Gregory Paradise and Joe "Mighty Atom" Greenstein could

bend a U.S. quarter using this technique. The reason I believe that Willoughby is mistaken here is that the force which can be exerted by the teeth is much greater in the rear teeth than in the front teeth. What's more, only the rear- or jaw-teeth are wide and flat enough to allow a coin to be clamped in the sort of vise-like hold that could withstand an upward push sufficient to bend either a dime or a quarter. Quite a number of authorities speak of coins being held in the jaw-teeth and bent, but no one to my knowledge has mentioned bending a coin while it was being held in the thin-edged front teeth. To give Willoughby the benefit of the doubt, he probably meant to say that the coins were clamped "between the teeth."⁴

Regarding Willoughby's references to Professors Desbonnet and Siebert having seen Cyclops break coins, I checked both of these authorities and found that they had, indeed, written that they had seen him do it. As to whether Cyclops was sufficiently gifted in sleight-of-hand to fool both experts is impossible to know at this great remove, and so we must take what the record gives us, weigh the evidence, and move on. One additional bit of information came from a 1948 article by Professor Desbonnet published in *Strength & Health*, in which the Professor says that when Leon See came to his gym in 1896 and lifted a thick-handled challenge barbell that had only been lifted off the floor by one man, See had never lifted weights before. When Desbonnet asked See's friend about the young man's background, the friend said that See didn't lift barbells, but "just breaks coins and tears over a hundred cards." What's most interesting about this statement regarding See is that it is the only mention of coin-breaking in Desbonnet's lengthy article—which is entitled, "The Man Who Breaks Coins!"⁵

We do know from other sources that See was an exceptionally strong-handed man, but there is some question about at least one of the men credited by Willoughby as having "broken" quarters—Charles A. Sampson. Even Willoughby seems to have had his doubts. For one thing, Sampson claimed that he was "The Strongest Man on Earth," even though his reputation rested not on the lifting of barbells and dumbbells but on his claims in harness-lifting, chain-breaking, and coin-breaking. Standing 5'7" and weighing only 175, Sampson was in his prime at more or less the same time as both Louis Cyr and Louis "Apollon" Uni, which Willoughby said made Sampson's claim almost laughable.⁶

Even though exaggeration was part of most professional strongmen's arsenals in those days, Sampson's greatest strength may have resided in his capacity for over-statement. He maintained, for example, that he had a 58" chest, a 16.5" forearm, and a 4.5"(!) wrist, measurements that set Willoughby's teeth on edge as they were either way too large (the first two) or way too small (the last one). Sampson also boasted that he could break a chain made of genuine welded links, 3/8" thick, made of iron or steel. Everyone I've asked about this maintains that this feat would be completely impossible unless one of the links had been sawn mostly through. As for his harness lifting, Sampson claimed that after only nine months of training he made an "official" record of 4008 pounds, which was more than the much heavier harness-lifting specialist Warren Lincoln Travis raised sixteen years later—after decades of training.⁷ As for Sampson's coin-breaking, it's helpful to remember that he was also said to be very adept in sleight-of-hand. These details are useful as they establish the culture of hyperbole which dominated the world of professional strongmen and strongwomen a century or so ago, a culture which should make any modern student of strength skeptical about some of the assertions made by and about many of yesteryear's heroes.

Another historian of strength, Leo Gaudreau, took strong objection to Willoughby's somewhat easy acceptance of the coin-bending and breaking of so many men. One of the bases for his skepticism is the opinion of the legendary wrestler/weightlifter George Hackenschmidt,

who, read in a Russian newspaper that Sampson astounded everyone at a banquet where Russian royalty and high officials were present by tearing packs of cards and breaking coins. "Such performances," wrote Hack years later after much experience with Sampson, "ought not to be classed as strength feats as they are largely due to sleight of hand." I have seen many foreign coins and they do not seem to have the toughness and rigidity of our U.S.A. coins... I think I know a little something about metal because I worked for nearly 47 years, and I had to work with many different types of metals every working day. I think the foreign coins have . . . brittleness and, for that reason, my mind is

not closed to the [possibility] that a coin (not U.S.A.) can be broken. But when it is reported that Cyclops tore coins (tore, mind you) with the ease and speed that he was alleged to be capable of, I get properly suspicious . . . Cyclops was only a mediocre strongman [and] if he had any such power in his fingers, it would seem that he would have displayed it in other ways.⁸

One of the most thoughtful students of the iron game in the early part of the twentieth century was Alan Calvert, the founder of the Milo Barbell Company and the publisher for many years of the magazine, *Strength*. Calvert published *The Truth About Weightlifting* in 1911, and in that excellent book he briefly discussed coin-bending, but he covered the subject much more completely in several of the monthly columns that ran in his magazine.⁹ The column was called "The Mat," and it covered issues of interest to Calvert's readers, and to himself. In October of 1924, an interesting letter from William Many and a response appeared in "The Mat."

Dear Sir: I have just heard a story of a man in our town who claims he can bend a twenty-five cent piece. There are a number of people who have seen him do it . . . He gets it between his teeth and then sets the heel of his hand to the exposed edge. Then he places his other hand on the wrist of the hand that does the work. I have never heard of anyone doing a stunt like that. If you think the feat anything extra I will get all the information I can. He can also bend a dime the same way.

Calvert responded:

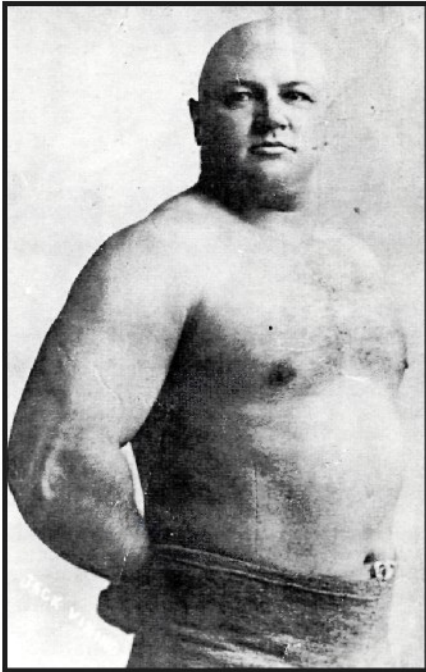
Upon receipt of the above letter I wrote to Mr. Many and asked him if to investigate the matter further. In his turn he sent to me a ten-cent piece and a twenty-five cent piece, and in the subsequent letter he said that he had actually seen Mr. Cartell bend the coins in the manner described. Both of the coins show toothmarks . . . The stunt is a very clever one. The coins show that Mr. Cartell gripped them near their edges with his

teeth, and this gave him a longer leverage when he pressed against the opposite edge of the coin with his hand. Mr. Many is an old correspondent of mine and I have always found his information to be reliable . . . This is the first positive evidence of coin bending that has ever been sent in to me. Now I would like to get some coins that were bent by the strength of the thumbs and fingers [alone] . . . I have received many letters from men who stated that they had seen other men bend coins with their fingers, so . . . if any of you fellows can furnish the evidence please send it along.¹⁰

Another bit of information that sheds light on this issue comes from a response made by David Willoughby to a question sent in to *Muscle Power* asking if anyone had "officially" bent a coin, "foreign or otherwise." Willoughby wrote:

There are many claimants . . . but I have yet to see one perform the feat. Perhaps the coins of years gone by were purer metal, softer in constituent, than the modern coins minted with combined alloys that make it an effort to bend them even when . . . held solidly in a vise . . . I am not denying that men have bent coins, but I have checked innumerable ones personally, who couldn't back their claims and were rampant with excuses. Nothing would please me more than meeting a coin breaker!¹¹

Another person who would love to have seen a legitimate coin-breaker, or even a coin-bender is Tom Lincir, the president of Ivanko Barbell Company and an avid collector of antique barbells and exercise equipment. Unlike Willoughby, however, Lincir believes that he met a man almost four decades ago who was strong enough to do it. Tom had told me about this man before, and so I recently called Tom—who besides being an inventor is a master machinist—to ask him to give me what he had about the old wrestler he met back in the 1960s in San Pedro, where Tom lives. Tom said that the man went by the name Jack Viking, and that when he saw Viking for the first time he had never been so impressed by anyone's general look of overall power.



Professional wrestler Jack Viking was said to weigh 250 pounds with measurements of: 52" chest, 22 1/4" neck, and 20" arms. The photo was provided by Tom Lincir, who believes Viking could bend quarters.

The photo on the left backs up Tom's assessment as Viking—a professional wrestler at the time of the photo—was indeed thick and rugged, but so was Cyclops. Tom said that although he never saw Viking tear a coin of any sort, other men in the San Pedro area saw him bend quarters and other coins. Tom said Viking looked so truly powerful—even at seventy-two years of age—that he has always believed Viking's claims of bending

coins and bent pressing four hundred pounds.¹²

The early twentieth-century strongman Charles McMahon, however, felt just the opposite, as the following passage from his 1927 book, *Feats of Strength and Dexterity* reveals:

The possibility of this [coin-bending or breaking] feat has been an oft-discussed question. Very few, of which I am not one, claim to have seen this feat performed, consequently I am just a little skeptical about it ever having been done without some trick either of sleight-of-hand or metal treating...There is a group of physical culture enthusiasts who believe everything they hear about feats of strength and another group who believe nothing unless they see it done. There is still a third group which I prefer to belong to who will believe some feats they hear of being performed and will not believe others...With this [latter] group it depends on whom you hear it from or where you read it, and whether or not it appears possible on the face of

it. The third group is often wrong, but the other two are more often wrong...The mere fact that only a very few strong men ever claimed to bend and break coins makes it sound doubtful...and there may be foreign coins that are considerably softer as to metal than the American coins. Right there may be the joker as far as we Americans are concerned. When I speak of coin-bending and breaking...I mean American quarters and half-dollar pieces...Coin-bending in the strongman game is like perpetual motion in the invention field; too much time shouldn't be wasted on it."

As for wasting time, none of the four members of the Fellowship of the Quarter who drove to Oklahoma on December 20, 2003—two years before I sat down to write this account—felt the least bit sorry to be making the trip. For one thing, we all wondered if we could have stumbled upon an old man equally as remarkable as Karl Norberg, the ex-longshoreman who didn't start serious lifting until he was forced to retire at sixty-five and yet became, by the time he reached seventy, one of the top few bench pressers in the world. Being spoken of in the same breath with Karl Norberg would be high cotton indeed, as some authorities believe that his 460 pound, flat-back bench press done at the age of seventy-three in the late Sixties ranks as the greatest feat in lifting history when age, date, poundage, and bodyweight are all taken into consideration. So remarkable was the 265 pound Norberg that even today, with bench "shirts" that can add more than 30% (!) to a lift, no one his size within ten years of his age has matched the 460 he did back in the Sixties, wearing an undershirt and flip-flops.

Joe Hood and I set out from Austin on our quest late one afternoon, and picked up Joe McCoy early the next morning in Glen Rose before driving on up to one of the Dallas airports to meet Dennis Rogers, who had shifted his schedule so he could go with us on the trip to Oklahoma. All the way up, of course, we talked lifting and feats of strength, especially feats of hand strength. And we talked at great length about "The Old Man and the Quarter," to paraphrase Hemingway. For example, Joe Hood and Dennis compared their respective memories of having seen, sometime in the early Eighties, a man on the television show, "That's Incredible," tear

several quarters in half, and we all wondered if the eighty-three-year old we were going to see was the same man who had appeared on the show. Joe and Dennis both remembered that the man had not been introduced as a professional strongman, but just as a working man who was shown performing this colossal example of hand strength. I added that back in the early Eighties I read about someone who had supposedly torn a quarter in half on *That's Incredible*, but paid little attention to it since I didn't believe such a thing could be done.

When we finally got to the restaurant where the old man was supposed to meet us he wasn't there as we were a bit late, but when we called him he said he'd be right over. We went into the parking lot to meet him, and as he drove into the lot in his pick-up, Dennis became excited and said to me, "It's the same guy I saw on 'That's incredible.'" Physical first impressions are important to iron gamers, and we all agreed later that when we saw the old man and shook his wedge-like hand we were struck by how thick and strong he looked. About 5'9" tall, he probably weighed in the neighborhood of 215 pounds, and he had the solid, weather-beaten look of a man who had spent a lot of time outdoors, working. He looked the exact opposite of atypical, frail man of eighty-three. He had on a Stetson hat and was wearing jeans and a western shirt under a thick jacket of the kind made for football players. His hand was wide and hard and thick-fingered, and I think we all began to wonder if we had, indeed, come upon a man who could actually tear a quarter in half. He actually reminded me a good deal of my pecan-breaking grandfather, who in his mid-eighties, put a doctor to his knees when the doctor shook hands with Papa and, following standard geriatric protocol, asked him to "squeeze as hard as you can."

Once we were seated in the café, we began to introduce ourselves all around, and the old man told us that he first started bending coins when he was a young man. He said he had an uncle who could bend a dime in his fingers, and that this inspired him to keep trying until he could do it himself. Finally, with a few more years under his belt of digging postholes and milking twenty cows each morning and evening, he bent a dime—and then he worked on a quarter until it, too, submitted. He told us that his uncle was fairly tall but "not heavy-built like I am," adding that even as a young man he'd been unusually heavily-muscled. "When I took my shirt off the muscles used to just stand out all over me, even in

my armpits," a comment that reminded me of the comment Dr. John Theophilus Desaguliers made about the strange appearance of the English phenomenon Thomas Topham, who was said to have armpits "full of muscles and tendons."¹⁴

The old man, who spoke and acted like the old Texas cowboy and outdoorsman that he was, had a ready smile and a friendly manner, and it was clear that he was known to the people in the café. As we talked he told us a few more things about his unusual background, which included a horrific episode when, at the age of seven, he witnessed his father being dragged out of a jail cell and lynched by a mob of men angry about a gunfight in which two law officers had died. His father was in jail because of his involvement in the notorious "Christmas Tree Robbery" in Cisco, Texas, which ended up in a deadly shoot-out. "My daddy was a bank-robbing, moon-shining fool," the old man said, "and if my grandfather hadn't taken me to raise, I don't know what would have happened to me."

During our long talk at the café I explained to the old man that Dennis Rogers was one of the greatest benders and breakers of metal in the strongman game, and we showed him a couple of things Dennis had bent. He seemed interested, and impressed, and he told us more or less how he tore the quarters—but we didn't ask him to tear one as we wanted to have our video-cameras at the ready so that, if he could really tear one, we'd be able to record it for proof and posterity. However, just as we'd finished our meal and begun to relax, he reached into his coat pocket, brought out a quarter and without saying a word began to bear down on the coin, groaning deeply with the effort. To our absolute amazement, the quarter began to open, and inside of ten seconds he pitched it onto the tabletop and leaned back in his seat, smiling. I picked it up and saw that it was torn about % of the way through, and it seemed clear that he could have torn it all the way had he wished to do so. We were all talking and yelling at once, and then he showed us his left thumb, which had a deep impression at the tip where he had pressed against the edge of the coin. We all examined the quarter, and I knew Dennis was looking—as was I—for any sort of sign that it had been gripped with pliers or treated in some way, but we found nothing.

As our heart-rates were beginning to return to the high-normal range and as the news of what the old man had done percolated through the large room, a teenager who worked in the café as a busboy came up and,

with the obliviousness of youth, handed the old man a quarter and asked him to bend it so he could see it for himself and show it to his girlfriend. And before I could stop him, the old man grabbed the quarter, buried it in his heavy paws and began again to twist on the coin and groan until he opened it just as he had opened the first one—torn about % of the way through and with the halves of the coin spread well apart. Once again, we saw the deep, dark indentations on his left thumb, and so before a whole horde of townsfolk came to the table with quarters to bend we got up, paid the check, got in our respective vehicles and followed the old man to his home a few miles out into the countryside. As we rolled into the yard of his modest home, a hound dog tied to one of the yard's many trees heralded our arrival.

Soon we were inside, and he was showing us several magazines and clippings that spoke about his tearing of quarters and about his long-time friendship with the actor Robert Duvall, who has had major roles in films such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Secondhand Lions*, and the *Godfather* trilogy as well as in the acclaimed television miniseries, *Lonesome Dove*, in which Duval played an old Texas Ranger whose mannerisms and speech he supposedly "borrowed" from the old man for that role. He also mentioned that he had a small role in one of Duvall's most recent films, *The Disciple*, and when I reviewed the film later there he was, sure enough. What's more, he showed us photos of a visit he and his wife had made to Duvall's Virginia farm, as well as two magazine articles in which Duvall speaks about his respect for the old man, who he'd known for almost 30 years. For example, Duvall said this in 2003, "I saw him recently and, at 82, he ripped five quarters in half with his hands. Literally." The old man also gave all of us one of his "business cards," which features a drawing of a quarter ripped almost completely apart.¹⁵

As we continued to talk, I read some passages and showed him some photos from several books I'd brought, including Willoughby's *The Super Athletes*, and Joe Hood—throwing caution and his dentist's advice to the winds—even bent a penny in his teeth for the old man to keep. During all this time Joe McCoy and Dennis had been video-taping our conversation, but everyone—the old man included—knew that

what we really wanted was to record him tearing a quarter or two. When I asked him if he'd tear one for the cameras, he said he'd try, but that he didn't want to "mess up his thumbs." I should add here that before we got to the cafe we four "questers" had talked about the need to verify what we hoped to see, and so I'd put an unobtrusive mark on a quarter in the hope that he wouldn't notice it. We thought about simply telling him that we had to see him bend a coin we'd marked so there could be no question about what he did, but Joe Hood believed that we should take the more polite, "Southern," approach—and we all agreed that this was the proper thing to do. In any case, when I gave him the tagged coin he looked at it and quickly said that it looked like it had been marked, saying it in such a way that indicated his feelings had been hurt by our skepticism. So rather than insist that the old man bend a marked coin I did the easy thing and gave him an unmarked quarter. And then the moment came. Joe McCoy stood to one side with his video-camera, Dennis stood directly in front, and the old man began to crank on the coin, once again groaning as he did so. As before, in just a matter of seconds the coin was opened up and flipped into the air. As the old man was grinding on the coin, Dennis Rogers kept saying, "There it goes, there it goes." and After the coin had been flipped Dennis added, "History was just made."

We left soon afterward, as we had a long way to go to get back home, and on the way south we swung from absolute amazement that we'd been fortunate enough to discover one of nature's wonders, to analyzing step by step what we had seen to be sure we hadn't been scammed in some way. During the early part of the trip home we were, for the most part, true believers—as excited as children who'd just seen their first elephant. Both Dennis and Joe Hood vowed to begin training to match the old man as soon as they got back home, and I

got a horse-laugh by intoning with mock seriousness that I could probably have done it myself in my "younger days." The more we talked, however, the more we had to admit that since the old man didn't bend a marked coin it was possible that he might have switched the quarters in some way for ones that were either treated or already broken. We dismissed



The Quarter Master gave us all his business card as we left that day, and headed back to Texas.

the "treated" theory, however, as he gave the quarters to us, and it would be easy enough to have them analyzed at one of the university's labs. As for the possibility of a switch, several of us recalled that he had had one of his hands in his pocket just before he tore each of the coins, which might have allowed him to palm the whole quarter and substitute a quarter that had been either weakened or torn.

To be completely honest, although most of us tended—and certainly wanted—to believe that we had, as Dennis said, seen history being made, we knew in good conscience that we couldn't claim we knew with absolute certainty that the old man had torn the quarters fair and square. So back and forth we went between happiness—at having been present at the tail-end of the career of a man who'd apparently been able to do a controversial feat for more than sixty years—and dismay at not having insisted that he bend a marked coin so we would know for sure.

I spoke often to Joe Hood and Dennis Rogers in the days after we returned to our respective homes, and we continued to analyze what we'd witnessed as we waited to see the videotape. When Dennis called me after his first viewing, however, he said it really didn't settle anything as it was impossible to really see the coin coming apart since the old man's wide fingers were so close together. Joe told me soon after we got back that he'd already made his thumbs so sore that he'd had to stop practicing, and Dennis also reported similar discomfort. I even called former national weightlifting and powerlifting national champion Mark Henry, who may well have the greatest pure gripping strength in the world, and told him about what we had seen. He was amazed, but not daunted, yet a few days later he called to say that he'd had to stop trying as his hands were, in his words, "completely ruined." And this is from a four hundred pound giant who closed the #3 Ironmind gripper all four possible ways the first time he ever saw one and who also—after I asked him if he thought he could squeeze a can of soda with one hand hard enough so that the can would split in some way—got a can and squeezed it until it burst.

As the days went by, only Dennis, with his bulldog tenacity and inventive mind, continued to work on at least bending a quarter. Soon, he said that if he put a pair of very small pliers on the edges of the quarter his leverage was increased and he could bend the coin. Even so, he said he didn't believe he could ever build the strength he needed to bend—much less tear—a twenty-five-cent

piece. I'd asked all the men who were on the trip to keep the news about our "quest" to themselves as I wanted to tell the story first to the readers of *Iron Game History*, but I'd lost a bit of my original enthusiasm since I wouldn't be able to write the sort of definitive piece I wanted to write.

During this interim, I rolled back my memory tapes and made a list of experienced men who had told me they didn't think a U.S. quarter could be bent using only the hands, much less torn. The list is impressive, and it includes Vic Boff, Mac Batchelor, John Grimek, Bob Peoples, Bob Samuels, the Mighty Atom, Slim Farman, Joe Assirati, and David Webster. I also called several active top benders and breakers to ask them if they thought it was possible for a man to bend a U.S. quarter. The first man I called was Mike "The Destroyer" Roy, from Quebec. Roy is a professional strongman who specializes in feats of hand and arm strength, and he has performed at some of the annual dinners of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen as well as at the Arnold Classic. Roy said that no one of whom he had knowledge could do such a thing, and that he doubted it was physically possible. An important consideration is that Roy is one of only two men I know who, most experts believe, have bent pennies (Canadian pennies, in his case) double with just their two hands, and he says he does it rarely as it "destroys the Destroyer's hands."

The only other man who can double up a penny—sometimes, at least—is "Stanless Steel" Plasken, a performing strongman from New York who says that the feat is at the absolute limit of his strength. He says that the bending of a penny leaves his hands sore for a week even though he pads the coin slightly with a piece from a grocery store paper sack. Plasken doubts that a quarter can be bent in the same way. Another man with whom I recently spoke is the great John Brookfield, one of the true Grandmasters of hand strength. John said that some years ago he trained for awhile in hopes of being able to bend coins, but that although he could "put a good crimp" in a penny he finally had to quit the training as his hands just simply wouldn't tolerate it. "When I hyper-extended one of my thumbs I knew I might permanently damage my hands if I kept it up," John told me, adding that he didn't believe a quarter could be fully bent with two bare hands and that he was absolutely certain one couldn't be torn apart in this way. Pat Povalaitis, the reigning king of the nail-benders, agrees with the other top hands, saying that he doesn't believe it's ever happened—unless the coin is held in a vise-like

grip by the teeth. He added that he had "dabbled with it, but found it very painful."

Where, then, did that leave us in our quest to understand just what we had seen in Oklahoma? None of us—and none of the experts to whom I spoke—were convinced that the bodybuilder Mike Dayton had been able to bend quarters. And Dennis Rogers had recently learned from Joe "The Great" Rollino—about whom it has been written that back in the days when he performed as a professional strongman he could bend quarters almost double with his bare hands—that he primarily used his teeth to make the bends. Rollino, now in his one hundredth year, is a wonderful old man who learned the strongman profession from Coney Island performer Warren Lincoln Travis. Last year, Dennis asked Rollino exactly how he had bent the quarter he had given Dennis, and Rollino explained that he first placed it in his "jawteeth" and bent it back and forth to "crease it" before finishing it off by putting his two hands between his legs and bending it further.¹⁶

So the question remained. Had the old man in Oklahoma torn the coin or had he not? I had begun to reconcile myself to the probability that we would never know with certainty, but then one day the phone rang. It was Dennis, talking a mile a minute. What he finally managed to make clear was that his son had just been lying on the floor in front of the TV set, watching the video of the old man tearing the quarter, when all at once he casually remarked to his father, "Hey, Dad, the quarter's already ripped." So Dennis dropped to the floor, got right down at ground level, and looked closely as they ran the tape back and forth until he finally saw it, too. Dennis told me that his son is proficient in magic, and so tended to watch such things with a more knowing eye, but still Dennis wanted to make sure—so he took the tape to a friend who works in local law enforcement as a specialist in the analysis of film and videotape. After his friend digitally enhanced the film so it could be viewed in super-slow motion it became absolutely clear that the coin the old man "tore" had already been torn before he exerted any pressure on it. All he did was open it up. Because Dennis was directly in front of the old man, the camera caught the torn coin being turned so that the tear was between the old man's thumbs—as can be seen in the photos accompanying the article. Dennis got a DVD of the footage to me right away, as well as a couple of blow-up stills of the telling moment when the tear can be clearly seen. One of those photos is reproduced on the next page. And for those of you who'd like to

have a DVD of the "tearing," Dennis has included the telltale footage on a recently-made and light-hearted compilation of legitimate feats and various "illusions" entitled *Crazy, but Powerful*. The DVD can be ordered from: www.dennisrogers.net.

Straightaway I called Joe Hood to tell him the news, but at first he wasn't all that willing to believe we knew for certain that the coins had been switched. I didn't want to believe it, either, but I'd grown more skeptical the more I thought about what we'd seen in Oklahoma—and about the possibly related fact that when Joe had called the Dallas Police Department to ask if they had any record of the car-jacking incident no such incident had been reported. But in time even Joe had to agree with the rest of us that this interesting and colorful old man had had a pretty easy time pulling the wool over the eyes of four supposed experts. The two of us, and Dennis, too, began to laugh at ourselves and at the entire incident as we knew we'd been like theater-goers who, in order to make a stage-play more real, engage in a psychological technique called, "the willing suspension of disbelief." In other words, we wanted so much to believe we'd witnessed an 83-year old man tear several quarters in half with his bare hands that we were easy marks.

Soon after viewing the tell-tale tape, Dennis called a friend of his who's a successful professional magician, and told him the story about the old man and the ripped quarter. "He laughed and laughed," Dennis told me, "and said that this coin-switch was a very standard magician's trick. He asked me several things about the "performance," and particularly if the old man had pitched the coin up in the air when he finished, since this is a tactic used to draw the eye away as the original coin is being put into his pocket." Mark Henry laughed about it, too, saying that we four were classic marks—just like a lot of the people who go to pro wrestling matches and trick themselves into believing that all the spectacular blows and kicks and falls are exactly what they seem to be.

Perhaps the moral of this story is that just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so too—sometimes—is strength. We four men went on a quest to see something we very much wanted to see—and for a time we were willing to believe that we had seen it. We had willingly suspended disbelief. Our love of the iron game—and particularly of the romantic aspect of prodigious feats of strength—muscle our objectivity to the side to such an extent that looking back at it now makes



This still, and the enlargement above, taken from the digital videotape shot by Dennis Rogers, clearly shows that the quarter was torn before the old man began to exert any pressure.

me smile all over again. Even so, neither I nor any one of us who went begrudge one minute of the time we spent—or the money we spent—driving to Oklahoma to meet the old Quarter Master. In fact, we all decided that no real purpose would be served by revealing the old man's name. He may well be dead by now, as he had a heart attack about two weeks after we were there to visit him. I certainly have no intention of calling him to tell him that we now know he didn't really tear those quarters, and I'd just as soon he went on taking pleasure in how he "fooled those Texas boys." But whether he's still doing his coin trick to amuse the good folks down at the local WalMart or to entertain the angels way in the middle of the air, we wish him no harm. He'd obviously been dining out on his stunt for years and years, and we all hope he dines out for many more. And who can say for certain that when he was in the fullness of his prime he wasn't so cock-strong that he really *could* tear a quarter in two? We do know that one part of his story is true: his father was indeed lynched, and as Joe Hood says as he looks back at what happened, "I think of a humorous old man who just wanted to 'be somebody,' and I think of a heartbroken young boy staring up at his father hanging from a tree on a dark Texas night in 1928."

Notes:

¹ "El Paso Retiree Single-Handedly Takes on Gun-Wielding

Thief," *Amarillo Globe News*, 11 December 2003.

² David P. Willoughby, *The Super-Athletes* (NY: A.S. Barnes & Co, 1970): 225-226. See also: David P. Willoughby, "Strength Through the Ages: Cyclops Bienkowski Breaking a Coin," *Strength & Health* (March 1962): 42.

³ Interview with Joe Weider, 14 December, 2005.

⁴ Willoughby, *Super-Athletes*, 225-227.

⁵ Prof. Edmond Desbonnet, "The Man Who Breaks Coins," *Strength & Health* (n.m.1948): 20 & 37. Clipping in David P. Willoughby "Coin Breakers" file. Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁶ David P. Willoughby, "Sampson & Cyclops—The Coin Breakers," *Iron Man*, p. 28-29, 53. Undated clipping in David P. Willoughby "Coin Breakers" file, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, The University of Texas at Austin. Willoughby's point can be extended to coin-bending because it seems odd that so few of the true giants of strength history—Louis Cyr, Apollon, Herman Goerner, Arthur Saxon, Mac Batchelor, etc.—have ever claimed that they could bend or break coins, even though some of them had great hand strength.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28. See also: C. A. Sampson, *Strength* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co. 1895), 129.

⁸ Leo Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horseshoes and Cannons: The History of Strongmen*, Vol. 1. (Alliance, NE: by the author, 1975), 177.

⁹ Alan Calvert, *The Truth about Weight Lifting* (Philadelphia: by the author, 1911), 73-74.

¹⁰ Alan Calvert, "The Mat," *Strength* (October 1924), n.p. Clipping in David P. Willoughby, "Coin Breakers" file, Todd McLean Physical Culture Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

¹¹ Untitled, undated clipping from *Muscle Power* in David P. Willoughby "Coin Breakers" file, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

¹² Interview with Tom Lincir, December 7, 2005.

¹³ Charles McMahon, *Feats of Strength and Dexterity* (Philadelphia: I.W. Kloppe Co, 1927;), 52-54.

¹⁴ Willoughby, *Super-Athletes*, 40-41.

¹⁵ Jon Chase, "Quote, Unquote: Robert Duvall," *FHM Magazine*, (May 2003): 76.

¹⁶ Dennis Rogers interviewed Joe Rollino in August of 2005 at Slim "The Hammerman" Farman's home.



Dear IGH,

I enjoyed the August issue, from cover to cover. The coverage of the Arnold Classic was super, and the explanation of how the sequence of events affected the events that followed, was insightful. Much can be said about how training routines are affected by the sequence of exercises. I wonder how Norbert Schemansky would have done with a straight shaft Apollon Barbell, instead of the bent shaft original he lifted many years ago?

The article on Alan Calvert gave much needed credit to his place in weight training history. The last issue did justice to the Hoffman team's visit to Springfield College and Dr. Karpovich, which opened the eyes of the professor to the benefit and truths about weight training.

The Farnese Hercules is probably one of the two most impressive statues showing human strength and power. The Laocoon Group being the other. Michaelangelo was the master, but Lysippos' rendition is the most powerful, ahead of the other great Greek sculptors.

Also, it was good to read the letter from Pete George, a very great weightlifter. Its good to see many of the greats from the past are still around, interested and contributing to the sport.

John Crainer

Via Email



Dear IGH:

Latest IGH was a zinger! I've always admired the Farnese. Perhaps you could do a similar piece on the "Blind and Chained Samson". . . it is even more massively muscular and apparently no one knows much about its origin or its current location. David Webster sent me a nice drawing of it, but I believe I've only seen one photograph—in an early issue of *Muscle Mag International*.

Of course the Calvert item was right up my alley. I noted that Kim mentions that "after the acquisi-

tion of Milo Barbell, Hoffman began his own equipment company, York Barbell." Truth of the matter is that he bought the bankrupt Milo company in 1935, but had begun manufacture of barbells as early as 1929 when he made the first York Olympic set by copying a Berg set brought over by Milo Steinborn. These sets were advertised in the first issue of *Strength & Health* in December 1932. In an interesting marketing ploy, Hoffman hired Robert Jones, the former manager at Milo, to market Milo barbells in Philadelphia and even ran ads for this venture in *Strength & Health* until 1942 when the war effort impacted the foundries.

Mike BonDurant

Via Email

Ed. Note: You're correct, Mike, and we thank you for pointing out the error. On page 36 of John Fair's history of the York Barbell Company (MuscleTown USA) he writes, "In 1929 Bob [Hoffman] began making barbells from the same facilities used in the manufacture of home heaters, but 1932 marks the real beginning of the operation." Fair goes on to explain that very few sets were sold in the early years. The record for a number of years was the twenty-two barbell sets sold during the July 4th week of 1933.

Dear IGH:



Just a quick note to tell youall (is that a word?) how much I enjoyed the new issue of IGH. The articles on *Strength* magazine and the Farnese Hercules were superb! A lot of good solid info was in there—you reaffirmed why IGH is so good and also more importantly so important! I cannot say I missed you two at the AOBs dinner this year because I did not make it myself. I do not know if you two were there or not; I had some work and personal issues. I for one hope to see you two next year up there. I think when it comes to an event like that—two people involved with the history of the game need to be there.

Howard Havener

Via Email

Ed. Note: "Youall" is indeed a word, particularly down here.

Dear IGH:

Enclosed is check for my subscription renewal. In looking over some back issues I noticed an article on Rosetta Hoffman and her impact on women's weight training. I think your readers will find the rest of her life interesting as well.

Bob Hoffman told me that upon their divorce he gave Rosetta \$50,000 as part of the settlement but that that was gone within six months so he started sending her monthly checks.

Her third husband was a man by the name of Morris. Rosetta claims she bought a small farm near Eder, Maryland but lost it because Morris got in some trouble and she wanted to keep him out of jail. I don't know what the trouble was but Morris was known to do a lot of gambling. As Bob's checks came in the money was spent. A man who owned a country store in Eder told me she would cash the check into nickels and spend hours playing the pinball machine until it was gone.

Later they were able to get a small house in nearby Fruitland, Maryland. On the property was a small garage so Morris started selling a few used cars but continued to gamble. One day a man was pumping air into a tire and the tire blew. The man was badly hurt (lost a leg) and there was a lawsuit. Once again Rosetta was about to lose her home.

Rosetta told me that Bob Hoffman, Alda Ketterman, and a lawyer showed up with a suitcase of money and purchased the house. So Rosetta and her husband still had a place to live.

I first met Rosetta when Dick Bachtell came down with his wife Connie. Sometimes he would hunt in this area. We decided to pay Rosetta a visit. We pulled into the yard and knocked on the door. There was no answer so we continued knocking. Connie saw a large woman on crutches looking at us thru the window and called her by name and Rosetta opened the door.

Rosetta was a big woman, on crutches and diabetic. She spent most of her time sitting in a big chair watching a large television set that Bob had given her. Her hair was long and yellowish white. I could tell she was lonely and in a bad way. When her teeth gave her trouble she would work them loose and pull them out over a period of time. Not a very good quality of life!

I would occasionally stop by and see her when in the area. She and Morris visited our house one time and got into a verbal fight right in our living room. She could go off at a moment's notice. She seemed to live in

the past and talked about when she was America's sweetheart. She asked me if her picture was still on the wall at the Broad Street gym. [She had] no idea that the company had grown and moved to Ridge Avenue and later to Route 83. She seemed to delight in telling how she smashed the bathtub and other fixtures in the house on Lightner Hill after Bob showed up with a girlfriend.

Sometimes she would praise Bob and later talk abusively about him. Her attitude seemed to be that even though she was married to another man, Bob still had an obligation to support her because she went to the meets with him and cooked for the weightlifters. She did help Bob get started. After her husband died in 1990 she continued to sit in the chair and watch the television. I think her husband's relatives and others looked out for her. When I saw in the paper that she had died on Christmas Day 1993, I called Alda Ketterman and told her. I hope this information completes the story.

Charles Spencer
Snow Hill, Maryland

**Dear IGH:**

Thanks for the incredible job you ALL do, I know this is sort of a niche endeavor but people like me really do notice and appreciate the work and effort you put in to help us feel a part of something special and magical from long bygone days. Thank you.

Kevin R. Wade
Watertown, TN

**Dear IGH:**

Since the demise of *Strength & Health* and *Muscular Development* in the mid 1980s and the loss of *Iron Man* to commercial bodybuilding there has been no publication recording the outstanding events that have occurred in our beloved Iron Game during the past twenty-five years. To my mind this is a serious omission as there will be no written record for future historians to refer to when researching.

Would it be possible to have a section in *IGH* covering recent history such as the weight-lifting results from Olympic, World and National Championships, cur-

rent World and National records no matter what type of lifting and if possible, profiles of current Champions throughout the world? I hope you will consider this suggestion, as there is no other publication capable of understanding or even being aware of the wide spectrum of the Iron Game other than the excellent *Iron Game History*.

Vic Burdett
United Kingdom

*Although we do run some contemporary pieces—like the Quarter Master article in this issue—we don't have the space to begin covering current events on a regular basis. However, if you haven't seen them, you might want to take a look at **Dennis Reno's Weightlifter's Newsletter**; **Randall Strossen's Milo**, which covers all aspects of the iron game; and **Mike Lambert's Powerlifting USA**.*

Dear IGH:



I have been intending to write ever since the March *IGH* about the Weider Endowment Fund—a great achievement, well done. I'm reminded of Tennyson, who wrote in "Ulysses," "Old age hath yet his honor and his toil . . . Some work of noble note may yet be done, Not unbecoming men that strove with gods."

In my own modest way, I shall remain a Patron of *IGH*. It's nice to be in a list of subscribers that includes Dave Draper, Walt Marcyan, Pudgy Stockton, Frank Stranahan, Joe and Betty Weider, and memorial tributes to Steve Reeves and Chuck Sipes.

Les Longshore
Birmingham, Alabama
Dear IGH:



I came across your website as I was perusing the Internet for information on the history of physical culture, a topic in which I recently have become interested. I was amazed by the depth of the text and pictorial documentation of the iron game and physical culture, in general, that exists online, and even more amazed to find out about

your Collection. I am sure it is, and will continue to serve as, a very important resource for the study of this field. Congratulations and thank you!

I was a competitive high school and college powerlifter in the late Seventies and early-to-mid Eighties and followed you and Terry as leaders in the field. Graduate school (and then my children) took me away from powerlifting and weightlifting, for a long while, but I am starting to get back into it a bit. Currently I am more involved in Xingyi Chuan, a Chinese martial art, and have "re-discovered" the history of the iron game and general fitness and physical culture through my involvement in the history and theory of Chinese physical culture. It would be a great topic for me to study more formally at some point, I guess.

But I was wondering, has anybody made a documentary movie, on the order of Ken Burns' "Baseball", about the history of the iron game and/or physical culture? I think it would be not only important, but also well received.

Lou Yurasits
Via email

*Two major documentaries have looked at the field of physical culture: **Fit: Episodes in the History of the Body** came out in 1991 (www.straightaheadpictures.com). The television series **Modern Marvels** also did a two hour special in 1998. The first episode is called, "The Quest for Health" and the second hour is called, "The Quest for Muscle." You can order copies from www.historychannel.com.*

Dear IGH:



Ian Batchelor was my favorite uncle when I was growing up and I am trying to locate any and all information I can to insure that I can keep his memory alive for the younger folk in my family. My mother's maiden name was Alice Johansen and she had a sister "Bea" who married Ian. They had one daughter "Janice."

Ian and Bea lived in Gardenia, CA and my family lived in Salinas, CA. Ian and Bea used to come visit us now and then and he would entertain us all. He occasionally went deer hunting with my dad but he was too big to ride our horse. He LOVED to drink beer and lots of it. Bea seemed to try to keep up with him but it cost her in the end. I visited them sometime in the late 60's and my time with Ian was nothing less than wonderful. His stories of his bartender days were most entertaining. When my mother passed away in 1992, I got to keep an old scrap book that contained a few newspaper articles about Ian. I have the *Mighty Joe Young* video where he was one of the ten strong men that had the tug-of-war with Joe. And, I have a few photos from 1957 that I took using my old Brownie Hawkeye camera when he visited our family when my father passed away. I would have been thirteen. I also came across your April 1995 article posted on the web from *Iron Game History* that was written by Terry Todd, entitled "Mac and Jan." The story brought mostly smiles but I was upset to learn how Janice (his only daughter) may have taken advantage of him in his final years. Other than that, my archives are pretty empty. When I speak of Ian I do not want to sound like an old geezer making up unbelievable stories. Ian, bless his heart, seemed unbelievable. Anyhow, any assistance you might provide me would be most appreciated.

James J. Foster

Via email

We're happy to learn that good old Mac is well-remembered by some of his relatives. You're right, by the way, to consider him remarkable, as he was a truly unique man. Most historians of strength would consider him to have been history's greatest arm-wrestler, as he apparently took on all comers for approximately twenty-five years and was never beaten during that time. He would play right or left-handed, with a thumblock grip (the normal grip used in arm or wrist-wrestling) or an openhand grip—depending on the challenger's preference.

I visited him quite a few times over the later part of his life, with the first visit coming in 1965 when he was about fifty-eight years old and I was 27. I went to his bar that day with Bert Elliot, one of his good friends from the strength world. Mac was then retired from arm wrestling at that time, having quit at fifty and lost a bit of weight, but he was still a big man—weighing about 280. I was in my lifting prime then, and weighed about 330, and I was proud when he compared our hands and showed me that our hands were almost exactly alike in size and shape. We were both a couple of inches over 6', but our hands weren't overly large for our overall size—which goes to show that hand strength isn't limited to men with huge hands.

One of the things we have in our collection here at the University of Texas that we particularly treasure is a hip-lifting belt Mac gave us on one of our trips to visit him at his house in Gardenia. He used to practice hip-lifting, which involves straddling something heavy, hooking a chain to it, and hooking that chain to a wide leather belt that went over the hips and then down to crotch-height or a bit lower so the chain could be connected to the rings at the ends of the belt. This allowed the lifter to slightly bend his legs, place his hands on his thighs, and then straighten his legs so that he would lift the heavy object (usually lying on the ground) a few inches. Huge poundages can be lifted in this way, and Mac used to often practice with a large telephone pole. I think he lifted over 2000 pounds in this way, so he had a high level of strength in other parts of his body than just his hands.

I always considered him a special friend, and I was saddened by the circumstances of his last years. But he had a heck of a life when he was in his glory days, and he gave a great deal of happiness to a great many people.

