

The Roark Report—

The Value of Accuracy

Joe Roark

From 1985 to 1989, Joe Roark distinguished himself by publishing a fascinating, carefully researched newsletter called the *Roark Report*. Beginning in this issue, a smaller but no less well researched version of the *Roark Report* will be carried every time *Iron Game History* is published.

It was a year when some of the old lifters died, and newcomers joined the hefting of weights. Kurt Saxon died, and Dietrich Wortmann, and Gregory Paradise. And a large lady named Katie Sandwina passed away. But a more petite young lady that year was in Los Angeles, flat on her back wearing a cupped, terrycloth bikini top, blue jeans rolled up once at the ankles, and she was, according to photographer Philippe Halsman, holding a ten pound barbell in each hand. She was demonstrating how she “fought gravity” using the weights, and was performing what at first glance appears to be a dumbbell bench press. Marilyn Monroe was pumping iron.

Most modern readers of the new book, *Marilyn Monroe and the Camera*, will not detect the dumbbell-called-barbell error. Often, those of us who have been intimate with the details of our sport for decades have nonetheless ignored correct terminology, and have thus rendered ourselves ignorant in the eyes of the general public who, while not able to distinguish dumbbell from barbell from swingbell, could correct certain of the terms we have persisted in abusing through the years.

For decades we wrote “prone” (face down) when we meant “supine” (face up) while describing a bench press. For example, *Lifting News* magazine, in November of 1955, mentions a contest involving a supine press, then the January 1956 issue calls it the prone press. No wonder that in those days the current powerlifts were known as the “odd lifts”. One of the early odd lift meets to be called a “powerlifting” contest was on October 18, 1958 at the Boston YMCA. The lifts contested were the upright row, the squat, and the “prone.”

Other misnomers have lodged in our lifting language. A lift can be clean (free of contact with the legs and lower torso, that is, “clean” of the body) or a lift can be continental (allowed to touch, indeed rest upon, body sections in a segmented ascent). You cannot perform a continental clean, but the organizers of the odd lift contest held August 4, 1962 in Berkeley, California did not know this and among the 30 lifts offered for competition (the lifter selected six) were the “continental clean” and the “continental clean and jerk behind the neck”. [Ed. note: The term “clean” as it applies to lifting evidently found its way across the Atlantic and lodged in the

southern United States, where such expressions as, “He lifted that bale of hay clean over his head” are still heard, “clean” having come to mean, in that context, “all the way”.]

What’s in a name? History. And accuracy. The press was eliminated from competition in 1972 because it had so degenerated in form that it was pressing the point to call it a press—some men were pressing as much or more than they could clean and jerk, which, given the allowed thigh heave in the jerk, is impossible—sort of like saying you can speed walk as fast as you can run. Anyway, other names have had curious twists: the squat was earlier called the deep knee bend here in America, but the British also called it the deep knees bend. After all, both knees are involved, and given the huge history the British have with one and two-handed lifts, such distinctions are appropriate. Not all two-handed lifts had one-handed counterparts, however. The one-handed bench press comes to mind.

The bench Marilyn Monroe used in 1952 was flat, unadjustable, unpadded, and had no uprights attached to hold a barbell (much less the two “barbells” she was lifting). Bench press contests in the early days often involved either a pullover from the floor to starting position, or the weight was handed to the lifter. When uprights became attached to the benches, one dilemma was whether the lifter should have to unrack the bell or have the spotters lift it off.

When did uprights become attached to benches? The bench by the York Barbell Company was introduced by Jim Park in the February 1953 issue of *Strength & Health* magazine, and the ad on page 37 reveals the price at \$29.95. Among earlier photos of benches with uprights was one of Floyd Page (died April 24, 1963) performing a 350 pound “prone press” (there’s that word again), shown in *Muscle Power*, August 1948. *Iron Man* referred to its bench as a ‘prone’ bench until May of 1975.

Is all of this just so much review with no relevance? No. Go to any gym and watch a limit curl being attempted. You will long for the day when upper back and butt had to remain in contact with a pole during a strict curl. The Deep Knee Bend is no longer deep. Leg stance in the deadlift has made comparing records of yesteryear and last year meaningless.

This column will be interested in accuracy. If sacred cows are sent to slaughter, well, perhaps it’s time to cut the bull.

(Note from Joe Roark: Letters are welcome at P.O. Box J, St Joseph, IL 61873. But replies to individuals will be as time allows.)
