



IRON GAME HISTORY



VOLUME 1 NUMBER 6

August 1991

A Pioneer of Physical Training

C.H. McCloy

Any people have contributed through the years to the growth of resistance training. Some have concentrated on competitive lifting of one sort or another, some have concentrated on bodybuilding, some have concentrated on the physical fitness aspects of weight training and some have concentrated on strength training for athletes. Charles Harold McCloy fits primarily into the last category, and even though his name is not too well known in the iron game these days, since he was never a famous lifter or physique star, he played a pivotal role in the debunking of the tenacious myth of the musclebound lifter.

McCloy was a giant in the field of physical education, serving from 1930 to 1954 as a Professor of Physical Education at the University of Iowa, and influencing in many ways the direction of his profession. In the days when most physical educators concentrated their efforts on competitive sports, McCloy's passion and preference was purposive exercise. Himself an almost obsessive exerciser, McCloy taught his students as much by personal example as by his lectures. A 1968 dissertation about McCloy's career by James R. Little features this aspect of his life.

"McCloy set an example of personal physical fitness that was widely acclaimed as being one of his most remarkable characteristics. Throughout his adult life, he maintained his body weight very close to 145 pounds. His height was five feet, eight inches. He was famous for his regular participation in personal exercise programs of a strenuous nature. His faculty colleagues...recalled that he routinely stopped whatever he was doing at about 3:30 P.M. and would have a cup of tea, relaxing for about thirty minutes. Then he went for his daily workout...He frequently exercised with the gymnastic team members. On other occasions he would play handball, tennis or badminton. He included calisthenics in his daily exercise routine in which he emphasized pull-ups. Annually on his birthday he would

demonstrate his ability to maintain a high level of muscular strength and endurance by doing as many pull-ups as possible. Students in his classes were invited to witness the demonstration and to count the number of pull-ups that he could do. McCloy stated that his record performance came on his fiftieth birthday when he was able to do forty-three consecutive pull-ups."

Besides the influence of his personal commitment to physical strength and endurance, McCloy made significant contributions to the fields of tests and measurements, the scientific analysis of sports skills, fitness for the armed forces, professional physical education and strength training for athletes. McCloy was a staunch enemy of the firmly entrenched idea, held by almost all of his professional colleagues as well as by the leading coaches in the United States, that the lifting of weights would cause an athlete to become slow, ill-coordinated and inflexible, in short, musclebound. McCloy believed strongly in the sort of physical activity a person could do in the privacy of the home, arguing that "Perhaps we should introduce our educational offspring to home rowing machines, rope skipping, weight lifting with the barbells, and to other available home exercise devices."



McCloy's fascination with all aspects of fitness drew him as the years passed to an examination of the myth of musclebinding. He had begun a personal program of weight training in 1942, at the age of 56, and his own experiences led him to challenge, through scientific investigations, this pervasive myth. Two of his students, Edward F. Chui and Edward Capen, were among the many who joined McCloy in his weight workouts, and out of their personal observations and desire to find the truth, they each conducted research for their Master's theses (Chui in 1948 and Capen in 1949) which helped dispel the belief that weight training should be avoided by athletes. These first research studies by McCloy's students were followed by others through the years, all of

which chipped away at the wrongheaded belief in the danger to athletes of weight training.

According to Little, three former varsity coaches at the University of Iowa told him that McCloy had urged them to use strength training for their athletes long before it became acceptable to do so. David Armbruster, the former coach of swimming, said, "I remember how McCloy tried to sell me on weight training for my swimmers. I absolutely refused, thinking it would make them muscle bound. Now look at the training programs!" And Otto Vogel, Iowa's former baseball coach, said of McCloy, "He was a pioneer in the scientific aspects of weight training and athletics. He was ten years ahead of others."

Near the end of his teaching career, McCloy helped one of his graduate students, Richard L. Garth, establish a weight training regimen for the University of Iowa's basketball team, whose members increased their vertical jump by an average of two and a half inches and became nationally ranked, thus helping to spread the gospel of resistance training for athletes. McCloy lectured widely about the Iowa program and wrote about it in an article published in the November, 1957 issue of *Strength & Health*, one of many joint

ventures between the famous physical educator and Bob Hoffman, publisher of *Strength & Health* and a long-time advocate of weight training as a way to improve a man in his "chosen sport."

These days, when even such hard-core muscle magazines as *Muscle & Fitness* feature articles such as the recent one about the training program of Nolan Ryan, when every broadcast of a professional football game has at least one reference to how much a certain player can bench press, and when the television coverage of Grand Slam events such as Wimbledon or the Masters in Augusta can be counted on to discuss the weight training programs of such athletes as Andre Agassi, Steffi Graf, Tom Kite or Ray Floyd, it's easy to forget that not too long ago anyone who maintained that a systematic program of progressive resistance would improve athletic performance would be looked at as either a fool or a charlatan. C.H. McCloy was neither a fool nor a charlatan and the cause of weight training for athletes was given a truly significant push when the power of his worldwide reputation and the research he supervised began to force the profession of physical education, which had been wrong for many decades, to put the myth of musclebinding to the test of objective scientific investigation —Terry Todd