



Although we don't normally bring you news of recent physical culture contests, we thought the following might be of interest. Mia Finnegan, the recent winner of the 1993 Fitness America competition, is the great-granddaughter of Professor Attila. Mia's mother, Margaret Seppe, is Siegmund and Grace Klein's grandniece and Attila's granddaughter.



Dear *IGH*:

Joe Roark you once wrote to me that writing is a chore for you—not natural to you, I think you said. Well, your piece on Chuck Sipes was (is) a fine job, well handled and quite as sensitive to his situation as any eulogy I've ever seen written in "iron" publications. "Way-to-go," and "Atta-boy."

Paul Kelso,  
Tochigi, Japan

Due to an error on our part, Joe Roark's regular column does not appear this issue, "The Roark Report" will return with Volume Three, Number Four.



Dear *IGH*:

I teach in the Department of Physical Education at the University of Ottawa. I'm in the process of doing a study on health and longevity in people over ninety years of age. I'm wondering if you have any information on life expectancy and health in the "strong persons" population.

Sean Egan, Faculty of Health Sciences  
University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

Although no one has, to our knowledge, done a scientific study of strength and longevity among weight trainers, there are several individuals who have evaded far longer than most the ravages of time. Ninety-five year old Milo Steinborn trained regularly with barbells and walked on his treadmill right up to the time of his death. He even bought himself a new wrestling mat when he was in his late eighties in order to get in some of what he called "rolling around."

Another of our personal heroes is Dr. Collister Wheeler of Portland, Oregon. Dr. Wheeler began training with barbells in 1913. Now *one hundred years old*, (he will turn 101 in June of 1994), Dr. Wheeler has set sixteen age group world records in master's track and field and, sixteen age group world records in swimming. Many of these records were set after age ninety. Dr. Wheeler also bears the distinction of being our oldest subscriber to *Iron Game History*. Two years ago we both smiled when we received Dr. Wheeler's twelve-issue subscription renewal check. However, that two year subscription is now up, and so, in honor of Dr. Wheeler's one hundred years of vigor, we are gifting him him with a free subscription to *IGH* for the remainder of his life. And that, by the way, is an offer we will gladly extend to any other Iron Gamer who hits the century mark.

Perhaps other *IGH* readers could let Professor Egan know of other nonagenarians. His address is: Professor Sean Egan, School of Human Kinetics, 125 University, P.O. Box 450 Station A, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1N 6N5.



Dear *IGH*:

The most I let myself hope for was that the article I sent in about Bob Samuels would serve as the basis for an article on Bob, written by someone else who could use my information. To have the article printed under my name was a great honor. In this world it seems like the real heroes are never recognized, their names washed out in time except for the influence they had on the lives of others. Bob Samuels is one of these quiet heroes and he has, at last, received the recognition he deserves.

Like John Grimek in physical culture and Lou Thesz in pro wrestling, Bob Samuels is one of the last of his ilk to be still alive and training. It would be a shame if these men and women were forgotten, especially in terms of their philosophies of life. Your publication keeps the Fellowship of Ironmen if not alive, then at least remembered by caring people. This is why we must somehow get the stories of the surviving strongmen and women in print. I once lived in the Brooklyn area where Joe Greenstein—the Mighty Atom—lived, yet I never looked him up. Katie Sandwina lived until 1952 yet I

never met anyone who bothered to look her up where she and her husband ran a bar in New York. I would have given about anything to meet the amazing Stan Zybyzsko or George Hackenschmidt, but have never met anyone who knew them. I should have made the effort.

In a recent issue of your journal, I enjoyed seeing the picture of Primo Carnera. I enclose a picture you might enjoy seeing, taken when Primo was at the end of his athletic career. It was about 1961, and he came back to wrestle in a tag team match with Bruno Sammartino as his partner. He was about fifty-four years old and still a remarkable physical specimen, especially his tree-like legs. His tremendous hands are quite in evidence. Bruno had big, thick hands with huge wrists, yet Primo's hand completely covers Bruno's. I have shaken hands with both Primo and Gil Hodges, the old Dodger fast baseman who was said to have the largest hands in sports, but Primo's dwarfed his. He was not that bad a boxer, and a tremendous strength athlete who, according to Milo Steinborn who managed him during his fifteen years as a professional wrestler, could military press 265. Despite those monumental hams, Primo was an excellent pen and ink artist.

By the way, I was doubly honored to have my article printed next to Kim Beckwith's excellent piece on Thomas Jefferson "Stout" Jackson, which I found fascinating. I particularly appreciated that she mentioned the character and humanity of the man in helping the "Tejanos" during his lifetime. According to old border patrolmen I have spoken to, they were treated often as practically sub-humans. So, it appears that, like Bob Samuels, Stout had a genuine compassion for the underdogs of this world. Both came up the hard way, and neither forgot their humble beginnings.

I could see that Ms. Beckwith—like most students of strength history—was grappling with the legitimacy of early claims and how they stack up against feats performed by modern strength athletes of today. There has to be critical openmindedness, but they should not be thrown out just because they were not performed in situations pre-ordained to countenance their legitimacy. If this were done, remarkable feats performed by extraordinary people would be washed out in history. Should the legends of plowboys and pioneer women be cast aside in the face of modern powerlifting contests and Olympic-style meets? I think and hope not. There is, of course, that "other kind of strength" that is not measured by doing bench presses or clean-and-jerks. The great wrestling champion and physical-intellectual marvel Stanislaus Zybyzsko could only military press 253 pounds, yet he could lift any struggling opponent over his head to slam him, something a modern competitive lifter probably could not do. Could a modern women's powerlifting champion lift and carry a cannon or bend iron bars into the shape of an "S" as Katie Sandwina could? Could a modern gym-trained athlete perform the sheer physical efforts an old-time plowboy or blacksmith could do? You see what I mean.

I think that the criterion for accepting a claimed feat of strength as verifiable (and all knowledge of the past is second-hand and therefore hypothetical to some extent) is pure common sense.

We must consider the veracity of the source, the number and known character of the witnesses, correspondence with other strength feats performed by the individual under consideration, and consistency of reports.

Sure, natural leverage, bodily proportions as regards bone length as well as what Bob Hoffman called "nervous lifters" (those whose nervous energy could be channeled into lifting feats) can enable smaller people without huge muscle bulk to perform remarkable feats of strength. But it is hard to believe that a man the size of Stout Jackson could out backlift Louis Cyr.

Allen Smith  
New Orleans, Louisiana



Dear IGH:

I am fascinated with *Iron Game History* and in particular with the recent input about the great and only Bob Hoffman.

I became acquainted with *Strength & Health* magazine back in the 1930s when as a high school graduate I weighed 135 at a height of 5'8". I picked up a used *S&H* magazine at a news stand and when I saw the pictures of the "greats" in the magazine, I was hooked. I made my own weights, started working out, bought used weights, and then bought some new ones, finally accumulating four thousand pounds.

I was one of the ten finalists in the *S&H* self improvement contest in 1942; won a nice cup, which I still have and cherish. I was born and raised in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, a little town about thirty miles from York, Pennsylvania, which back then, and for several decades later, was the center of the weightlifting world.

After seeing all those pictures in the early issues of *Strength & Health*, when I got a decent car in the mid-thirties. I used to drive to York and go to the York Barbell Company which was then at 51 N. Broad Street. This was usually Saturdays when the greats put in their real lifting day. The greats were John Grimek, Steve Stanko, Tony Terlazzo and, of course, Mr. Weightlifting himself, Bob Hoffman. I got to be on speaking terms with Bob and many of the other greats. Elmer Farnham was, at that time, about my bodyweight so I patterned my activity after him.

Well, Bob, as you may remember, was a "bug" on the bent press. You remember how tall he was and around 260 pounds. Well, he would take the fixed barbell of 250 pounds, stand it on one end, bend down and then proceed to press the bar overhead and stand up with it. He then did something I shall never forget. He simply walked away from the barbell that he held overhead and down the barbell would come crashing. The entire building shook, for their workout

room was on the second floor of that old, old building. Then to top it all, Bob would say, "There is no one around here that can make the barbell bounce that high."

By the way, you might be interested to know that I am working on a doctoral dissertation at age seventy-six!

**Clarence Rudegeair**  
Zephyrhills, Florida

**Congratulations. Several years ago, one of us sat on the dissertation committee of a man who received his Ph.D. at the age of seventy-nine. Gordon Wallace was a champion racewalker and wrote about the history of his sport in his dissertation. Good Luck.**



**Dear IGH:**

Sorry to hear about Ed Jubinville, I enjoyed reading about his life. I had his muscle control book but lost it when I moved. Is there any way I can purchase it—or any other muscle control books?

**Bob Haley**  
North Bergen, New Jersey

**Anyone wishing to sell a copy of Jubinville's book may write to: Bob Haley, 1314 6th Street, North Bergen, New Jersey, 07047.**



**Dear IGH:**

I am a biblical scholar working on a commentary on the Old Testament book of Zechariah. Odd as it may seem, this has led me to take an interest in the history of weightlifting.

Zechariah 12:3 reads as follows in the New Revised Standard Version: "On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves." Many commentators, beginning with Jerome in the fifth century A.D., have compared this verse with the sport of weightlifting in ancient times. Jerome wrote that he had seen such a large stone in the Athens of his day which was lifted by the Athenian young men as a trial of strength, and suggested that the stone of Zech 12:3 would have been

the Jewish equivalent of that stone in Athens.

Some modern commentators have followed Jerome's explanation, but others reject it. For example, the most recent commentary on Zechariah, by Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, has the following comment on this verse: "Thus the suggestion. . .that this metaphor derives from the Greek sport of weight lifting posits a somewhat farfetched association. Such a connection derives from an assumption that this text is Maccabean, a date we reject. Thus, the idea of this image referring to a weightlifting contest cannot be defended with respect either to date or to the nuances of the words employed" (Zechariah 9-14 [Anchor Bible 25C; New York: Doubleday, 1993] 317).

In trying to make my mind up about this I would like to have an expert opinion on the following questions.

1. Is it true, as the Meyers seems to assume, that weightlifting was an exclusively Greek sport in antiquity, so that its presence in Zechariah would imply Greek influence? Or, was weightlifting more widespread in the ancient world?

2. What kind of injury would typically be associated with trying to lift too heavy a weight? An abdominal hernia? The Hebrew word translated "grievously hurt themselves" in the NRSV seems to mean literally "cut themselves" which could conceivably refer to people "rupturing themselves" if that is good English. Would that make sense in a weightlifting context?

Can you shed any light on these matters? I would be grateful if you could give me some relevant bibliography, or assist me in any other way.

**Al Wolters**  
Redeemer College  
Ancaster, Ontario, Canada

The earliest depiction of weight lifting of which we have a record occurs on the walls of a funerary chapel at Beni-Hassan in Egypt. This drawing, done approximately forty-five hundred years ago, depicts three figures in various postures of raising overhead what appear to be heavy bags. The bags are lifted in what would now be termed a one-banded swing. Both the exercise and the shape of the bags are reminiscent of Indian club exercises. Records can be found as early as 1896 BC of strength feats being practiced in what are now known as the British Isles. The early Irish or Tailtin Games included a form of weight throwing known as rotheleas or the "wheel feat." It is certainly true, of course, that stone lifting was a popular activity among the Greeks. Norman E. Gardiner, in *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals*, observed: "These stories of weight-lifting [among the Ancient Greeks] have been strangely confirmed by discoveries in Greece. At Olympia a block of red sandstone was found, bearing a sixth-

century inscription to the effect that one Bybon with one hand threw it over his head. . . At Santorin, another such block has been found, a mass of black volcanic rock, weighing 480 kilos. The inscription on it, which belongs to the close of the sixth century, runs as follows: "Eumastas the son of Critobulus lifted me from the ground." (p. 82-83).

Regarding your second question, it is certainly possible for a man to rupture himself while trying to lift a large, unwieldy rock. The word "cut," as you may know, is in common use among farmers in many countries. The reference is to the castration or "cutting" of bull calves. Our guess is that this use of the verb "to cut" is the most likely. However, could the Hebrew possibly translate to mean "Year themselves?" If so, perhaps the reference is simply to torn muscles which are far more common than hernias.



Dear IGH:

I have been a weightlifter for thirty years, and I grew up reading *Strength & Health* and *Ironman* magazines, admiring the now-considered old timers: John Grimek, Steve Reeves, George Eiferman Reg Park, etc.

Six years ago, while visiting New York, I was lucky enough to attend the annual meeting of the Oldtime Barbell and Strongman Association where I met in the flesh some of the heroes of my youth. It was a very rewarding experience.

All this was refreshed in my mind after reading a story by Dr. Kenneth Rosa, in the recent issue of your magazine. Dr. Rosa's account was so vivid that I felt as if I had been there in person.

Kudos to Dr. Rosa and to Joe Roark for their fine articles. And, kudos to you two for editing a very special magazine.

Eduardo Franco  
Madrid, Spain.

In the last issue, we placed Dr. Rosa in Brooklyn, not the Bronx. We regret the error.



Dear IGH:

I am currently working on a research project on Louis Cyr (1863-1912), the well-known Canadian strongman and on other strongmen of the Province of Quebec for the cultural ministry of Quebec and the Chamber of Commerce of St. Jean de Matha. We are attempting to create a center near Joliette in the Lanaudiere region on this subject. Could you please refer me to any person or institution that might have information they would be willing to share about Cyr and/or about any other Quebec strongmen?

Jean-Francois Leclerc  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Perhaps the most authoritative place to start would be with David Norwood's masters thesis on the life of Louis Cyr entitled: "The Sport Hero Concept and Louis Cyr," which he did for the Department of Human Kinetics at the University of Windsor in Ontario. We reprinted a section of Norwood's fascinating thesis in Volume 1 Number 2 of *Iron Game History*. Then, we would suggest a look at Ben Weider's, *The Strongest Man In History: Louis Cyr . . . Amazing Canadian* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1976). A belt of Cyr's is at the York Barbell Hall of Fame in York, Pennsylvania. If any other readers have suggestions, please contact Jean Francois Leclerc at: 6774 Des Ereables, Montreal, Quebec, H2G 2N3.

