

*by Jim Murray*

# **Jim Lorimer: The Iron Game's Greatest Promoter**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But this is about Jim Lorimer, not me. What was he doing? He had left the FBI (too many transfers for a young father with a growing family) and was working for the Nationwide Insurance Company. His merits were soon recognized and he was transferred from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, to the home office in Columbus, Ohio. This is

where his organizational abilities really blossomed. Jim had continued to train with weights and maintained his interest in track and field. In 1959 he attended the first U.S.-Soviet dual meet in Philadelphia, where the U.S. men's team narrowly defeated the Soviet men, but the Soviet women soundly thrashed the American women. The Soviets combined the men's and women's scores and claimed victory for their

superior socialist system. Jim was horrified at the obvious lack of technique and training shown by the American women. He noted, for example, that the U.S. girls were still using the long-obsolete scissors style in the high jump.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PHOTO COURTESY JIM MURRAY



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

PHOTO COURTESY JIM MURRAY

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

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

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

That solved part of the problem, but then it

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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