

A decorative border composed of several barbells of varying sizes, arranged in a rectangular shape around the central text.

Vic Boff

**My Friend:
John C. Grimek**

John C. Grimek was finally laid to rest on the beautiful, sunny day of Tuesday, November 24, 1998—thus ending one of the greatest chapters in the history of the Iron Game. His shining star in the world of physical culture and the Iron Game will glow forever.

For over six decades John Grimek has been heralded as the Monarch of Muscledom throughout the world. He was the greatest combination Iron Game athlete of all time and certainly one of the most popular—inspiring millions. He was a major influence in the lives of every top bodybuilder. Grimek was the only major bodybuilder in history who was never defeated in a contest. His charisma was so outstanding that everyone in the Iron Game wanted to meet him, shake his hand, or get an autograph.

This living legend was the Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, and Red Grange of his sport. He had the unique ability not only to excel in his sport, but through his extraordinary personality to dramatize it in a way that has never been equaled. He is the symbol and link between the modern era and the old-time strongman, exemplifying the very best of both periods.

John Grimek did it all in an amazing, unbelievable career that spanned eight decades. He has been featured in every significant muscle and physical culture magazine in the world. He has traveled the globe giving dynamic exhibitions that included muscle control, handbalancing, contortion, weightlifting and feats of strength. Powerful, agile, and extremely flexible, John also dispelled forever the illusion that bodybuilders were musclebound, and not athletes. In his prime, Grimek was a pioneer in making physical

educators see the light in their attitude toward weightlifting for body development and athletic training.

Back in the Thirties, a symposium comprising Y.M.C.A. authorities, physical educators, and interested citizens was held at the Central “Y” in Queens, New York. The symposium had been organized because some “Y” officials had decided to abolish weight training and lifting at all of their Y’s and schools throughout the country. The themes of this symposium were the same old bugaboos—lifting would make you “musclebound,” cause heart problems, create ruptures, and so on. When I heard about this symposium, I summoned Bob Hoffman, then coach of the York Barbell Weightlifting Team. Upon hearing of the meeting’s agenda, Bob attended with five of his greatest lifters: Grimek, John Terpak, Tony Terlazzo, Bobby Mitchell and Gord Venables. To make a long story short, Bob, with his vast knowledge easily refuted all their objections in his rebuttal. He then asked John to perform. The YMCA leaders and physical educators were amazed at John’s musculature and fascinated with his performance. He did splits and backbends, and showed that he could bend over with stiff legs and touch the floor with flat hands below the level of his feet. The people in the audience were just as awed to see that such a big, muscular man could be so light and graceful. Upon finishing this unbelievable demonstration, Grimek politely asked the man who was conducting the symposium, “Can you perform as I did?” When the reply was in the negative, John simply responded, “Then you’re musclebound, and I’m not.”



JOHN'S FLEXIBILITY NEVER FAILED TO AMAZE THOSE WHO SAW IT DEMONSTRATED.

Bob then went on to further his rebuttal by waging \$5000 that his five athletes would beat any five Olympians in a series of events outside their specialty. In other words, the swimmers wouldn't swim, the lifters wouldn't lift, etc. After having seen Grimek and the other York men, there were no takers. Because of this remarkable exhibition, the various objections to weight training and weightlifting were held at bay. This was a very significant event in the history of the Iron Game, and had Bob and John not appeared at the symposium the myth of musclebinding would have grown even stronger and in all probability weight training would have been banned in YMCAs all across the United States. We owe these men an appreciation beyond words for their tremendous efforts on our behalf. Surely no thinking person, after seeing the graceful, hugely muscled, yet nimble and flexible Grimek, would call him musclebound.

Professor E. M. Orlick, physical fitness au-

thority and former editor of *Mr. America* magazine admirably expressed John Grimek's greatness in September 1959: "At best, photographs of Grimek—like all photographs—are static. In them you see flashes of his greatness. But seeing him in person is to appreciate a perfect symphony of muscle mass, proportion, shape and definition, blended with perfect coordination and harmony of movement, so that each muscle flows and blends into the others with a marvelous rhythm." Such a description demonstrates that John Grimek, more than any other physique star, is responsible for the sophistication of modern posing routines.

John retired from the York Barbell Company in 1985 after 50 years with the company. Beginning in 1938, he wrote for *Strength & Health* and, after 1964, was the editor of *Muscular Development*. The September 1985 editorial of *Strength & Health* was appropriately titled: "Shoes Impossible to Fill." With Grimek's retirement, another great chapter in the history of the York Barbell Company came to an end. Over the years, this mecca for weightlifting and bodybuilding became so famous that the city of York, Pennsylvania became widely known as Muscletown, U.S.A.; and John Grimek was Muscletown's living symbol. Bob Hoffman summed up the magnitude of the man who did more than anyone else to make him wealthy when he responded to a young bodybuilder who had asked, "Was John Grimek as great as they say?" After a moment of thought, Bob replied, "Son, let me put it this way—in your lifetime, you will never see another Grimek."

John Grimek was a warm and personal friend of mine for over 60 years. His passing is a great loss to his dear friends and to all who knew him from afar. Our heartfelt, sincere condolences go to his lovely wife, Angela, his dear children, his grandchildren, his great grandchildren and his friends.

In conclusion, I would like to note that even though John is an Iron Game legend, he was not particularly famous in the wider culture. In other cultures things would have been different. I believe that if John C. Grimek had lived in the glory and grandeur of ancient Greece, he would have been proclaimed a national hero. His body and his name would have been immortalized in marble.