



I THOUGHT HE WAS IMMORTAL

JIM MURRAY

When one of my training buddies, Bill Zorichak, called to tell me he had seen an obituary for John Grimek in an area paper, *The Trentonian*, I couldn't believe it. I guess I really thought JCG was immortal. I hadn't seen him for a couple of years, but the last time Jane and I visited John and Angela in York I remarked after we left that John still looked like a superbly fit man of 40. He was past 80!

The first time I saw JCG was at the 1941 National Championships and Mr. America contest in Philadelphia. Jim Lorimer and I were 15-year-olds entering our sophomore year in high school and if any one thing sent us home determined to keep training hard with weights it was seeing John in action that night. There were a lot of splendid specimens in that contest, but Grimek clearly stood out as the winner from the moment he first appeared on a stage rigged in the middle of a boxing ring.

When I landed a job as managing editor of *Strength & Health* in 1951, I had the incredibly good fortune to share an office with John in the old York Barbell Company building on Broad Street. He was already 41 and 40 was old to a 25-year-old, but John didn't seem like a man of 40. He was a superbly muscled athlete who could have been my own age or younger—especially when it came to his enthusiasm and sense of humor. What a great time I had listening to his stories about all the people I had been

reading about since I was a teenager!

But one image that keeps coming to mind is of being in the *S&H* office at a few minutes before quitting time. John would get up from his desk and quietly leave the office. A few minutes later it would sound as though there was a blacksmith at work in the next room, which was the battered old York gym where so many champions had trained. John was in there working his way up the rack of solid dumbbells. He would start with a pair of 60s and work up in 10-pound jumps, doing 10 to 20 reps in a dumbbell incline press that was almost a flying exercise as he lowered the bells wide to the side and pushed them up to clang together at the top of the press. He did the exercise on a crude wooden bench that had a slight incline and he would finish with a pair of overweight hundreds—weighing two to four pounds heavy—that were rejects from the foundry. That rhythmic clanging went on for a total of about 75 reps in all. The ringing of those bells signaled it was time to work out.

I wish I could hear it again. But even though I can't, I believe my first reaction on hearing of John's passing was correct. He is truly an iron game immortal.



AT *STRENGTH & HEALTH* MAGAZINE'S OFFICES IN THE 1950S. THREE FAMOUS CHAMPIONS GATHER TO DECIDE EDITORIAL POLICY: STEVE STANKO, GORD VENABLES, AND JOHN GRIMEK.