

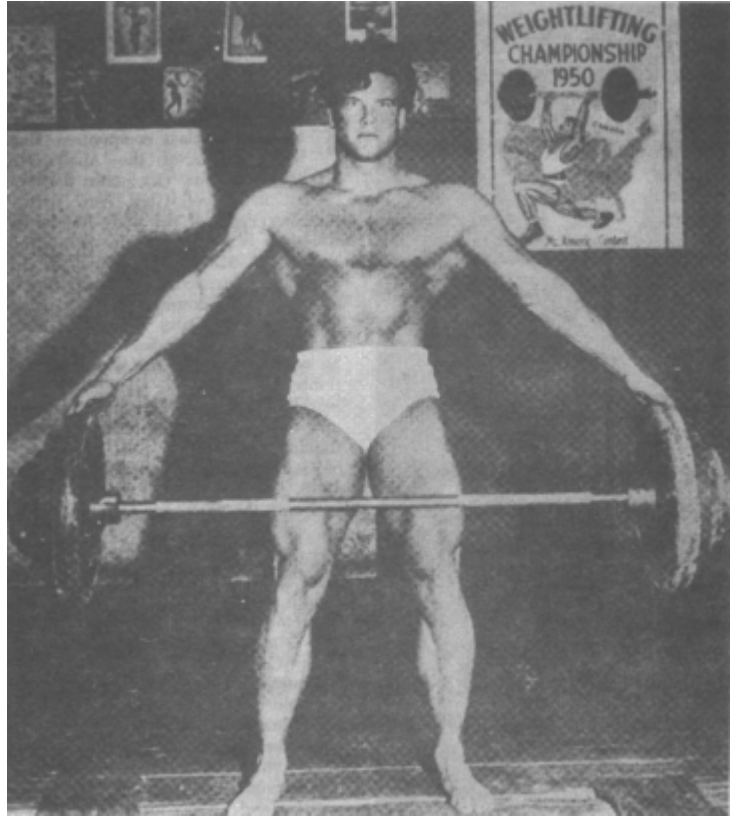
Finally Meeting the Man

by Lou Mezzanotte

It was not until the 1997 AAU Mr. America that I was finally able to realize a personal ambition and meet the man whose physique launched me on my own lifelong quest for strength and health. When I arrived at the contest, Steve Reeves was seated outside the auditorium where the pre-judging was taking place. He was busily shaking hands and signing autographs. I was immediately struck by his youthful appearance, and how massive he still looked for a man his age—positively huge. You never equate Reeves with forearms, probably because of his overall symmetry, but his forearms were incredible. As big if not bigger than any I had ever seen, and that includes Pearl, Sipes and Grimek.

I waited for the crowd to thin out before approaching him. When the moment came to finally shake his hand in person, it was like renewing a friendship with someone I had known all my life. Steve had an easygoing manner about him. I talked “training” with Steve a bit and asked him about a photograph I had seen of him where he is doing a deadlift, but instead of holding the bar, he is gripping the rims of the old-style 45-pound Olympic plates. Over the years, I had read that Steve used this exercise to widen his lats. Not so, said Steve. He indicated that when he trained at the old York Barbell Club for the Mr. Universe in 1950, everyone at the gym was encouraged to come up with an odd feat of strength others could try, so that little competitions could be held. Steve came up with that particular one. He said that no one was able to lift more than he did in this particular movement, and he wasn’t sure if it was because he was stronger than everyone else in this movement, or if his long reach gave him an advantage. Steve was able to do around 400 pounds in this manner.

Of course, I also asked Steve about calf-work and the proper way to do a calf raise, even though I had been doing them for 30 years and knew there were no secrets to be gleaned. But how many opportunities does one have to ask the “master” himself about calf training! Steve very patiently put his hand on the table where he



Although strength was not as important to Reeves as was development, in 1950 he showed the York Barbell gang one of his stunts. The weight shown above is less than the 400 pounds he could lift.

was sitting and simulated the exercise with his fingers emphasizing the need to come up as high as possible on the big toe. Then he looked at me with a straight face and said, “Of course, you’ll never have calves like mine.” The understatement of the year! We both laughed. I found that Steve had a sense of humor, too.

That evening at the Mr. America show, Steve was given another award for his contributions to the sport. He was decked out in a suit that made his already wide shoulders look even wider. No padding needed here! As I left the auditorium, my last glimpse of Steve was of him talking with fans and signing autographs, with that same easy manner. As I drifted out with the crowd into the summer evening air, I remembered back to the days when I trained in my folks’ basement with Steve’s picture up on the wall providing most of the inspiration. I never came close to emulating his impossibly perfect physique, of course, but I have been training for 30 some odd years now thanks in large part to Steve’s inspiration. I still maintain a high degree of strength and, more importantly at age 52, health. Many thanks, Steve. Rest in Peace.