STRONGMEN I REMEMBER BEST

. . . I MEET THE “CHAMP”

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Since my gymnasium is located right on the northern edge of Times Square, I am fortunate that most strongmen visitors to the Big Town make my place a port of call. So, I have met most of the Muscular Greats in the weight world during the more than thirty years I have spent in New York. Naturally, I often think back and sort out the celebrities who have climbed the stairs to my iron haven, and sometimes I wonder, “Who was the greatest of them all?”

Who, among all these hundreds, and perhaps thousands of visitors will be considered the greatest when a history is written? Who will be remembered fifty years from now as we remember Sandow today? And when I think of these things there is no hesitancy in my mind, and as I lean back in my chair I seem to see again, and live again one late afternoon in 1930 . . .

It was just past five o’clock and the gym was tilling with my evening pupils, when a sturdily built young fellow came walking through the door. I could tell he was a barbell man, but otherwise he was a complete stranger. I greeted him and he walked over to my desk, where I was seated, going over my records.

As he stood there, leaning with one hand on the desk, I suddenly got the impression that here was a young man entirely out of the ordinary. Perhaps it was because my eyes wandered to the hand planted on the desktop. It was not an unusually big hand but it was so shaped that it gave a definite impression of strength and power. My eyes followed the hand upward, and noted the thick powerful wrist which showed below his coat-sleeve. My curiosity
Another early photo of John Grimek, taken in July of 1934 at Perth Amboy, New Jersey. According to the back of this photo, John weighed 200 pounds on this day.

was aroused.

“Would you roll up that sleeve a minute?” I asked. He smiled a bit diffidently, and protested mildly, “Oh, you have seen better arms than mine,” but I persuaded him to remove his jacket and roll up his sleeve. The arm thus displayed could only be described by a phrase I have heard somewhere before . . . it was like the arm of Vulcance cast in bronze. The forearm swelled from the powerful wrist, and the biceps and triceps were moulded like a sculptor had chiseled them from stone. I thought, what a model this man would have made for Michelangelo.

Eager now to see if the rest of his physique matched his mighty arm, I asked him if he could change into trunks and join us in a light workout. It took a little persuading to get him to agree, but finally he donned a pair of trunks and walked out into the gym. The rest of my pupils stopped exercising immediately, for they, too, had never seen such a herculean build.

He picked up a 180-pound barbell, placed it behind his neck and began to “warm up” by doing a few deep-knee-bends, but his version of this time-worn exercise was something I had never seen
FROM THE BEGINNING, ONE OF THE
MOST UNUSUAL ASPECTS OF GRIMEK’S
PHYSIQUE WAS THE GREAT DEPTH OF
HIS RIB CAGE.

before or since. He went down into an
extremely low position, on flat feet,
almost sitting on the floor, and then
when his powerful thigh muscles pro-
pelled him upward, it seemed like they
were so tremendously strong that they
actually hurled him right off the floor
and a full foot or more straight up into
the air. Honestly, as he kept going
higher and higher, I was alarmed that on
his next leap his head would crash into
the ceiling!

All of this was so light and
effortless that it seemed he could keep it
up all night. The group of club mem-
ers looked at each other and then at
me. My mouth was open wider than
any of theirs! At each bend and leap, all
the massive, mighty muscles of back and legs seemed to coil and recoil
like a well-oiled machine. None of us had seen a musculature like this;
none had ever seen a man who was quite evidently so powerful that a
mere 180-pound barbell was as light as a wand. It was simply as if there
was no weight there at all!

By this time all of us were wondering who this magnificent
athlete was, where he had come from, and what he had done to create this
amazing panoply of muscles. So we asked him and he told us he lived
across the river in Jersey.

The name... John Grimek.

AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, THIS IS THE FIRST PICTURE OF JOHN GRIMEK
EVER PUBLISHED IN A MUSCLE MAGAZINE. IT APPEARED IN STRENGTH
MAGAZINE IN OCTOBER 1929. THE CAPTION IDENTIFIES GRIMEK AS
A SILVER MEDAL WINNER IN STRENGTH’S MONTHLY POSING CONTEST.