



IRON GAME HISTORY



VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1

FEBRUARY 1990

A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



adies and gentlemen, this is the inaugural issue of a modest journal we have chosen to call *Iron Game History*. For several years, we have felt that a publication of some sort should be available to people who want to write, read about or formally research the history of physical culture. In past days, magazines such as *Strength & Health* and *Iron Man* carried material

of this sort on a regular basis in either an article or a news format but *S & H* is no longer being published and *Iron Man* has become almost altogether devoted to the current bigtime bodybuilding scene. Among academic publications, the *Journal of Sport History* carries articles in this general field from time to time but the main thrust of that journal is, as its name implies, directed at competitive sports.

Because of this almost complete vacuum of information, it seemed an appropriate time to ask some of the leaders in the field about the idea of producing a small, bi-monthly publication that would interest both academics and people who, for one reason or another, enjoy reading about the days before anabolic steroids changed the field of physical culture so dramatically. We have discussed such a publication for some time with Vic Boff, the founder and president of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen, and this year at the Association's annual reunion dinner in New York City, we talked about it with many of those present and even distributed a questionnaire to determine what sorts of articles and information would be of most interest.

The reception given to the idea of such a publication was so positive that we decided to do what was necessary to organize, produce and distribute it. So when we returned to Texas, we immediately began calling people and asking them if they would help us by submitting articles and news. And with only one exception (a physician with a large practice), every

one we called agreed to help us. It should be clearly understood that *Iron Game History* is totally non-profit and will be published under the auspices of the McLean Fellowship in Sport History at the University of Texas (see page 10 for details about the McLean Fellowship). No-one will be paid for articles or artwork and no-one will be paid for editorial work. We will, of course, have to pay to have *IGH* printed and mailed but we have the necessary word processor-computers to allow us to do most of the production through a method that has come to be known as "desk-top publishing". In other words, we can type in the material we receive and, with the computers' help, do the "layout" of the pages.

The money we receive from subscriptions to *IGH* will be used to pay for printing and mailing and we will use surplus monies, should there be any, to increase the size and quality of the journal. It should go without saying that if too few people subscribe, we will be unable to continue producing and distributing *IGH*. We have chosen to personally bear the initial financial burden of getting the inaugural issue in your hands, but future issues will be sent only to subscribers.

It might be of interest to you to know that this first issue—Volume One, Number One—is being sent to current and past members of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen, people who have attended one of the past seven reunion dinners of the Association, past subscribers to *The Roark Report*, members of the North American Society of Sport History, managing editors of various magazines and newsletters in the field and people, for whom we had addresses, who might be interested.

Obviously, if you believe we have made a reasonable first step by launching *IGH*, we want you to subscribe and to either buy subscriptions for your friends or tell them about it. And for those of you who have the inclination and financial wherewithal to give a bit of extra help, we would be grateful for it. (Information about the various subscription options can be

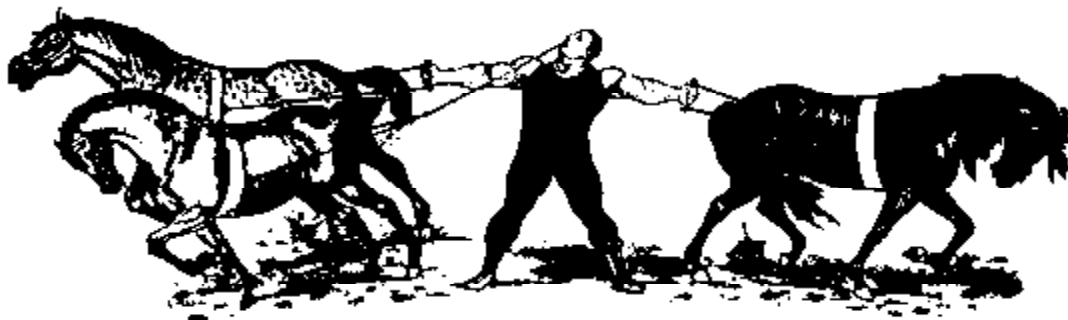
found on the last page.)

We also want you to provide us with direction for future issues. We need your help and, quite literally, cannot be successful without it. You'll notice that we have used a few photographs and drawings this time. The line drawings are reproductions from our physical culture archives here at the University of Texas and we would appreciate knowing whether you find them of interest. Remember, we don't have unlimited space and so the more photos and artwork we include, the less text we can use. Our plans call for either a 12 or a 16 page format for the first year, although we may increase the number of pages sooner if subscriptions and interest allow us to do so. We would also like to know if you prefer for us to continue with the same size type in future issues. Naturally, smaller type allows us to use more words, and we would like to have your input as we try to strike the correct balance.

Finally, we want to say that our main objective, as we begin what we hope will be a journal which outlives everyone who receives this first issue, is to provide accurate information about the fascinating world of physical culture. One of the ways we will do this will be to include, by the second or third issue, several articles which are written in an "academic" or footnoted style and which pass through a "refereeing" procedure which involves the article being checked for factual errors by several specialists in the field. It is our hope that these "academic" articles will be of as much interest and help to our "non-academic" readers as the articles by people like Joe Roark and Dave Webster will be to our academic readers.

Physical culture writing has been plagued since the beginning by exaggerated and hyperbolic stories about how much someone lifted or how big a certain strongman's arms were or how effective a certain exercise program was and we intend to do as much as we can to separate hard fact from soft fiction. In that spirit, we would like to dedicate this first issue to the memory of a man we miss more the longer he's gone—David P. Willoughby.

Terry and Jan Todd
The University of Texas
February 1990



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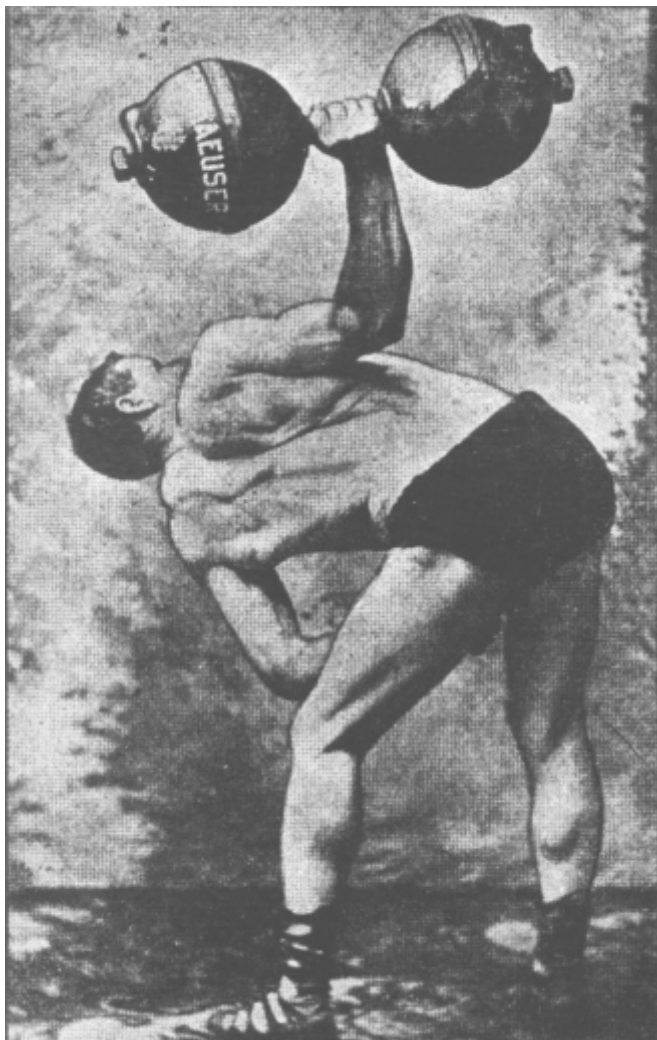
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John Y. Smith in the middle position of the bent press with 185

Profile:

John Y. Smith

Tom Ryan, Temple University

Tom Ryan competes in Masters' weightlifting and has written a book (unpublished) about strongmen.

For the inaugural issue of *Iron Game History*, it seemed appropriate to feature a strongman who exuded strength and vitality at an advanced age.

John Young Smith was born on April 22, 1866 to a Scottish father and German mother aboard an Austrian ship in Chinese waters (different, to say the least). Unfortunately for young John and the other two children, their father died in 1870 and their mother passed away a week later. Orphaned at such a tender age, John literally grew up working on sailing vessels.

He eventually retired from the sailing life, and a year later, at the age of 30, took up weightlifting. He stood 5' 6.5" and weighed between 160 and 170 pounds in his prime, which

was from 1903 to 1910. He is best remembered as having been a weightlifting champion at the age of 60—not just a champion for his age group, but a champion in open competition. Specifically, he won the “Strongest Man in New England” contest in 1926 against all comers.

John Bradford's detailed account of this contest can be found in *Strength* magazine (1926). A series of elimination contests were held that reduced the field from 34 contestants to six finalists. There were 5,000 spectators who viewed the elimination contests, and a picture shows that virtually all of them were standing. And a throng of 20,000 spectators viewed the finals, which were held at the playing field of the Boston Braves.

The lifts that were contested were the two hands continental jerk, two hands continental press, two hands deadlift, right hand deadlift and left hand deadlift. Smith won the contest by 15 pounds, and his best lift was probably the right hand deadlift of 415. (He had made 450 two weeks earlier for a world record.)

His performances in other lifts were truly phenomenal. David P. Willoughby, in *The Super Athletes*, rates Smith as the second greatest bent presser of all time when bodyweight is considered. Only Arthur Saxon is rated higher, and Smith's rating is based on a bent press of 275.5 pounds performed in 1903 at a bodyweight of 168. What makes this lift even more meritorious is that it was performed with a dumbbell, so it was probably equivalent to more than 300 pounds with a barbell (Willoughby says 313).

Smith also lifted a 1,640 pound block of iron in roughly a hand-and-thigh style (lifting the iron four inches), and pressed a pair of dumbbells weighing a total of 225.

As Smith aged he retained much of his tremendous strength. He made a bet with a friend that he would one arm press 200 pounds on his 50th birthday, and he did succeed, with 203.5 (which was presumably a bent press). Later, when he was 53, he did 207.5, and 185 when he was 59.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Oscar Mathes, another smallish strongman, for the accomplishments of Smith, as it was Mathes who convinced John that the only way he could regain his health (which had been damaged by many rough years as a sailor) would be to start a program of sensible physical training. That Smith was able to regain his health is indicated by his splendid strength accomplishments and by the fact that he lived another 60 years after commencing weight training, dying in 1956.

References:

- Berry, Mark H., John Y. Smith, *The Strong Man*, Vol. 1. Nov. (1931): p. 10.
 Bradford, John, American Continental Weight Lifters' Association Notes, *Strength*, Vol. 11. September (1926):p. 51.
 Jowett, George F., A Physical Marvel at 71, *Strength & Health*, March (1937): p.22. (This article was previously printed in *Strength* magazine in 1927 under the title “A Physical Marvel at 61”.)
 Willoughby, David P., *The Super Athletes*. (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1970) p.143.



This column is named in honor of the *Strength & Health* feature which appeared in that magazine from January of 1956, when Harry “Bosco” Paschall took over the managing editorship from Jim Murray, to May of 1986, when the final, by-then-slender issue limped into view. The reconstituted “Iron Grapevine” will carry news and information about the world of physical culture. The emphasis will be on the past but such things as the passing of noted figures in the field and the current activities of veteran members of our fraternity will also be covered. We invite readers to help us with this column; in fact, without letters and calls from interested people, *The Iron Grapevine* will be far less than it can, and should, be. So if you have something of interest, or if you have learned of the death of someone in the game, please send that information to us here at the University of Texas and we, in turn, will share it with the readers of *IGH*. (The first installment of Paschall’s “Grapevine”, by the way, introduced the elusive Seminole strongman, Jackie Bobo, who was said to have exceeded the world record in the clean and jerk in training, using the crudest of exercise equipment down in the swamps of the Everglades. Remember?)



In the next issue of *IGH* we hope and intend to include several regular features or columns which, for one reason or another, we did not carry this time. One of the columns will usually be written by Jan Todd and will be primarily concerned with women who have made important contributions in the past to physical culture. We also plan to always include a “Letters” section, and the only thing that would stop us would be, of course, no letters. So if you have comments, suggestions, or axes to grind, send them our way.



We had the pleasure of a visit between Christmas and the New Year from Harold Weiss, an attorney and longtime lifter from Memphis, Tennessee. Hal, as he’s known, is also a serious collector of books and magazines in the strength field, so when he and his wife come to Texas to visit his daughter and son-in-law in Houston, he usually manages to come to Austin for a few hours at the Collection. While he was here, we drove out to visit Charles A. Smith, who is recovering well from some earlier surgery. Hal, who once cleaned and pressed a pair of 120 pound dumbbells, told us a wonderful story about visiting Sig Klein’s gym back in the 1940’s and asking Sig to give him

a chance to clean and press a pair of challenge dumbbells. Besides his successful law practice, Weiss is a member of the Baker Street Irregulars, a group devoted to the Sherlock Holmes stories. In fact, Hal has written an article in which he analyzes the Holmes stories in order to prove that Arthur Conan Doyle knew a great deal about physical culture. *IGH* has been promised a copy so you can look forward to seeing it in these pages in the coming months. Hal has also located a 102 year old man who personally knew George Hackenschmidt when the Russian Lion was an active athlete. A taping session is now in the planning stages. Watch for the transcript.



A telephone conversation with Jack Elder of East Texas brought the welcome news that this vigorous, 76 year old man had recently broken the national record in the deadlift for men over 75 years of age. Jack’s career as a lifter goes back to the 1930’s, and he used to go all the way to York for some of the big meets. The meet in which Jack deadlifted 350 was promoted in Longview, Texas by John Inzer, and it included such things as superheavyweight powerlifter Gus Rethwisch, dressed as the character “Buzzsaw” he portrayed in the Schwarzenegger film, “Running Man”, engaging in a mock tight on stage and then cranking up his chainsaw and chasing his “opponent” offstage, from which area were heard bloodcurdling screams followed by the reappearance onstage of Rethwisch with a (supposedly) severed head, which he proceeded to roll across the stage. We wonder what Dietrich Wortmann would have thought of the show. In any case, it’s a fine thing to know that Jack is still active and still interested. His son, by the way, is a very successful orthopedic surgeon.



It is with real sadness that we report the death of Kimon Voyages, a body builder whose prime was in the 1940’s and 1950’s. Voyages, who operated a successful chiropractic clinic in New York with his two sons, suffered a stroke during the holidays and died on the 26th of December, one week short of his 68th birthday. Readers may recall his feats in high rep squatting or his outstanding thigh development. Dr. Voyages was a member of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen and he retained a keen interest in the physical culture field.



Many of you will remember Lou Riecke, the New Orleans weightlifter who holds the distinction of being one of the very last Americans to have set a world record. Lou had a long career in lifting, from the 1940’s to the 1960’s, and he snatched 325 in 1964 in the 181 pound class, using the split style, and to our knowledge this was the last world record in the snatch made with the “fore and aft” technique. After he retired from lifting, Lou followed his friend, Al Roy, into strength

coaching and he served in that capacity for the Pittsburgh Steelers during their glory years, earning four Super Bowl rings in the process. We saw him recently in New Orleans and he looks wonderful—lean and quick as always and full of energy and ideas. He recently sold his successful business and is at work on a project which will use computers to bring accurate training techniques to high schools that do not have a qualified strength coach.



Gilbert Michaud, a friend from Quebec, recently sent us a set of very interesting photographs about a 19th century strongman-giant, The photos were of a granite boulder of about six feet in diameter. Embedded in the boulder—which is in Quebec—is a plaque explaining that Modeste Mailhot, known as the “Canadian Giant,” was born in 1769 and died in 1834 and that he had singlehandedly rolled the huge boulder out of a proposed roadway. Mailhot was a man of truly majestic proportions, having been 7’6” tall and having weighed as much as 617 pounds. Shorter by three inches but heavier by over 100 pounds than his fellow Canadian, Angus McCaskill, the “Cape Breton Giant” (1825-1863). Mailhot had great vigor, as indicated by the fact that he lived to be 64 years of age, not a mean feat in those days, particularly if you weighed as much as four men of average size. Michaud is looking for more information on this phenomenal man and we will pass it along when and if it arrives.



One of the interesting people who attended this year’s annual dinner of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen was a young man—Steven Sadicario, who appears professionally as “The Mighty Stefan”. Sadecario, who is only 31, is 5’6”, weighs 180 pounds and he does what Ottley Coulter used to call a “strong act.” Among his listed feats are bending steel bars, tearing cards, breaking chains and lifting sledgehammers. He has made many appearances in the New York City area and he can be contacted by calling 201-233-2784. We are pleased to provide The Mighty Stefan with a little exposure; it’s always good to see someone interested in maintaining the craft of the strongman.



Those who were active in the early days of powerlifting will remember Dr. Lyle Schwartz, who devised the still-popular formula which bears his name and allows men of different weights to be fairly judged for the “Best Lifter” trophy. Lyle was an accomplished lifter in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s and he served with distinction for many years as an official and a member of the executive committee of the United States Powerlifting Federation. For years, Lyle was a professor at Northwestern University in Chicago but several years ago he and his wife moved to the Washington, D.C. area

and he began work as the Director of the Institute for Materials Science and Engineering for the U. S. Department of Commerce.



Charles A. Smith, a former writer for various Weider publications in the 1950’s, has been retired for some years from his work with the juvenile court system in Austin, where he still lives. Smith spent his boyhood and young manhood in England and he sent us the following recollection.

“Back in the middle to late thirties, I was working out at a club in London called the First West Central Weightlifting Club. It was presided over by “Milo” Brinn, the old vaudeville strongman. Our lifting club was above Brinn’s pub, the Grafton Arms, and quite often George Hackenschmidt would drop by to visit Brinn and chat about the golden years of the vaudeville strongmen. After they’d finished their chat, ‘Hack’ would often ask if anyone was upstairs in the club and, if the answer was no, he’d say, ‘I think I’ll go up and look around.’ When this happened we’d wait a few minutes and then sneak up the stairs and peek through the glass panels of the clubroom doors. And there would be ‘Hack’, into his sixties, doing a one arm bent press with the Berg bar, the two big discs and the collars, about 145 pounds.” [Ed. note: Hackenschmidt was born August 2, 1878.]



At the end of January, a group of veteran weight men gathered in Venice, California for the first annual Muscle Beach Weight Club Reunion. Most of those in attendance had been involved in the club called the “Dungeon”, as opposed to the “Pit” (which was on Venice Beach and much more well known to the general public). But the Dungeon was one of the first really heavy iron gyms on the coast and those who gathered to relive those glory days included Zabo Koszewski, Bud Mucci, Buddy Pryor, Hugo Labra, Harold Connally, Louie Paul, Steve Neece, DeForest Most (the “mayor” of Muscle Beach), Seymour Koenig, Jack Hughes and Bob “Bugsy” Siegel. We hope to be able to include more news about the gathering in the next Grapevine.



One of the things we old-timers have to put up with are frequent claims from people about some exercise or machine or routine being “new” and “revolutionary” when the truth is that the exercise, machine or routine was older than the person who’s calling it new. From where we sit, it seems a good idea to point out these sorts of mistakes. Not only is it a way to educate the new people in the game, but it also is a way to give credit where credit is due by explaining who really did invent a certain exercise, machine or system of sets and reps. In any case, if you see or hear of something that fits into one of these categories, let us know and we’ll try to set the record straight.

The European Corner

Dave Webster



Most readers know that Dave Webster of Scotland is one of the leading figures in the world of strength lore. An outstanding strand-puller; an international official in weightlifting, bodybuilding and strongmen competitions; a respected collector

of strength-related books and magazines; and an avid student of the game for many years, Webster has distinguished himself as a writer through the publication of such books as *Strength Lore & Strands*, *The Iron Game*, *Barbells & Beefcake* and *Scottish Highland Games*. We are pleased and grateful that he has agreed to contribute a column to *IGH*.

Greetings from across the sea. On behalf of all European strongmen I extend cordial and sincere good wishes to our like-minded friends in America. I have followed your activities from the beginning, with interest and a longing to be actively involved and, believe me, I WILL make it to one of the next reunions of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen; the sooner it happens the better I will be pleased.

When I was asked to contribute a column to *Iron Game History* I unhesitatingly agreed, even though I was conscious of the problems this may cause me in time to come. I lead a very busy life, all hinging round our favourite activities; you could say I am obsessed by strength in all forms of physical endeavour but particularly in sport and entertainment. I am fully booked with major strength events for 1990 and have good international bookings two years ahead. Equally I am steeped in strength lore from days long gone and the wonderful history of the display of power. In these ways I can look at the past, present and future of strength athletics, my main interest in life.

In this, hopefully regular, feature I would like to work in similar fashion with some items on old timers, some on current happenings with the strongmen and some on advance information of interest.

To set the scene let's look at what is happening. With my colleague, Dr. Doug Edmunds, I run many top class professional strength athletics contests each year. For instance, we have now in Europe a range of contests from national to world championships for real strength athletics. The contenders are all professional strongmen, several of them being full-timers, with this as their main occupation. They compete for cash prizes and it's all genuine and aboveboard; if they don't place well, then the returns are not in keeping with the effort and the training. However, it's certainly not all about money;

almost without exception they love what they are doing. These mighty men enjoy the challenge, the battles and the camaraderie of the circuit which has now emerged.

From small beginnings I have tried to build up a whole new sport very similar to the TV strongman competitions and many of our events are filmed. I use the term "strength athletics" as there is a significant degree of athleticism required, as well as strength and power. To earn a high placing the competitor needs all round ability. Unathletic, overweight strongmen don't do well, nor do well-muscled, very fast men who are not extremely strong. The best men are large, exceedingly strong and also athletic. We have our own International Federation of Strength Athletes and an official journal, *The Strength Athlete*, which carries our news and results. [Editor's note: We understand that the publishers of *The Strength Athlete* have filed for bankruptcy and sold the magazine. More later.]

Dining the past year I have refereed Netherlands' Strongest Man (TV), Finland's Strongest Man (TV), World's Strongest Man, held in Spain (TV) and we have also organised the Scottish Muscle Power Championships, British Muscle Power Championships, European Muscle Power Championships and the World Muscle Power Championships, plus some team competitions.

This reflects the main locations of interest, except that Iceland produces the highest level of professional strongmen, with three truly outstanding competitors who have taken almost everything before them even though there is a host of other good strongmen snapping at their heels. Iceland had its own international event in the summer, won by the fabulous Jon Pall Sigmarsson. Jamie Reeves (Britain) earned an equal number of points but less firsts and so finished second. Two other Icelanders came next and then the popular O.D. Wilson (USA), the man they call "The Nightmare".

Britain has more competitors than other countries as we have more competitions, at various levels. The more milk we have, the more cream we get, so there is a good record with Jamie Reeves winning the World's Strongest Man this year and with great past competitors like Geoff Capes. The 6'9", 364 pound Mark Higgins is currently our number two man. Mark is a great all rounder, being an international discus thrower, a past international basketball player, a champion powerlifter and a man who went to Australia with the British sailing team for the America's Cup. Big though he is, he is not the tallest competitor. That honour goes to the handsome giant, Ted van den Panne from Holland, who is a finely built seven feet in height and strong enough to have tied for second place in his national championships.

Finland also has many fine contestants, two of whom

are of international calibre and travel extensively—Markku Souenvirta and Ilkka Nummisto, a former Olympic hero now turned professional strongman. Bill Kazmaier (USA) has also been around, placing fourth in the World's Strongest Man, after Reeves, Sigmarsson and Wolders (Holland) and placing third in the World Muscle Power Championships to Sigmarsson and Reeves.

It's a colourful, vibrant scene and it keeps me on a very tight schedule. In the last year I have been on more Jumbos than Sabu the Elephant Boy, and in August I went to a competition for just one day in Canada and some nine hours later was back at another major event in Europe. If I go any faster next time I may meet myself coming back!

Next issue I will take a backward look at the development of strongmen in entertainment.

Where Are They Now?

John Curd Edmunds: Master of the Pull-up

Al Thomas, Kutztown State University

Al Thomas has been active in physical culture for approximately 50 years and has earned a reputation as one of the leading writers and social theorists in the field. We are much obliged to him for agreeing to write the *Where Are They Now?* column.

Philadelphia lawyers of the weightroom can mount a pretty convincing argument supporting the view that the toughest strength feat is the chin-up (the pull-up), the ultimate playground exercise. Asked to “make a muscle,” the skinny playground urchin manfully flexes his arm and pops up a little ball of biceps. (What other muscle is there to “make”?) Perhaps as a response to some jungle memory, the urchin pulls his chin over a bar, clenched in blood-drained fingers, and in the process releases the monkey in himself, indeed in all of us whose initiation into our great game had more to do with chinning than with barbells. For many a playground kid, chinning is part of the ritual celebration of his initiation into what, for a kid, passes as “manhood,” the signal of which to such a kid is nature’s diploma for chin-ups, a pair of knotty biceps. It is difficult to establish oneself as a champion in weightlifting or powerlifting, and these are sports that most men never attempt. Not so with chinning. The champion chinner has distinguished himself in a test that just about everyone has tried. It’s a test that, for many, comprises their only life-long gauge and exhibition of strength, and for others the pull-up becomes a major component of their bodybuilding and/or strength building regimens. If the cliché of flexed arm and attendant bulge is a universal request to “make a muscle,” then the champion chinner, from his playground days to his glory days, is the real “people’s strongman” in the most universal—the World Series—of strength tests: the chin.

Where is Curd Edmunds, the erstwhile king of the chin-up? Still the farmer he has been all his life, he’s still in Glasgow, Kentucky, where the Edmundses have resided since his great, great grandfather, Captain William Edmunds, arrived there back in 1810 with his 15-year-old-bride, Mary Ann (Penn), a descendent of the great William Penn. Curd and his wife of 40 years, Frances, of French Huguenot extraction, are descended from the earliest settlers in the region, evidence of which is written in bold script across the handsome faces of this stalwart, salt-of-the-earth couple. A “farmboy” (as he puts it), an outdoorsman, a lover of the mockingbird’s song, Curd has spent all his 77 years as a student of the soil, having become in the process a highly respected organic farmer, the first in his county. Indeed, his only absence from this land that had been part of the Edmunds’ blood for almost two centuries was his three-and-a-half-year Pacific Ocean sojourn in which he was kept busy as a Navy man in five major invasions and the “greatest sea battle ever fought.” (He still shudders at the memory of an ill- conceived live-week stint in Yankee-land on

Curd Edmunds and son, Chris, show their world record form on the chinning bar in Curd’s backyard in Glasgow, Kentucky.



a line in the Ford plant way off in Detroit, but the countryboy in him missed his old Kentucky home too much—and its mockingbirds’ songs.)

In his prime, Curd stood 5’10 1/2” and weighed from 171 to 195, his best lifting being done at 171 to 180 pounds. Always hobbled by congenitally weak knees (dislocated at 18, 20 and 26—and ruined finally in 1972 when they were “mashed into the side of a car,” a devastating injury which almost put him into a wheelchair for life), Curd also suffered serious shoulder dislocations “from incidents involving cattle.” Thus, laconically, he dismisses the injuries that, piling up, made it impossible for him to pursue the weight training that had appealed to him so much since boyhood. Though he had trained with crude weights since 1930, in 1934 he bought the first barbell ever seen in his county. (‘The people around here didn’t have any idea what that bar was with the wheels on it.’) That 208-pound barbell, however, was soon the centerpiece of Sunday afternoon lifting sessions with strongboys from neighboring farms. Before becoming too incapacitated with injuries to pursue a weight-lifting regimen, Curd was able to rep stiff-legged deadlifts with 400 pounds and to grind out 105 reps with 165, but the injured knees made lifting impossible: “I learned that I’d have to quit barbells because they hurt my joints too much and then [I] turned to exercises that ‘pulled the joints apart,’ like chins and hanging leg raises.”

In the back of his mind, throughout all this, there had always been the inspiration of his father who, despite the rigors of a farmer’s life, had done 37 chins at 26 years of age. This feat had always piqued young Curd’s curiosity about chinning. Never a “natural” at the exercise, the teenage boy fooled around with chins and by the age of 19 was able to grind out 19. He never improved upon that number until, aboard ship at 31 or 32, he did 23. In 1949, at age 37, he broke his father’s record, but from then until 1968 he marked time. The fillip to his great career came with an article on endurance training by *Iron Man* guru, Fred Grace. Inspired by Grace’s heated prose, Curd embarked whole hog upon his assault on the world’s chinning records. What follows is history.

Age	No.	Age	No.	Age	No.
56	41	63	--	70	80
57	42	64	102	71	82
58	48	65	103	72	75
59	54	66	117	73	60
60	55	67	220	74	71
61	63	68	120	75	55
62	66	69	95	76	43
				77	32

As background to this astonishing assemblage of numbers, in 1976, Curd became the second man in history to break the 100 continuous chin-up mark, pulling 102 at the age of 64. On June 15, 1978, at age 66 and a weight of 167, Curd set the world record with 117 chins, breaking the record 106 set on June 23, 1969, by William D. Reed of the University of Pennsylvania. Strength theoretician David Willoughby gave this feat a performance rating of 1107, the highest ever to that

point for this movement. (In second position on Willoughby’s list was Hall of Famer Marvin Eder [1083], ranked by Terry Todd among the ten most memorable strongmen in history.) Curd’s greatest year, however, was 1979, when he was 67. Curd and his son, Chris, who as Curd puts it, “went on to become the greatest chinner in history”, agreed to perform on the Guinness Show in June 1979 in Bowling Green, Kentucky. At this show, both Curd and Chris did 110 chins apiece, to break the record (106) but, as Curd says, “We could have done more, but didn’t know that a Korean was going to do 120 [prior to the publication date of the London-based *Guinness Book of World Records*], so he got into the book and we didn’t. Chris and I, however, were the only ones in the show who broke a world record and won the live hundred dollars.”

In that year, 1979, both father and son blossomed in a manner that will probably never be duplicated. Chris, who had been doing “only” 53 earlier in the year, was soon doing more than 150, as was Curd. By the early fall of 1979, with the help of straps, the two were flying high.” Before we went to Hollywood for *The Guinness Game* show, a 20th Century Fox production, I did 175 and Chris 174. Later, Chris did 207, and went on to 221. I then went to 188 and later to 210, and knew that I could do 225, but I didn’t want to pass Chris. Now, I wish that I had because I would have been world champ again. But that would have only been for a few minutes because Chris went on to 241. A few days after that, I did 220 in 12 minutes, and knew I could have done 230-235, but decided that 220 was good enough for me at 67 years. As the days passed, Chris jumped to 261, to 275 and then to 301, two days before we flew to Hollywood. He did this in 15 minutes and at a weight of 175.”

Nineteen-seventy-nine was clearly a year that still provides an incredible benchmark for the world of strength. As always, Curt puts it simply: “It took me 48 years to learn how to break the barrier between strength and endurance. It took Chris some 15 years. After you break this barrier, doing chins, you lose sight of how many you can really do because they become so easy. It’s like being in outer space: I felt as though I weighed about 30 pounds, but there we were, weighing 174 -175 pounds. It turned out that Chris lifted the equivalent of 26 tons in 15 minutes, and I lifted over 19 tons in 12 minutes, using just our hands and arms. It’s hard to believe, but we could have done more.”

Unfortunately, this flurry of tandem chinning, the greatest in history—not to mention in one place, or even more incredibly, the same backyard on the same bar and in the very same family, no less—was not accepted by the *Guinness* people because it wasn’t “properly witnessed.” (To know this Christian gentleman is to know that Curd’s word is his bond, but what could poor *Guinness* “know”? To top this off, “The Guinness Game” show, for which all this was preparation, proved to be a travesty of sorts. The night before he and Chris left for Hollywood and the show, Curd came down with a devastating case of food poisoning; his heart was “fluttering like a leaf in a high wind.” According to Curd, “When I got on the bar, I was worried that after 48 years of training, I was going

to flunk my great test. But I prayed and prayed to the Good Lord, and by the time I started—almost like a miracle—my heart had stopped fluttering. I was able to do 64 and Chris did a world record, 86, in the three minute limit. I was the happiest man in the world at that moment, and so was the world champion, Chris.” There would, however, prove to be a fly in the ointment. In Curd’s quietly philosophical words, “There was an elderly man there at 20th Century Fox who worked for the Guinness people, and he wouldn’t let us into the *Guinness Book* because we went up too fast and used straps.” At times like these, one senses the Christian grace and graciousness that characterize this gentle and devout man. [Ed. note: Curd was kind enough to send tapes of the show as a contribution to our Collection here at UT, and the tape shows, as anyone knowledgeable in human performance would have predicted, that he and his son both used the “kip” style, which employs a snapping of the torso to generate much of the upward movement. Both men did come to a full arm stretch and pause between reps in their three minute trial, but we understand that they did their really high rep chinning without a pause at the bottom. Their performances are still remarkable, of course, but the technique they use is not at all like (and far easier than) the technique used by the average bodybuilder.]

Around age 65, Curd had come to the chinning technique that made his progress to 220 chins possible. In order to protect an injured elbow, he learned to “zip up real fast,” rather than pulling slowly: “I got so I could chin more times if I went very fast because I didn’t have to pull as hard.” Today at 77, Curd still preaches daily training and his regimen includes biking and, of course, his standbys: chinning and hanging leg raises. “I do 100 hanging leg raises as soon as I get up in the morning, in sets of 25, 30 or 40 depending upon my grip. In doing the movement, I bring my feet above my head; this works the whole body and makes me feel great. Then, in the afternoon, lately, I’ve been doing another 100. I do the leg-raises to warm up for my chinning workout. This summer I worked up to a lifetime record of 65 reps, nonstop. I think this is an exercise that would be great for most of the Oldtimers.” Curd’s great record in the pull-up was the result of a basic, simple system, built around these two movements: the hanging leg raise and the chins, done in sets of from 65 to 75 to 85 reps each day, no less!

When approached to serve as the first subject of this column, the self-effacing strength great responded with typical modesty; “I consider myself a weakling compared with the other fellows. I never dreamed of such an honor. I have always been way off in the sticks, far from the real greats of the Game.” A man of many parts, nobody in our Game carries them off with more dignity, charm and modesty than Colonel John Curd Edmunds, of the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels. Student of the soil, the good Kentucky earth that has been in the Edmunds’ blood for almost two centuries, a devout Christian for whom “going to heaven is the main goal of life,” a once-and-ever champion of the pull-up, the people’s strongman—the salt of the earth—mighty Curd hasn’t lost his savor with age, either as a strongman or as a memorable human being.

Books and Magazines

Terry Todd

Each issue, this space will contain information about books, magazines or both. The aim is to acquaint or, in some cases, to reacquaint readers with earlier publications and to alert readers to current books and magazines which deal with the history of physical culture.

Apollo [William Bankier] *Ideal Physical Culture*. London: Greening & Co., Ltd. 1900. 141 pages.

William Bankier, who performed under the stage name of "Apollo", was a capable, professional strongman and the owner, for a time, of what we would call today a health club. In the first chapter of *Ideal Physical Culture*, he discusses noted strongmen of the past. His descriptions are interesting, and he makes the enlightened and unusual statement that many of the feats he ascribes to the various strongmen may not have really been performed. He explains that he is merely relating to the reader information that he has gathered from reading about these men and talking to people who knew them.

Bankier, who was also known as the "Scottish Hercules", is commendably forthright throughout the course of the book, even going so far as to say that a man must be "born strong" in order to develop record-breaking bodily strength. This statement is in contradistinction to the claims of the average purveyor of systems of physical culture, who would usually maintain that he had been a pitiful weakling and in a state of physical collapse until taking up a course of physical training (one he happened to sell), after which he acquired great strength and muscular development and the company of attractive young women.

The later sections of the book provide exercises for the overall development of the muscles of the body—the chest, waist, legs, arms, shoulders and so on. Other aspects of physical culture are also covered, such as diet, breathing techniques and clothing appropriate for vigorous exercise.

Along with a degree of honesty which was uncharacteristic for the period in which the book was written, Bankier, like most of his contemporaries, had something to sell. In his case, it was a device—in the form of a dumbbell—which contained electrical batteries that could be activated so that the person using the dumbbell would receive a mild electric shock. But critics of Bankier should remember that the turn of the century was a time in which many people were producing and marketing devices for "electrical stimulation" which supposedly aided the health of those who used them. (For those interested in knowing more about this period and some of the devices which were sold, a good source is Harvey Green's *Fit for America* [NY:Pantheon Books, 1986], although Green's knowledge base about exercise seems a bit unsolid.)

The Todd-McLean Collection

The following information was prepared at the request of Vic Boff, for distribution at the seventh annual awards dinner of the Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen Association. It is reproduced here to allow readers to more completely understand the history and mission of the collection.

The Todd-McLean Collection in the History of Physical Culture was begun in 1983 when Terry and Jan Todd decided to donate their extensive collection of books, magazines, courses, films, videos, photographs and artifacts in the field to the University of Texas, where they both teach. Shortly after the Todds' decision, U.T. Professor Emeritus Roy J. McLean added his own collection to the Todds' and donated \$50,000 to support the collections through the establishment of the McLean Research Fellowship in Sports History. Over the next several years, that \$50,000 donation was matched by the university, as were later gifts by Mrs. McLean and Mr. and Mrs. Doyle Hartman.

The primary purpose of the McLean Fellowship, which now has an endowment of approximately \$250,000, is to maintain and expand the Todd-McLean Collection, to conduct historical research using the materials in the collection and to disseminate the results of that research. Interest on the endowment can be used for such things as preservation material, cataloguing, telephone calls and travel to academic conferences; the interest cannot be used for purchases. Everything in the collection has either been purchased by the Todds or donated by people with an interest in working with the collection to preserve the history of the Iron Game.

Terry Todd began collecting books and magazines in the field of physical culture over 30 years ago and he was encouraged in this effort by his coach at U.T., Professor McLean. Later, when Todd was working on his doctoral dissertation on the history of resistance exercise, he met Ottley Coulter, who had what was said to be the largest collection in this field in the United States. Coulter, who began collecting in the first decade of this century, befriended Todd and graciously allowed him to use this collection. In 1975, after Coulter's death, the Todds purchased the collection from the family.

Gradually the Todds added to the collection and then, when they joined the faculty at the University of Texas, they decided it was time to make a home for the growing collection so that it would live on beyond them and be used and enjoyed by scholars and lovers of lifting for decades to come. The Todds understood that the collection should be part of the library system at a major, research-based university with a

history of kindness toward specialized collections of rare material.

As time went by and the collection received attention through articles by such people as Al Thomas and Charles A. Smith, the Todds approached other people about donating their materials to the collection. In this way, all or part of the collections of David P. Willoughby, Joe Assirati, Dr. Jack Leighton, Dr. Christopher Gian-Curseo, Sam Loprinzi, Dr. Jesse Mercer Gehman, George Hackenschmidt, Sig Klein and Vic Boff have been added to the holdings at U.T.

All of the material is on reference cards and the Todds are in the process of entering the entire collection into the computer so that, in time, anyone at the university with a computer hookup will be able to locate and use the material in the collection. The collection itself currently consists of approximately 100,000 books, magazines, photos, courses, videos, films, artifacts and pieces of correspondence. Among the holdings of the collection are the personal scrapbooks of George Hackenschmidt, Ottley Coulter and Professor Attila; the drawings and notebooks of David P. Willoughby; an oil painting of Professor Attila done in 1887 by a royal court painter in London; a complete set of the major magazines in English, including *Strength & Health*, *Iron Man* and *Muscle Builder/Power*, newsreel footage of dozens of lifters, bodybuilders and strongmen from the 30's, 40's and 50's; correspondence from such people as George F. Jowett, Ottley Coulter, George Hackenschmidt, Professor Attila, Warren Lincoln Travis, Earle Liederman, Sig Klein, Mac Batchelor, Joe "The Mighty Atom" Greenstein, Alan Calvert, Mark Berry, Bob Hoffman, Hermann Saxon, and many others; Joe Bonomo's publicity photo collage; and books, dealing with exercise, dating back to the 1700's.

It is a collection of which the Todds and the University of Texas are proud, but it is a collection which requires the help and support of people who believe it is important to remember the pioneers of the sport and to preserve the historical records of their accomplishments. By working together, people who want to preserve the history of progressive resistance and physical fitness can see to it that 100 years from now it will be possible for interested people to visit Austin and study the lives of the leaders who laid the foundations of physical culture. Anyone wishing to make arrangements to visit the collection or to donate either materials or money should contact Dr. Terry Todd or Jan Todd, 217 Gregory Gym, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas 78712. Their telephone numbers are: 512-471-4890 (office) and 512-447-3635 (home).

The Roark Report—

The Value of Accuracy

Joe Roark

From 1985 to 1989, Joe Roark distinguished himself by publishing a fascinating, carefully researched newsletter called the *Roark Report*. Beginning in this issue, a smaller but no less well researched version of the *Roark Report* will be carried every time *Iron Game History* is published.

It was a year when some of the old lifters died, and newcomers joined the hefting of weights. Kurt Saxon died, and Dietrich Wortmann, and Gregory Paradise. And a large lady named Katie Sandwina passed away. But a more petite young lady that year was in Los Angeles, flat on her back wearing a cupped, terrycloth bikini top, blue jeans rolled up once at the ankles, and she was, according to photographer Philippe Halsman, holding a ten pound barbell in each hand. She was demonstrating how she “fought gravity” using the weights, and was performing what at first glance appears to be a dumbbell bench press. Marilyn Monroe was pumping iron.

Most modern readers of the new book, *Marilyn Monroe and the Camera*, will not detect the dumbbell-called-barbell error. Often, those of us who have been intimate with the details of our sport for decades have nonetheless ignored correct terminology, and have thus rendered ourselves ignorant in the eyes of the general public who, while not able to distinguish dumbbell from barbell from swingbell, could correct certain of the terms we have persisted in abusing through the years.

For decades we wrote “prone” (face down) when we meant “supine” (face up) while describing a bench press. For example, *Lifting News* magazine, in November of 1955, mentions a contest involving a supine press, then the January 1956 issue calls it the prone press. No wonder that in those days the current powerlifts were known as the “odd lifts”. One of the early odd lift meets to be called a “powerlifting” contest was on October 18, 1958 at the Boston YMCA. The lifts contested were the upright row, the squat, and the “prone.”

Other misnomers have lodged in our lifting language. A lift can be clean (free of contact with the legs and lower torso, that is, “clean” of the body) or a lift can be continental (allowed to touch, indeed rest upon, body sections in a segmented ascent). You cannot perform a continental clean, but the organizers of the odd lift contest held August 4, 1962 in Berkeley, California did not know this and among the 30 lifts offered for competition (the lifter selected six) were the “continental clean” and the “continental clean and jerk behind the neck”. [Ed. note: The term “clean” as it applies to lifting evidently found its way across the Atlantic and lodged in the

southern United States, where such expressions as, “He lifted that bale of hay clean over his head” are still heard, “clean” having come to mean, in that context, “all the way”.]

What’s in a name? History. And accuracy. The press was eliminated from competition in 1972 because it had so degenerated in form that it was pressing the point to call it a press—some men were pressing as much or more than they could clean and jerk, which, given the allowed thigh heave in the jerk, is impossible—sort of like saying you can speed walk as fast as you can run. Anyway, other names have had curious twists: the squat was earlier called the deep knee bend here in America, but the British also called it the deep knees bend. After all, both knees are involved, and given the huge history the British have with one and two-handed lifts, such distinctions are appropriate. Not all two-handed lifts had one-handed counterparts, however. The one-handed bench press comes to mind.

The bench Marilyn Monroe used in 1952 was flat, unadjustable, unpadded, and had no uprights attached to hold a barbell (much less the two “barbells” she was lifting). Bench press contests in the early days often involved either a pullover from the floor to starting position, or the weight was handed to the lifter. When uprights became attached to the benches, one dilemma was whether the lifter should have to unrack the bell or have the spotters lift it off.

When did uprights become attached to benches? The bench by the York Barbell Company was introduced by Jim Park in the February 1953 issue of *Strength & Health* magazine, and the ad on page 37 reveals the price at \$29.95. Among earlier photos of benches with uprights was one of Floyd Page (died April 24, 1963) performing a 350 pound “prone press” (there’s that word again), shown in *Muscle Power*, August 1948. *Iron Man* referred to its bench as a ‘prone’ bench until May of 1975.

Is all of this just so much review with no relevance? No. Go to any gym and watch a limit curl being attempted. You will long for the day when upper back and butt had to remain in contact with a pole during a strict curl. The Deep Knee Bend is no longer deep. Leg stance in the deadlift has made comparing records of yesteryear and last year meaningless.

This column will be interested in accuracy. If sacred cows are sent to slaughter, well, perhaps it’s time to cut the bull.

(Note from Joe Roark: Letters are welcome at P.O. Box J, St Joseph, IL 61873. But replies to individuals will be as time allows.)

The President's Message

by Vic Boff

Each issue of IGH will include a report from Vic Boff, founder and president of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen. He will use this space to communicate with the members of his association and to inform non-members of the good work he and the association do to promote the ideals of barbell training and healthful, drugfree living. We urge anyone interested in honoring the memories and accomplishments of past strength athletes and bodybuilders to join the Association.

On Saturday, October 7, 1989, the Association's seventh annual reunion and achievement awards dinner was held at New York City's prestigious Downtown Athletic Club, home of the Heisman Trophy. Honored were Dr. Pete George, Marvin Eder, Ed Jubinville and Jules Bacon, who, through their ourstanding accomplishments and contributions, have earned a spot in the history of the iron game.

It was a night to remember, as 150 notables and enthusiasts gathered with respect to hear the beautiful tributes to the honored recipients. Rudy Sablo, coach and international weightlifting official, presented the award to Dr. George, one of the greatest weightlifters in history, a man who was a silver medalist at the Olympic Games in 1948 and 1956 and a gold medalist in 1952. Dr. Terry Todd, a University of Texas professor, presented the award to Marvin Eder, long recognized the world over as one of the strongest men ever, pound for pound Jan Todd, also a faculty member at UT and a former world record holder in powerlifting, made the presentation to Ed Jubinville, one of the foremost modern exponents of muscle control, a man who has given lifelong and outstanding support to all areas of our game. Finally, Joe Abbenda, Mr. America of 1962, made the presentation to Jules Bacon, Mr. America of 1943.

With respect, I read the words on each plaque, which summarized the tremendous role each of the honored guests played in the strength sports. The honorees were also presented with a beautiful painting by the artist and illustrator Jim Sanders, whose artistic talent captures the men as they were in their prime.

I should add that I had a very nice surprise when I was honored with a beautiful plaque for what they called my "efforts and contributions" to the Association. The plaque was presented by Iron Mike D'Angelo, Joe Rollino and Johnny Mandel and I really appreciated this kindness.

For entertainment, the enthusiastic crowd was treated to the Guinness Book of Records performance of Joe Ponder and Galen Shinle. Ponder holds and supports Galen from a high

platform with his teeth while Galen—upside down—shoots 10 arrows. The show also featured rare videos of strength, muscle control, posing, handbalancing, and weightlifting; and such people as Joe Ponder, Milo Steinborn, Eugen Sandow, Pere George, and John Grimek were featured. Additional videos were provided by Al Leroux and showed Jules Bacon, Marvin Eder, Ed Jubinville and Otto Arco. Also, Jan Todd presented slides and a lecture about strongwomen from the turn of the century.

At the dinner, Johnny Mandel, who is a member of the President's Council of Physical Fitness and Sports, called for a moment of silence for our past greats. He then opened the reunion by reading salutations from the president of the Downtown Athletic Club, C. Peter Lambos, and from the general manager, Raymond C. Mott.

Once again, our dynamic emcee was Leo Murdock, a man of memories, who reminisced about the game as he introduced the various people on the dais, including Rudy Sablo, Dr. Kimon Voyages (now deceased), Dr. Terry Todd, Jan Todd, Frank Stranahan, Charles A. Smith, Jim Sanders, Dr. Hy Schaeffer, Joe Abbenda, Johnny Mandel and the legend, John Grimek. In the audience were Bruce Page, Slim Farman, Paul Bruno, Joe Rollino, Carl Linich, Al "Tarzan" Bertrand, Al Thomas, Al Leroux, and many others.

During the program, the talented Ted Keppler read from his wonderful booklet, "Things to Think About". The poem he chose was "Winning Against Stress", about how barbell training can help us overcome obstacles. Dr. Terry Todd told us about the forthcoming publication of Iron Game History and explained that what *IGH* needed were suggestions, information and articles. So I urge you to subscribe to *IGH*. It can be a valuable part of the outreach of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen and we need to work with the Todds and the University of Texas to make this new publication a success.

Leo Murdock also introduced the new owner of New York's famed Mid-City Gym, Vinny Consalvo. Best wishes to Vinny and best of luck and health to Tom Minichiello—the longtime previous owner—and to his wife, Eleanor, for their future adventures and retirement.

Also, thanks a million for all those spirited phone calls and letters from around the country and the world, expressing best wishes to our guests of honor and to everyone present. From England we heard from David Gentile and from Scotland, Dave Webster. Other letters came from Tommy Kono (Hawaii); Curd Edmunds (Kentucky); Gene Jantzen (Illinois); Dr. Jack Long (Texas); Sam Loprinzi (Oregon); Bob

Delmontique, Glenn Sundby, Bert Goodrich and Dr. Terry Robinson (California); Cliff Sawyer (Mass.); Dr. Tom Temperely (Saudi Arabia); Reg Park (South Africa); and Donne Hale and Barton Horvath (Florida). I could go on and on so please accept my apologies to all those I failed to cite.

I also want to extend my appreciation to the distinguished staff of the DAC for their professional assistance, especially Rudy Riska and Nick Marricco. And to DAC member Johnny Mandel, without whom I couldn't have put this all together. Thanks as well to my lovely wife, Ann, and to Leo Murdock, Dr. Hy Schaeffer, Mike D' Angelo, Joe Rollino, Keith and Angela Rapasarde, Al Leroux, Gordon Press, the Todds and Joe Marino. The Association also wants to express sincere appreciation and special thanks to Mr. Tom Lincir, of the Ivanko Barbell Company, San Pedro, California, for his participation, support and sponsorship of the dinner. Ivanko is one of the world's leading manufacturers of barbells and weight equipment and Tom hasn't forgotten the pioneers who got things rolling.

The following morning, several notables had a breakfast get-together at the DAC and continued to enjoy a feeling of nostalgia as they shared their thoughts about the old days.

So, let's make every attempt to keep on getting together at our annual banquet reunion so that our ideals will not be forgotten and so we can further the evertrue principles of the iron game and genuine strongmanism. We do hope to see you all at our next big show. One final note. If your membership in the Association has lapsed or if you have never joined, send \$15 to the address below. Your membership fee will be used to support the annual dinner and to recognize those who have made valuable contributions to the game.

[Ed. note: Vic Boff and the Association can be contacted at 2218 86th Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11214. If you are interested in acquiring a tape of the 1989 reunion for your VCR, please remit a check or money order for \$25 to Iron Mike D'Angelo, 18 Colon Street, Staten Island, N.Y. 10310. And for reproductions of the Jim Sanders paintings, write to Jim Sanders, 207 Penny Street, Garner, N.C. 27529.]

Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen president Vic Boff (l) and artist Jim Sanders (center) stand with (l-r) 1989 honorees Marvin Eder, Dr. Pete George, Jules Bacon and Ed Jubinville. Honorees were presented original portraits by Sanders as well as large plaques by the Association. Photo courtesy: Vic Boff



Steroids and Monkey Glands

John Hoberman, The University of Texas

Anabolic steroids have become familiar to the public as drugs which are widely assumed to boost athletic performance. The Ben Johnson scandal at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games only confirmed the widespread view that steroids have become an essential, if illicit, ingredient of certain record-breaking performances in track and field as well as Olympic weightlifting.

But the association of steroids with athletic performance is only part of the story. Anabolic steroids, first isolated by chemists in the 1930s, are synthetic male sex hormones which mimic or amplify the effects of natural testosterone, which produces the male secondary sex characteristics and the sex drive itself. So it is not surprising that for centuries primitive precursors of synthetic steroids have been used as aphrodisiacs and rejuvenating elixirs.

Fantasies about the restorative powers of certain human or animal organs and fluids has been a part of medicine since ancient times. In antiquity the blood of powerfully built athletes was believed to have special curative properties. In the Middle Ages powders made from the testicles of horses, foxes, rabbits, and roosters were used to boost sexual potency. Even today such potions remain the most popular performance-enhancing substances known to man.

One of the most interesting chapters in the long history of the male hormone involves the medical career of Dr. Serge Voronoff, a Russian-French surgeon who earned an international reputation—and a great deal of money—back in the 1920s by transplanting slices of monkey testicles into aging men seeking a new physiological lease on life. Even today, many people who lived through the 1920s and 1930s will recall the term “monkey glands” and what it suggested about the men who sought to have them implanted on or near their own sexual organs.

The monkey gland operation played a very marginal and rather bizarre role in the sporting life of that period. A former middle-weight boxing champion of the world named Frank Klaus, clearly hoping for a comeback, publicly announced his own operation, but even the simian glands could not revive his career.

Meanwhile, similar operations had been underway at San Quentin Prison in California. From time to time the testicles of executed criminals were transplanted into other inmates who were judged to be gland-deficient. At the prison's Thanksgiving Games in 1923, sportsmedical news was being made. As the medical historian David Hamilton reports: “Gland-

transplanted inmates did well, and the seventy-year-old John Person, who was carrying an extra grafted testicle, came a good second in the fifty-yard dash, beating several younger inmates with only two testicles.”

Another sports-related event involving gland transplants was the 1928 meeting of the British Thoroughbred Breeders Association, which refused to list gland-grafted horses in the stud book in order to preserve equine racial purity. The most interesting aspect of this little controversy was the widespread assumption that gland-grafting actually worked. One horse breeder called this sort of research “contrary to nature,” but the major concern was polluted blood lines.

It goes without saying that gland-transplanting was an exercise in pseudo-science. Voronoff himself appears to have been a sincere if self-deluded crusader who believed he was conferring a blessing on mankind. The benefits reported by his patients resulted from Voronoff's considerable personal charm and power of suggestion.

Voronoff's operations were highly publicized, and it seems that the general public, like his patients, were rooting for him to succeed. Such fantasies about miraculous hormone cures are a reminder that, despite the anti-drug campaign now in progress, our own attitudes toward anabolic steroids are likely to be highly ambivalent whether or not we are aware of it.

It was Voronoff's misfortune that his work preceded the synthesis of testosterone in the 1930s. By the 1940s, clinical experiments with testosterone were actually being discouraged, due in part to reports that this hormone was nothing less than “medical dynamite” and “sexual TNT.” The potential use of testosterone as an aphrodisiac is, in fact, the unpublicized aspect of the steroid issue.

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Iron Game History
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