



# IRON GAME HISTORY



THE JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

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*The Jowett Scholarship*

## *A Gift That Keeps on Giving*

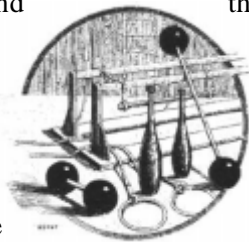
Several weeks ago, just as we were finishing this issue of *Iron Game History*, we received via registered mail an unexpected surprise. As we opened the letter, which was from a law firm in Ontario, we learned that the late Phyllis Jowett, the only child of George F. and Bessie Jowett, had left instructions in her will that \$20,000 of her estate should go to the University of Texas in Austin. She wanted the money to be used to establish the George Fuisdale Jowett and Phyllis Frances Jowett Scholarship. The scholarship will reside in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education, and will be associated with the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection and the Roy J. McLean Research Fellowship in Sport History. A check for \$20,000 was enclosed.

Phyllis Jowett stipulated that the money was to be placed in an interest-bearing account. She also stipulated that some or all of the interest generated by the money was to be used each year to support students who were concentrating on the areas in which her father made such important and lasting contributions. To say we were touched and grateful is, of course, an understatement. We had spoken often to Phyllis in her later years, and we made one memorable trip to visit her home in Morrisburg in the summer of 1995 to pick up some of George's equipment and papers. She wanted those photos, clippings, garments,

belts, and weights to reside in our Physical Culture Collection and be in the company of all the other artifacts of the game he loved.

Phyllis was a charming, genteel woman, and we spent a wonderful day in her company listening to reminiscences about life with her famous and talented father. Her mother's family was from the area around the small town of Morrisburg near the Saint Lawrence River, which divides Ontario from New York State and flows into Lake Ontario. George and Bessie settled there more or less permanently just before World War II. At the time of our visit, Phyllis lived in a modest brick home, but for many years she lived with her parents at Trelawney, a beautiful eighteenth-century estate hard by the banks of the Saint Lawrence. It must have been a good life, as she remembered it so fondly, laughing with pleasure as she recounted the later years of her father's life, during which he played a very active role in local politics and filled their home with hundreds of books on a variety of subjects.

Phyllis had wide-ranging interests, and a solid education. Her first degree was a Bachelor of Arts from Queens College in Kingston, Ontario. She also received a degree in nursing from McGill University in Montreal and a degree in Music from the University of Toronto. For many years, she taught Physical Educa-



tion and Music at the Morrisburg Collegiate Institute. She was also the organist at the local Anglican church, supported a variety of causes in the field of nature conservation, owned and rode horses, published numerous articles in both local and national newspapers and magazines, pursued a variety of sports, and was an expert in antiques.

Without question, George F. Jowett was one of the giants of the iron game during the twentieth century. He was the key player in the founding of the Amer-

ican Continental Weight Lifting Association, in the growth of the Milo Barbell Company, and in the early successes of the York Barbell Company and the Weider publishing empire. For him to have a university scholarship endowed in his honor and given each year to a deserving student of physical culture seems an entirely fitting thing. We invite anyone who would like to contribute to the Jowett Scholarship Fund or to establish a similar fund in honor of another iron game figure to do so.

—**Terry Todd**

# IRON GAME HISTORY

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# IL DUCE AND THE FATHER OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

Charles Kupfer, Ph.D.  
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Italian dictator Benito Mussolini was fond of the art of the gesture. Once a journalist, he admired the opinion-massaging potential of a well-executed press item. During his rise to power, photographers most often caught him in showy regalia, making speeches, or half-naked, pitching hay with peasants, muscles and machismo on display. His final photograph, however, was grisly. In the closing days of the European conflicts of World War II, Mussolini was arrested along with his mistress Clara Petacci. Embittered Italians mangled both corpses before allowing news cameras to flash the gruesome images across the wire services.<sup>1</sup> Mussolini's macabre finale preceded Adolph Hitler's by just three days.<sup>2</sup>

Mussolini's charismatic influence began to be felt nationally when he was named Prime Minister by Italian King Victor Emmanuel in 1922. Self assured and proud of his virility and vigor, Mussolini never missed an opportunity to identify himself as the solution to Italy's ills. Wearing his black shirt, he told Victor Emmanuel, "Majesty, I have come from the battlefield, fortunately bloodless," when the King named him Prime Minister. Actually, he had come from the railway station, but image is everything when making a myth.<sup>3</sup>

Italy badly needed an infusion of vigor as it recovered from World War I. Dr. Mussolini and his black-shirted followers appeared to have the right medicine. Doubters could refer to his best specimen, *Il Duce* himself, the very ideal of fascist physical prowess: hefting a sledgehammer or tossing a bale, bare-chested, muscles flexing and smile affixed

despite—because of—the effort. Hard work in hard times made a hard man.

As Mussolini's power grew, so did the numbers of his followers. As a term, "Fascism" carried classical connotations that Mussolini liked. In Roman times, *lictors*, or bailiffs assisting a magistrate, carried fasces, elm and birch branches bundled around an axe. These symbolized a sergeant-at-arms' power to lop off refractory heads. *Fasci di combattimento*, "bundles for combat," was Mussolini's 1919 term for Black Shirt precursors, the *squadristi* who chopped down leftists and other enemies in pitched street fights.<sup>4</sup> Like Communism, its totalitarian cousin, fascism promised to create a new man and new woman who would find actualization as components of the state. To this end, state control of culture, institutions, and identity was a given.<sup>5</sup> Although Mussolini never managed to wangle the maximum totalitarian sway that Hitler or Stalin did, it was not for a lack of wanting and trying.<sup>6</sup> Further, it would be a mistake to underestimate Mussolini's drive to power, or to attribute any kind of benignity to his doctrine. Italy's fascists grew more, not less powerful, during the Thirties, as they built a lattice of ties with the Church, financial sector, army, and royal court.<sup>7</sup> Fascism assured all that it would end decades, even centuries, of stultification by substituting strength and direct action for weakness and dithering. "Mussolini is always right," was the official credo.<sup>8</sup> Mussolini predicated his rise on his promise to restore lost vigor. Rome had sunk low since the days when men on the Tiber ruled the known world. Impotence depressed a culture that idealized virility. But with slogans like: "He Who Has Steel, Has Bread!" or: "War is To the Male What Childbearing is to the Females!" and "Right Without

Might Is Vain!” and “The Plough Makes The Furrow, But The Sword Defends It!” it was not long before such coercive pep-talks-on-a-poster had energized the Italians.<sup>9</sup>

It would be in German dictator Adolf Hitler that Mussolini found the admixture of hardness and potency that he personally sought. But well before his first meeting with Hitler, *Il Duce* cast an inquiring glance, not northward to the *fuehrer*, but far westward, to a short but strapping physical culture expert who lived, preached, wrote, exercised, and dined—very carefully—in New York.

If all the world is indeed a stage, then Bernarr Macfadden’s twentieth-century role looms decidedly less large than Mussolini’s. But Macfadden is far from forgettable. Recent studies of his life suggest, in fact, that in the world of physical culture—where he was the self-appointed guru—Macfadden’s impact and lasting legacy were enormous.<sup>10</sup> As Jan Todd has written, Macfadden was an agent of change for popular American attitudes towards health, fitness, diet, and feminine physicality. However, said Todd, “Historically Macfadden is difficult to define because his interests and impacts on American culture were so diverse.”<sup>11</sup>

Of all his diverse activities—and Macfadden’s life was replete with odd episodes—there may have been none more bizarre than his liaison with Mussolini. The outgrowth of Macfadden’s interests in politics and self-promotion, the hookup occurred during the Great Depression, in 1930. Macfadden, whose depth of perception regarding Italy did not penetrate beyond admiration for Mussolini’s apparently energetic leadership, took a trip there under semi-official auspices. Assigned to study juvenile health and welfare for a White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, Macfadden met Mussolini for the first time in Rome.<sup>12</sup> The dictator’s manly handshake and purposeful stride captivated the American, who marveled that such “a natural born emperor” displayed “no unseemly egotism.”<sup>13</sup>

No doubt, Macfadden was pleased by Mussolini’s greeting, in which the *Duce* pronounced himself familiar with the American’s work, adding, “I, too, am a physical culturalist.”<sup>14</sup> Adding to his bona fides, the dictator made other observations. “A sound mind presupposes a sound body,” he said. “The dynamism of the body is related to the dynamism of the intellect.”<sup>15</sup> *Now, mens sana in corpore sano* was hardly a novel formula, but by his own recollection, Macfadden found

*Il Duce’s* profundities arresting. “What the Dictator had said was so amply obvious in the dictator’s own life,” noted Macfadden, adding that if other world leaders could just see life as Mussolini did then the world would be a better place.<sup>16</sup> Mussolini agreed.

At their first meeting, Mussolini held forth on a range of subjects from the sub-par physiques and soporific attitudes of Asiatics, to the wonders wrought by cultivating proper habits. The most palatable portion of their conversation, however, centered on food. “I am a great believer in raw fruits,” *Il Duce* announced when Macfadden praised the abundant fresh foodstuffs in Italian kitchens. “I have raw fruit each meal. There is a bunch of grapes for me at the breakfast table each morning. We can have grapes all the year around in Italy. Some are especially retarded for the winter, after the harvest, while others, coming from our African colonies, are especially advanced for spring.”<sup>17</sup> Using fresh local ingredients to good culinary effect, of course, was an Italian habit predating fascism, but the *Duce* was happy to claim whatever credit he could.

Never one to pass up a chance at proselytizing his own nutritional beliefs, Macfadden informed his host, “Your soldiers eat too much. If I had a few of your men for three weeks, I guarantee you they’d be better soldiers.”<sup>18</sup> As the conversation continued, Macfadden told Mussolini that he felt the men would also benefit from a different exercise routine. Ever impetuous, Macfadden then offered to train for free a group of Italian military men at his New York health resort as a way to prove to Mussolini the efficacy of his methods. For Macfadden, who also possessed a Barnum-like love of publicity, the connection with one of the world’s emerging leaders was a press agent’s dream. “MUSSOLINI AND MACFADDEN TRY A NOBLE EXPERIMENT TO PREVENT WAR” ran the self-congratulatory headline in Macfadden’s newspaper the *Graphic*, accompanied by photographs and a caption spelling out Mussolini’s conviction that a nation fit and vigorous was best able to live peaceably.<sup>19</sup> Whatever else Macfadden believed about Mussolini or Fascism remained hidden behind his enthusiasm for *Il Duce’s* embracing of physical culture ideals. For his part, Mussolini was putting fascist theory into practice, albeit with an improbable partner.

#### Macfadden: Form/Fortune/Fitness

As Robert Ernst’s excellent biography of Macfadden makes clear, Macfadden’s decision to

invite the fascists to his health resort at Dansville was an act set in motion by a life history tilted with the desire to be recognized and honored. Born to a modest and dysfunctional Missouri family in 1870, a young Bernard (his name changed along with his fortunes) endured a childhood marred by illness, poverty, the early death of his alcoholic father and suffering mother, and stints in an orphanage. The gym provided this child with both physical and mental sanctuary, and young Macfadden, inspired in part by the German immigrant Turnverein movement, built himself up. His career as a physical culture crusader took hold during the 1890's, and he embarked on his lifelong formula of dispensing tips on exercise, diet, and healthy living.<sup>20</sup>

As scholars and disciples alike have testified, Macfadden's was a holistic approach. His lessons formed the backbone of a growing publishing concern. Magazines like *Physical Culture* not only detailed his opinions and regimens, but put them within reach of a national audience. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, these grew into a publishing empire, and Macfadden emerged as the nation's most confident proponent of physical culture. His advice covered everything from food preparation to weightlifting to sex.<sup>21</sup> It was the sex part—whether articles dealing with the act, or editorials decrying restrictive clothing, or photographs celebrating the physiques of men *and* women—that caused Anthony Comstock and others in the peck-sniffery pack to bay their charges of indecency at Macfadden's heels.<sup>22</sup>

As benefits a headline-seeker and headline-maker, Macfadden did not shy away from controversy. *Physical Culture* assailed the medical establishment, making an enemy of the AMA, which countered that Macfadden was a quack.<sup>23</sup> Having supported Franklin D. Roosevelt, in tandem with major domo Fulton Oursler, Macfadden later disparaged the New Deal, gaining an anti-union reputation.<sup>24</sup> In a dubious move given his pas-de-deux with Mussolini, Macfadden named George Sylvester Viereck editor of *Liberty*, the publishing conglomerate's socio-political organ. Viereck's World War II imprisonment for pro-Nazi activities made Macfadden's earlier, friendly stance towards Europe's strongman ruler retroactively less innocent.<sup>25</sup>

Macfadden himself also possessed political ambitions. Having supported New York's mayor Jimmy Walker, Macfadden hoped to be named the city's public health commissioner.<sup>26</sup> In 1930, with the

Depression new, Macfadden hoped to land himself a Cabinet appointment as secretary of the as-yet-uncreated Department of Health.<sup>27</sup> His plans to establish the need for such a department depended upon his plans to show the nation his own indispensability. All these twists and turns, the support-then-renunciation of FDR, the personal ambitions for office, the admiration for foreign leaders who seemed to be riding the wave of the future while a confused America remained mired in the muck of Depression, were very typical for the times in question. The maneuvers occurring before 1930 form the backdrop to Macfadden's invitation to train the Italians.

### Setting Up the Trip

While in Rome, Macfadden's main contact was General Renato Ricci, Undersecretary of State for Physical Education. Ricci outlined Italy's plan, "Of making physical education just as much a part of the courses of general education as were the usual academic studies."<sup>28</sup> If that sounded good to Macfadden, imagine how much he liked hearing about how Mussolini established the job, which Ricci filled. Ricci penned the introduction to the book written about the training plan. Entitled, "What Bernarr Macfadden Did for Italian Physical Culture," the essay was a boilerplate example of theory and practice.

*Italy today is in the midst of a revival of a sports and athletic tradition which dates back from the times of the Romans. If we have not appeared in great number amongst the winners in the great international athletic events, it really is not because we have no athletic tradition, but because that tradition was allowed to lie dormant and only a little awakening was needed to bring it back to its full grandeur.*<sup>29</sup>

Dutiful party man that he was, Ricci laid credit for the awakening at the feet of his *Duce*.

When Macfadden visited Italy, he toured the nation, had an audience with the Pope, and visited training facilities and stadiums. United Press correspondent Thomas B. Morgan, who wrote a slim volume on the endeavor for the Macfadden Book Company, described some aspects of the trip.

*Going along the Tiber, he was able to*



The Italian cadets pose with Macfadden aboard the S.S. Conte Biancamano just prior to their departure for Italy on 17 July 1931.

*witness hundreds of healthy brown bodies which had been exposed to the natural sun rays and not alone did they seem like a galaxy of Greek gods, but they radiated the glowing spirit of physical fitness. Along the seashores there were hundreds of camps where children and youths of all ages stayed for the summer to bask in the sun and store up a plentiful supply of nature's own curative qualities, All were beautifully tinted in a golden tan made possible by the fact that their bodies were all exposed except for their little loin girdles in the form of trunks.<sup>30</sup>*

This was Macfadden's kind of set-up—not, he hastened to add, for any salacious reason. Any indecency would be on the part of those objecting to such naturally healthy comportment. Along Adriatic shores, real morality existed: "A true healthy atmosphere, both physical and moral, with none of the prudery and false

modesty which pervades the countries of puritanical modesty."<sup>31</sup>

The forty Italian naval cadets, ranging in age from late teens to early thirties, sailed into New York on February 23, 1930. Macfadden could show them no sun-ripened bodies on the beach, but they enjoyed a host of extracurricular activities. The first night he took them to a wrestling match; the next day, they enjoyed an official reception at City Hall, where Mayor Walker shook each cadet's hand after receiving a fascist salute. Later outings included theatre trips, a drill performance for newsreels, and a night at the Met, courtesy of Otto Kahn. A road trip through Connecticut, New York, Ohio, and Kentucky brought receptions, baseball games, and the like. The capper was a trip to Washington, when the Italian ambassador accompanied them to a meeting with the President at the White House. In the written account, Hoover's words earned rather less of Macfadden's attention than Mussolini's had.<sup>32</sup>

#### **The Regimen: Sports/Exercise/Diet**

Their six-month stay under Macfadden's eye,

at a Tennessee military school and at the Dansville health hotel, left plenty time for training. The regimen, like much of Macfadden's physical culture when divested of rhetoric, was simple, based on sound principles, and fairly effective. Diet, sport, and exercise formed a triad upon which to build and measure the progress of the "boys."

Their initial physical exam showed all to be in reasonable shape. Their sports calendar revolved around six pastimes, some of which were unfamiliar: basketball, baseball, tennis, wrestling, boxing, and track and field. To these were added swimming and American football. Work in the latter was restricted to scrimmages. In basketball—as in other sports, swimming included—the sailors used outdoors facilities instead of the indoors whenever possible. Track & field work culminated in a Field Day. Regular gymnasium work in tumbling, pyramid-building, and balancing built skills applicable to the various games.

Baseball was the favorite sport, despite its novelty. Macfadden noted that, "The throwing muscles were underdeveloped," no surprise for products of a soccer-playing nation.<sup>33</sup> Progressive throwing and catching drills, accompanied by blackboard instruction on the rules, all led to five-inning intramural games, with box scores recording the action. By Macfadden's account, the "boys" loved the action, and were each presented with equipment before their return journey, in order to spread the horsehide gospel to their homeland. Building a knowledge base so that each cadet could teach the sports taught him when he returned to Italy was a major component of Macfadden's envisioned plan.<sup>34</sup>

But the men did more than play sports. Each day began with "Setting Up Exercises" and combined stretches and calisthenics designed to improve "coordination and precision."<sup>35</sup> Macfadden stressed proper performance in each exercise, and every cadet had to show teaching competence in each maneuver. They also worked on posture—"Strengthening the spine," as he put it, was a longstanding Macfadden priority.

Macfadden's diet plans revolved around balanced health, as he spelled out again and again over the years. Intake for the cadets was, "commensurate with the day's activities," bearing in mind energy requirements and the need for weight control. This was no fat farm. Still, Macfadden's food notions were basic and moderate, if not by 1930's lights, then by today's standards. Fruits and vegetables formed the core of the

menu, prepared differently for the sake of variety. Whole grains came in cereals and breads, meat and eggs supplementing. Milk was the beverage of choice.<sup>36</sup> Modern sophisticates who scoff at Macfadden on other scores must give the man fair due when considering how advanced many of his food attitudes really were. Worth remembering, also, is the fact that his foes thought his dietary schemes were bunk.

Regarding beverages, the Italians had to face an obstacle right off the bat. As Ricci put it, they were used to "Taking wine with their meals...ever since their birth, almost."<sup>37</sup> Prohibition was a hardship that they bore with, "Spartan fortitude," the fascist general noted approvingly, adding that his men, "Profited by the regime of strict abstention and American training systems."<sup>38</sup>

## Results

In the book summarizing the encounter, Macfadden presented before and after photos of each cadet, along with a report card that exhaustively recapitulated weight, body measurements (neck, arm flexed and unflexed, forearm, waist, chest normal-contracted-expanded, hips, thigh, calf, ankle, knee); weight-training results (two-hand press repetitions: 73 1/2 lbs.; left and right arm presses: 30 lbs.; abdominal lift: 30 1/2 lbs.; deep kneebends, or squats: 103 lbs.); and times for the 100 yard dash and the mile. Without lengthy statistical analysis, let it be stated that, while weight changes were often negligible, with a few modest reductions, body measurements showed perceptible gains, and weightlifting and running performances showed demonstrable improvements. One hopes Ricci found these achievements as noteworthy as the cadets' teetotaling feats. The results point to the germinal sense of Macfadden's fitness and diet regimen. Eating right, in appropriate amounts, while training effectively—it still means getting bigger where you want, smaller where you want, and stronger all over.

## Conclusions

In summary, Bernarr Macfadden, a sixty-year old man who nursed both political ambitions and controversial doctrines relating to health, fitness, and diet, admired Mussolini as the dynamic embodiment of certain ideals. Cosseted on his Italian sojourn and certainly in over his head regarding matters of international affairs and socio-political analysis, Macfadden offered to reciprocate by teaching a group of young military



men the finer points of his physical culture lifestyle. Forty of these young men departed their purportedly energetic society during the first full year of the Great Depression. They spent six months in a supposedly decadent democracy, eating, exercising, playing, and living according to Macfadden's plan. They manifested measurable gains in size, strength, speed, and endurance. Then, they returned to Italy.

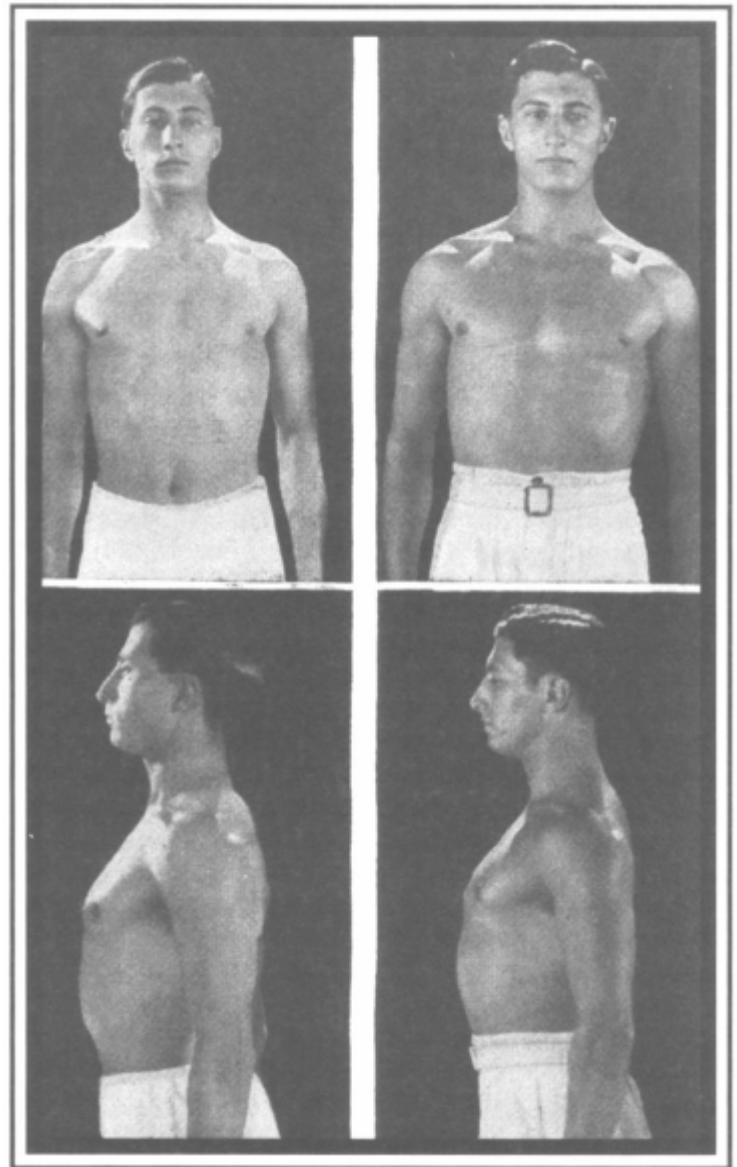
Did their sojourn cement relations between democratic America and fascist Italy? Did their love of baseball or their sightseeing ensure peace between the two nations? Did Mussolini, dazzled by Macfadden's practice and theory, make physical culture the central value of his governance?

Of course not. Insofar as Macfadden dreamed of large-scale or enduring effects from what amounted to a training camp, he was kidding himself. His ideas on fitness and diet were not at all ridiculous; in fact, many of them were far ahead of their time and would later find widespread acceptance. In this department, Macfadden's work with the Italians was a success. He promised to make his charges more fit, and he did.

On the other hand, he surely had other agendas. Was Macfadden a closet fascist or a wannabe dictator? Ernst's biography makes it clear that eccentricity, vanity, and naivete were more applicable to Macfadden than a will-driven intention to remake his society and crush all dissent. But on the subject of dictators, Macfadden brought on criticism through his own words and actions. His later appointment of Viereck seems more disturbing than the inveigling of Mussolini.

Macfadden was not the only Depression-era American who thought that foreign tyrannies showed dynamism which democracies could not match. Potentates claiming to know a better route to the future scorned democracy as infirm and short-sighted. As late as 1941, many high-profile Americans failed to see the true nature of what went on in Italy, Germany, and the USSR. Many otherwise discriminating observers had their vision clouded by tours of Potemkin towns and factories, by the rhythmically stomping soldiers on parade, or by what looked like the bright light of tomorrow glinting off the bemedaled chest of a field marshal. In Macfadden's case, the mirage of Mussolini in 1930 shimmered with illusions of fitness, better diet, and active life.

No less than Winston Churchill once remarked



Macfadden published before and after photos of each participant. Attilio Pregellio, shown here, weighed 143 pounds upon arrival and 142 when he departed. During the five months training, he put two inches on his chest and added half an inch to his biceps. He also decreased the size of his hips by 1/2 inch but added two inches to his waist. Macfadden tested the men in repetition lifting, in a mile run and in the 100 yard dash. Attilio cut his time in the 100 from 12 seconds to 10 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub>, and in the two hand press, using 73.5 pounds, he did 18 repetitions at the beginning of the study and 28 at the end. In the squat, with 103 pounds on his shoulders, he made 18 in the beginning of the experiment and 100 repetitions at the end.

that he was, "Charmed by Signor Mussolini's gentle and simple bearing."<sup>39</sup> An ambivalent American book published one year before Macfadden's trip, while noting the *Duce's* violent side, paid homage to his "Marvelous" energy and called him "The Wild Man of Europe."<sup>40</sup> FDR's envoy Sumner Welles wooed Mussolini in spring 1940, urging neutrality in the war underway. Ezra Pound remained madly loyal throughout World War II. Along this spectrum, Macfadden fit somewhere in the middle, closer to Churchill's mistaken first impression and FDR's diplomatic blandishment than to Pound's anti-American hate-mongering.

Academicians veer towards overarching conclusions, the better to dramatize a study. It would be exciting to say that Macfadden's involvement with Mussolini proves that the father of physical culture was a not-so-closeted fascist. But the truth is more mundane. The worst that can be said about this episode is also the best: Macfadden, that idiosyncratic booster of decent fitness principles, was snookered by a charismatic dictator, years before many in the world saw Mussolini and his system for what they truly were. In matters of fitness, Macfadden, while controversial, was no quack. But when it came to international relations, that is exactly what he was. When Macfadden and Mussolini met, it is true that one man represented a dynamic social system that was flexible and strong enough to lay claim to the future, while the other stood for an order that was phony, cruel, and doomed. The trick was knowing which was which. Neither the *Duce* nor the physical culture guru got that one right.

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Mussolini was killed on 28 April 1945. Cesare Salmaggi & Alfredo Pallavisini, *2194 Days of War* (Milan: Arnoldo Modadori/Barnes & Noble, 1987), 724.

<sup>2</sup> *Colliers' Photographic/The Picture History of World War II 1939-1945*, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1946), 253.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Overy & Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Road to War* (London: Macmillan London, 1989), 150.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda-The Art of Persuasion: World War II* (Seacaucus, NJ: Wellfleet, 1987), 69.

<sup>5</sup> Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Overy & Wheatcroft, *Road to War*, 150.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>9</sup> Rhodes, *Propaganda*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance: Robert Ernst, *Weakness is a Crime: The*

*Life of Bernarr Macfadden* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Jan Todd, "Bernarr Macfadden: Reformer of Feminine Form," *Journal of Sport History*, 14(Spring, 1987): 74.

<sup>12</sup> Ernst, *Weakness*, 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas B. Morgan, *Italian Physical Culture Demonstration* (New York: Macfadden Book Co., 1932), 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst, *Weakness*, 19 & 1-10. (Readers in search of more detailed biographic material are directed to this seminal volume, which is both lively and rigorous.)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-52.

*Ibid.*, 38-52, & Todd, "Bernarr Macfadden," 61-75. (Todd's perceptive article is the source of record for those interested in Macfadden's pioneering attitudes regarding feminine athleticism and form.)

<sup>23</sup> Ernst, *Weakness*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Macfadden & Emile Gavreau, *Dumbbells & Carrot Strips* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953) 299.

<sup>28</sup> Morgan, *Italian Physical Culture*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-81.

*Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-102.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-105.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-84.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory 1874-1932* (New York: Laurel, 1989) 19.

<sup>40</sup> John Bond, *Mussolini: The Wild Man of Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Independent Publishing Co., 1929), 13.



Arthur Dreschler's  
*The Weightlifting Encyclopedia:*  
*A Guide to World Class Performance*  
(Flushing, NY: 1998)



**Review by John Fair, Ph.D.  
Georgia College and University**



To persons outside the iron game, it seems inconceivable that weightlifting competition consists of just two basic movements lasting several seconds each and that lifters should devote the best years of their lives performing endless repetitions of these motions. No less amazing would be Artie Dreschler's *Weightlifting Encyclopedia*, which encompasses virtually all aspects of this activity in nearly 550 folio-size pages. For iron game insiders, however, Dreschler's weighty tome is chock-full of meaningful information, based on decades of widespread experience, reading, and thinking about the sport of weightlifting. It is actually more of a primer (or "guide" as the author calls it), but this volume is truly encyclopedic in its coverage. The prevailing tone is upbeat—unabashedly conveying a sense of confidence that readers, especially budding lifters from the United States, can achieve world class performances.

That these noble aspirations can be fulfilled seems possible to the author from two events of the past—the success of Bob Hoffman and York Barbell in raising American lifting to unimagined heights from the 1930s to the 1960s and his own achievement, as a "Bob Hoffman boy grown up," in breaking a junior world record at the end of that golden age. Befitting the work of a crusader, each chapter is full of didacticisms and infused with the severe and relentless logic of a man with a mission. Sad to say, this enthusiasm may be futile. Olympic lifting in the U.S. is but a shadow of what it was during America's heyday, and it seems

unlikely that Dreschler's splendid effort will inspire a renaissance among the current generation of strength athletes. Today, these athletes seem far more inclined to take up bodybuilding, powerlifting, and other sports less hidebound by administrative and incentive structures from the past.

Interestingly, the introductory section, "What Weightlifting Is All About," concentrates more on dispelling commonplace fallacies about the sport than on describing what it is. Powerlifters, however, might question the assertion that "they are simply no match for the best weightlifters in the world in terms of pure strength or power" (p. 5), and many more eyebrows will be raised over the statements that "on a practical level, the advantages of taking anabolic steroids have been virtually eliminated" and that there are "50 to 100 times" as many weightlifters as powerlifters worldwide (p. 8). Notwithstanding these arguable points, it is true that weightlifting is greatly misunderstood and, unlike other sports, in constant need of explanation and justification to the non-lifting public.

This negative approach does not extend into the first two chapters on technique and teaching of technique. Here each step of the snatch and the clean and jerk is carefully explained, accompanied by sequence photographs and a clear idea of the consequences of improper form. No aspect of lifting technique—proper breathing, limited bar drop, the hook grip, etc.—is left uncovered. A really attractive feature of Dreschler's pedagogy is that he explains thoroughly the advantages

and disadvantages of each style, from the frog-leg pull popularized by the Japanese in the 1960s to the squat jerk employed by the Chinese in more recent years. His explanation of the advantages of the split (almost universally employed in the 1950s) over the squat style in the low position of the snatch and the clean, however, must be questioned. If the former does require less flexibility and leg strength and permits 30% to 50% faster execution, why does no one in the world use it? Otherwise, Dreschsler provides the wherewithal for lifters to experiment and make wise choices. The teaching chapter presents Soviet, USA, Romanian, and Bulgarian approaches to technique and even includes a section entitled "If It Doesn't Work, Try Something Different" (p. 102). His *laissez faire* approach reminds one of Steve Stanko's terse aphorism for lifting success: "If it works, do it."

Despite such extensive coverage of technique, it is heartening to know that the author believes that strength is still the most essential ingredient to weightlifting success. Indeed, "there has not ever been, nor will there ever be, a world weightlifting champion who is not incredibly strong, and the strongest man generally wins" (p. 112). Dreschsler explores strength in all its ramifications, its distinction from power and its relevance to flexibility, with much emphasis on the Russian and eastern European systems that have been so successful over the past four decades. He includes traditional and non-traditional methods for gaining strength, such as concentric and isometric contractions, isokinetic training, compensatory acceleration, plyometrics, and electro-stimulation, and incorporates the routines of noted strongmen from the past, such as John Davis, Doug Hepburn, Paul Anderson, and Ed Coan. Despite this profusion of scientific methods and models, Artie would no doubt appreciate the simplicity of an anecdote about Norbert Schemansky's take on lifting. A young lifter, having just missed an attempt, asked the great master to tell him the secret reason why. Norb just looked at him and said, "You weren't strong enough."

The chapter on equipment includes valuable information on such topics as lifting suits, straps, wraps, the bar, power racks, pulling blocks, and benches. What is unexpected, in what is otherwise a pretty matter-of-fact rendering, is a dramatic account of how the author, home alone, fought for his life to escape from a new and very stiff lifting belt that would not unbuckle after he had done a personal record press. Irony is evi-

dent too in his observation that the greatest weightlifting champions have often trained in grungy facilities. Compare, for instance, the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs with the Spartan facility of the Bulgarians or with the dingy Broad Street gym in York where America's greatest lifters once trained.

An entire chapter follows on assistance exercises. Generally these lifts, by stressing isolated movements and targeting special muscle groups, approximate the snatch and clean and jerk as closely as possible. Undoubtedly the most important assistance exercise for the Olympic lifter is the full squat, front and back. "The basis for life on earth as we know it" was the way junior world record holder Vic Schreiner referred to his fixation on the latter. "Squats are essential for weightlifters," concurs Dreschsler. "If the lifter is to succeed, they must practically become an obsession" (p. 226). Over and over, he stresses how much weightlifting is grounded in the big muscle groups of the legs, hips, and back. He also places the classic lifts in proper perspective, thereby ensuring that assistance exercises do not become an end in themselves.

The very long section on training plans, replete with discussions of periodization and cycles (micro, meso, and macro) will likely appeal only to the more advanced lifter. Here again Dreschsler offers a smorgasbord of choices and samples, consciously avoiding the "cookbook" or "one-size-fits-all" approach. He wisely believes that there is no ideal workout plan and that not all lifters are on the same level or capable of responding to the same kinds of routines. On one point, however, he is adamant. Contrary to most previous prescriptions, he does not advocate extensive stretching in the warm-up process, citing again the efficacy of Bulgarian methods. Flexibility work, he argues, is more appropriate in the cooling down process.

While most of Dreschsler's account deals with physical attributes and properties, full coverage is devoted to mental preparedness. Here single-mindedness, of the kind exemplified by Bob Hoffman, is a prerequisite. Weightlifting must come first in your life. Beyond that, such attributes as visualization, mental toughening, overcoming pain, and control of one's emotions and anxiety will fall into place. To illustrate how to harness one's mental powers to achieve optimal performance, the author relates his own experience in setting two junior world's records in 1970. The most important final ingredient to a record lift, however, is

motivation. “The motivated lifter will feel an energy that cries to be released and confidence that success will be achieved. I have almost never missed a lift that I was highly motivated about. I have rarely made a maximum lift that I lacked confidence about making or lacked the burning desire to complete” (p. 350). But willpower alone, driven by the prospect of Olympic glory or a world record, will no longer suffice as incentives in the new millenium. The more immediate gratification of fortune and fame, of the kind exemplified by other sports in tune with America’s capitalist tradition, will more likely motivate today’s young athletes.

Remaining chapters on the competition itself, non-traditional lifters, nutrition, and injuries serve almost as an anticlimax to these inspiring words. Unlike previous sections, a lingering resentment is detectable against overbearing and omniscient coaches. Presumably young lifters would be better advised to seek guidance from this manual than from some of the old guard of the iron game. As Dreschsler explicitly states, “the underlying theme throughout this book has been that athletes need to be treated as individuals” (p. 377). Likewise they should be treated with respect, and special allowance should be made for anatomical differences of women, maturational curves of children, and the effects of aging on the mature athlete. Surprisingly little attention is devoted to anabolic steroids, especially considering their impact on the sport over the past forty years. This is refreshing, but hardly realistic. A final irony concerns injuries. Weightlifting does subject the body to extreme stress, but contrary to the views of most outsiders, it is one of the safest of sports, even when extending oneself to the limit. The key is to exercise reason, meaning that “the weight attempted on any given day should be within or slightly beyond the lifter’s capabilities” (p. 419).

This kind of sound information extends another 76 pages into the appendices. Though they include a discussion of Newton’s three laws of motion and become somewhat technical in places, the appendices are hardly extraneous or irrelevant. They are followed by an annotated bibliography and a highly useful list of organizations and publications of special interest to the weightlifter. Making connections and networking are simply other ways of expanding upon the knowledge made available in this compendium.

This is not a book, however, that should be read straight through. It will be most useful as a reference work. Novices, veterans, and curiosity-seekers alike will find themselves thumbing through this clearly-written, well-organized, and amply-indexed text in search of answers to their lifting queries. It is not with-

out flaws, however. Some of the statements and advice are debatable, and a revised edition would benefit greatly from a copy editor and proofreader. Economy of expression is not one of the virtues of this volume, and there are numerous instances of missing or misappropriated words—especially articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. Spell-check does not catch such infelicities. But these are mere quibbles. There is far more to savor and appreciate than to criticize in this encyclopedia.

More than anything, it is an enterprise of creativity, much like the noble efforts of Peary and Mabel Rader in the 1930s and of Osmo Kiiha in recent years who were motivated mainly by a love of weightlifting and the pleasure of stimulating others who are devoted to it. What’s more, it is the only current “how to” book available on Olympic lifting, far superseding primers by Hoffman, George Kirkley, and others. In the absence of *Strength & Health* and *Iron Man* (the Rader version) and the lack of local lifting clubs or even meets, where else can a young lifter obtain instruction and inspiration? Though intended to encourage youth to world class performances, Artie’s encyclopedia may serve the unintended purpose of helping to prevent the extinction of an endangered species in this country—Olympic weightlifters.

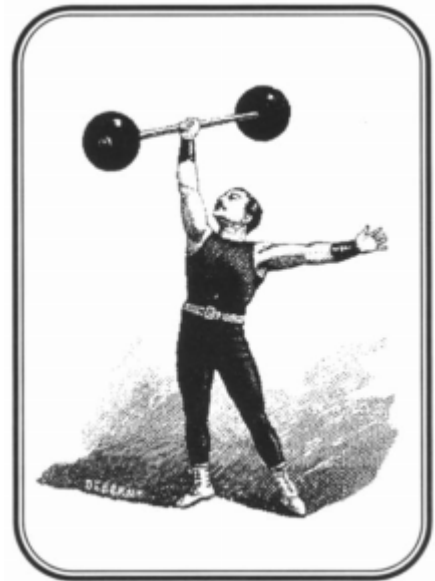
This book, though very reasonably priced, will likely earn little profit, and what money it does make, the author assures us, will be used to promote the sport. It is such an important book that USA Weightlifting should adopt it forthwith and assist in its marketing. In the best of all worlds, sales should exceed those of Arnold Schwarzenegger’s *Encyclopedia of Modern Bodybuilding*, now in its second edition. But Dreschsler must realize, especially from his statement that “weightlifters and weightlifting coaches are both rare commodities,” that any such hopes are chimerical and that it will take much more than his crusader’s zeal to lift American weightlifting from the doldrums. Salvation, if it ever comes, will likely not require some foreign model, or the reappearance of another Bob Bednarski, Dave Sheppard, Tommy Kono, or even a Bob Hoffman to lead the way. It is only when the “powers-that-be” abandon the Procrustean bed of amateurism and atavistic thinking that has prevailed over the past thirty years that this admirable book will receive the attention it so richly deserves.

To order Dreschler’s book write: *A is A Communications*, P.O. Box 680, Whetstone, New York, 11357-0680. Telephone/Fax: 718-661-3195. Price is \$29.95. ISBN:0-9659179-2-4.

# The Brothers Baillargeon

Excerpted from  
Rejean Levesque and Kathy Paradis's  
*Homage aux célèbres frères Baillargeon*  
(Cap-Saint-Ignace, Quebec: 1997)

Translated by David Chapman



*Editors' Note: We recently received a gift from Gilbert Michaud, a friend from Quebec who shares with us an interest in strongmen. The book, by Rejean Levesque and Kathy Paradis, is **Homage aux célèbres frères Baillargeon**, and it details the careers of the famous French-Canadian lifter-wrestlers. We were fascinated with the book, and thought our readers would enjoy an excerpt discussing all the brothers, but featuring the most accomplished lifter among the six rugged men—Paul, the greatest bent presser of the modern era. (Paul died late last year.) The book is in French, and those interested in ordering a copy should contact La Plume d'Oie, 153A des Pionniers Ouest, Cap-Saint-Ignace, Quebec, GOR 1H0. We are grateful to David Chapman for taking the time to translate this section for **Iron Game History**.*

**W**henver they visited, family members and friends from the village endlessly repeated to the Baillargeon parents, "Your boys will make a fortune in the city; they're strong!" By dint of hearing this confirmation, their curiosity was roused, and that was how the adventure began.

The years rolled on and the Baillargeon brothers gradually became aware of their physical strength. From one experience to another, they developed sur-

prising abilities that allowed them to lift heavier and heavier weights, but this phenomenon always amazed them. Jean was the first of the six boys to discover that his strength was equal to that of men who were much better trained and experienced than he.

One day Jean read an ad in the newspaper that mentioned that a wrestler named Sheik Abid challenged anyone to lift the same weight as he did in his performance on Sunday evening, November 26, 1946 at the Tour de Québec. One hundred dollars was offered to whoever was successful at this feat.

Jean was greatly tempted to go and give it a try. So then, on Saturday morning he asked his men to load his truck with wood. After supper, he left to deliver his wood to Onésime Chalifour, who had a wood yard in Lévis. That same night Jean slept in Québec City, and the next evening he went to the show.

It was a vaudeville show organized by the Champlain Athletic Club [*Le Soleil*, Québec City, November, 25, 1946]. When it came to Sheik Abid's act, he lifted a 725-pound weight with a type of apparatus that he slung over his shoulders. The strongman then performed several other feats of strength. When he was finished, Jean moved toward the stage and said to the announcer that he wanted to try to lift the weight. He was then told that it was impossible since the bill was too full. Jean argued, and he was given the chance to show his abilities; after all, if you are going to make a

challenge, you should at least set aside some time for the audience to try.

After Jean insisted, Sheik Abid was contacted, and he agreed to the demand. Jean wanted to lift the 725-pound weight—that did not call for any knack, just brute strength. Sheik Abid told him to start with a one-arm snatch; the Sheik then took a large barbell of 130 or 150 pounds by the center, did a “standing snatch,” that is to say he lifted it from the floor in only one movement, then brought it over his head, did a half-turn and then let it fall into his two arms. Finally, he threw it into the air and caught it in the center with just one hand.

For a lad who had never lifted weights before, this called for tremendous ability, and Jean succeeded. His hand, however, was not in the center of the barbell and as the weight tilted toward the back a little; it was much more difficult to hold on to. For the promoters, this was not acceptable. Jean asked to do it again; at this attempt his hand was a little more centered but the barbell was still out of balance. As the promoters got ready to tell him this [that he had failed once more], the crowd began to boo them. They then handed over the sum of \$25 to get him to leave the theater because he was upstaging the “star.” This was the beginning of Jean’s weightlifting career; he was at that time 31 years old.

Juliette Veilleux, the same person who would later become the wife of Antonio Baillargeon, was present at this show; she witnessed this feat and the reluctance of the promoters, since everything was designed so that Sheik Abid would be the star. At that time, Juliette was not yet married and did not even know Antonio. It was a complete coincidence that she was a fan of strength shows.

After this show, Jean met Jean-Yves Dionne and Gérard Michaud, a former Canadian weightlifting champion. Eager to know more of this impressive specimen, they asked him where he came from, what he did for a living, and if he knew anything about weightlifting. In order to pique their curiosity a little more, he told them that he had five brothers, all just as brawny and that three of them were bigger than he was. Gerard Michaud invited him to his gymnasium to discuss training and the possibilities that would be available to him in this field.

Some time later, Jean, accompanied by Adrien, went to Québec City to meet Gerard Michaud. For this

event Michaud had invited a lad from Saguenay named Bacon, a weightlifter who weighed 350 pounds. At a given moment, when it came time to match strength with Bacon, Jean defeated him and Adrien did the same. Mr. Michaud had been convinced that just the opposite would result and these proofs were not sufficient for him. He therefore invited them back, but this time to the gymnasium of a Mr. Pichette; both of them wanted to see what Jean was capable of doing.

At the time of this meeting when Jean came alone, it was a question of lifting weights, and on each attempt his observers increased the weight. According to them, if Jean could manage to lift 170 pounds (with one hand), this would be good. When someone is untrained, the more repetitions the weaker he becomes, but when one has trained the opposite is true: he gets warmed up and lifts more. Jean thus began to tire out, but he succeeded all the same in lifting 190 pounds. They were completely surprised for they compared him to a lumberjack of whom they had heard who was not used to lifting weights either but could lift 170 pounds. Later they learned that this lumberjack was Adrien. Shortly after this, Jean bought a weight set from Mr. Gérard Michaud during the winter and began working out.

At the end of November, Jean was invited to participate in a great weightlifting competition sponsored by the Bodybuilding and Weightlifting Association of Quebec. He appeared as the fifteenth and final attraction doing an act featuring muscle control and various feats of strength. For the contest, he participated in the heavyweight division; he succeeded in the military press, the snatch, and the clean and jerk. He therefore won the overall championship.

“It was Jean Baillargeon, the strongman who has already challenged Sheik Abid, who took home the honors of the evening. And Baillargeon is only a beginner in weightlifting which promises a very bright future.” [*Le Soleil*, Québec City, November 1946].

After these little experiments, Jean was convinced that he was capable of doing just as well as the others (if not better). He conceived the idea of presenting a strength show in Saint-Magloire, his native parish. For this occasion, he invited Mr. Gérard Michaud to do a weightlifting demonstration as well as the Dionne Brothers, who would do an acrobatic act. Jean gave a little strength demonstration consisting of some prone

(sic) presses and several other feats. The parish hall was packed with the youth of Saint-Magloire and by people who had come from neighboring parishes.

During this time Lionel and Paul lived in Colebrook, New Hampshire where they had purchased a dairy farm. When they learned that Jean had given a strength show and that he had met people who were interested in helping him put on a show, Paul went up to meet them. Paul was encouraged to work out, so he bought 500 pounds worth of weights from Mr. Gerard Michaud and returned to the United States with this equipment, determined to follow his advice.

At the same time that Jean was gaining a reputation in Québec City, Adrien and Charles had also been working in Colebrook for six months; they were logging their land. Jean wasted no time in telephoning Charles to ask him to organize a show in his area a bit like the one presented in Saint-Magloire. In order to do this, he sent him several placards and details of the show. Charles therefore had to choose the most promising location for this type of demonstration and since he was already well known in the eastern counties (of Quebec), he opted for Coaticook.

Jean went back to join his brothers in Colebrook and trained with Paul and the Dionne brothers. Charles put on the show at a racetrack on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in 1947; Jean lifted weights, including one of 1,000 pounds; Paul lifted a horse up a pole, and the Dionne brothers did acrobatics. They had attracted nearly 4,000 persons.

This performance caused them to be talked about in all the surrounding towns. In Colebrook there was an exhibition which was going to start in a few days. Having heard what happened in Colebrook, the promoters decided that an extra attraction would draw more people to the exhibition. They asked Paul to participate. Paul attached iron rods in a pole that had already been set up in front of the main stage and that is how in the afternoon and the evening, he lifted a horse up the pole.



The six Baillargeon brothers pose in front of their touring truck. From the left: Adrien, Paul, Lionel, an admirer from Virginia, Jean, Charles, and Antonio.

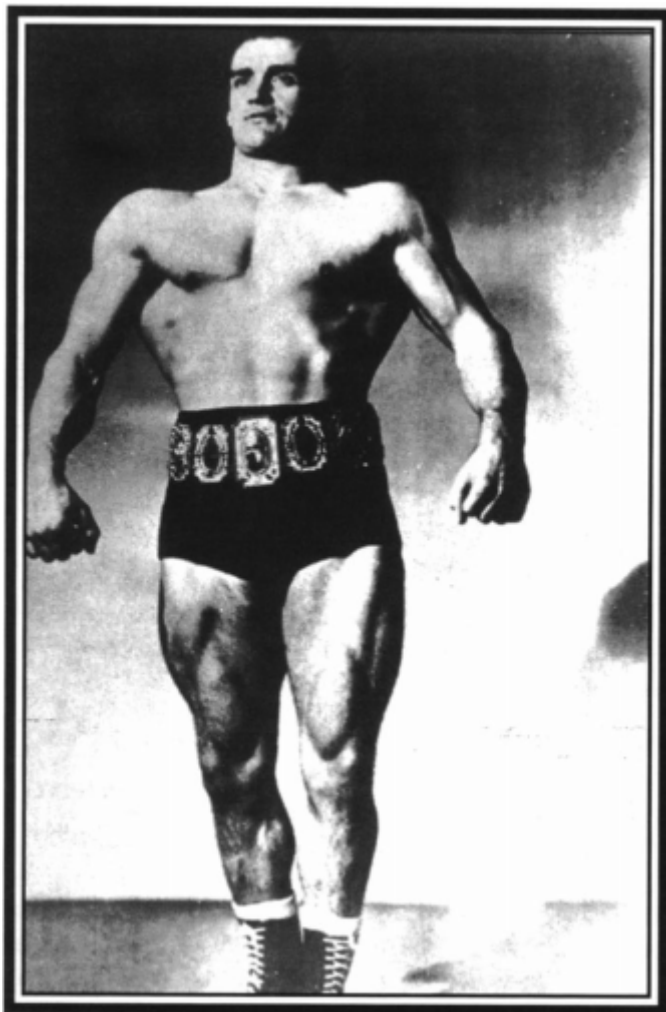
This became the extra attraction for three days.

After this success, Jean wanted Charles to continue to organize performances. Thus, a month later they performed four other shows. At that time, the brothers only lacked Antonio, who was still at school in L'Islet. They performed in Colebrook, Berlin, and Farnham. It was moreover in Farnham where Antonio came to join them. This marked the six brothers' debut in weightlifting and strength feats.

The Baillargeon brothers possessed fabulous physical capacities, but they also developed an absolute trust in their abilities, which became a sort of moral contract. The endurance and explosions of power which are observed in weightlifting and wrestling encourage the will to win and to become strong. To develop the mind and the body: that is the essential element in success and in the ability of make extreme efforts.

Throughout their careers, these men knew how to be tenacious, courageous, humble, good, and generous. A spirit of solidarity linked one to another. They experienced neither jealousy nor envy. Their feats of strength and their training were carried on in a state of harmony. There was never a question of determining





Paul Baillargeon's strength is easily seen in this physique shot taken in 1951.

who was "the strongest." They encouraged each other and mutually respected one another's individual talents. They were men without malice and careful about protecting their honor.

The stage costume of the Baillargeon Brothers was distinguished by a maple leaf on which there was a beaver and by the inscription "6 Baillargeon Brothers" decorating the upper part of the costume. They sold these to fans for 25 cents in 1949.

Mr. Jean-Yves Dionne demonstrated a real artistic talent, so it was he who designed the advertising panels that were installed on Jean's truck. The truck was loaded heavily with props that would be used in the feats in the performance.

The lettering was in French as well as English

since most of their performances were in the United States, especially in the French-speaking parts (such as Lowell in Massachusetts), but just as often in English-speaking sections. The inscription "the strongest in the world" appeared all in colored letters.

Thus painted, the truck announced the "vaudeville performance" in ten acts during which the six Baillargeon brothers performed feats of strength while Messrs. Jean-Yves Dionne and Riverin Gosselin did acrobatic tricks.

### The Strength Shows

At this time, every show was a game—a sort of entertainment to use physical strength and hear the gasps of the audience. The troupe had the duty of carefully preparing the show and of performing the feats of strength with great seriousness, all the while looking for ways to improve things. Here is a preview of the show program for the Tour de Quebec.

"The totally stunning show given by the six Baillargeon brothers lasts two and a half hours and will so astonish the audience that those who see it will still remember it fifty years hence."

### Program

#### *Afternoon*

**Charles Baillargeon pulls a bus with his teeth**

#### *Evening*

1. The six Baillargeon brothers
2. Mr. Riverin Gosselin, world-renowned balancer
3. The two Dionne brothers, sensational acrobats
4. The Baillargeons and the Dionne brothers in a series of pyramids
5. Mr. Jean Baillargeon, muscular control
6. The Baillargeon brothers
7. Mr. Jean Baillargeon lifts one ton
8. Mr. Adrien Baillargeon lifts 3,000 pounds with a platform

#### *Finale*

**Mr. Paul Baillargeon lifts a horse weighing 1,400 pounds**

—*Le Soleil*, Québec City, December 4, 1949

The Baillargeon and Dionne brothers performed a special act in which the entire troupe formed human pyramids. With one single person at the bottom, they succeeded in forming pyramids of three, four, even five people. With their shirts off so that people could see their sharp and well-defined muscles, Jean and Paul

were most often the understanders. The most spectacular part of the pyramid was not just its weight, but even more the balance that it demanded. Their series of pyramids never fell apart, and they were appreciated by the audience.

After training vigorously during the winter of 1948 in order to do weightlifting, Charles organized the shows (i.e., performances in the parishes of Quebec). Still at the beginning of their careers and wanting to make a living from their shows, they needed to organize some promotions in the surrounding area. It was easier to fill parish halls than the theaters of the big cities since they were not yet well known. Attracting the same number of spectators in the cities called for lots of advertising. In 1949 they received excellent publicity in newspapers and in weightlifting magazines which added luster to their fame.

Still in 1948 during a visit to York at the gymnasium of Mr. Bob Hoffman, who celebrated his fiftieth birthday and at the same time sponsored a weightlifting exhibition, the Baillargeon brothers met all the Mr. Americas, "Mr. Physiques", and other weightlifters. At the York gymnasium there was a lad who trained without giving them any notice. But when Paul took Mr. Louis Cyr's weight and bent pressed it, the lad came up to him to question him and then went to find Bob Hoff-

man who learned what Paul had just accomplished. It was at this point that Mr. Hoffman sought to include them on his evening's program: Jean for his muscle control and Paul for his bent press.

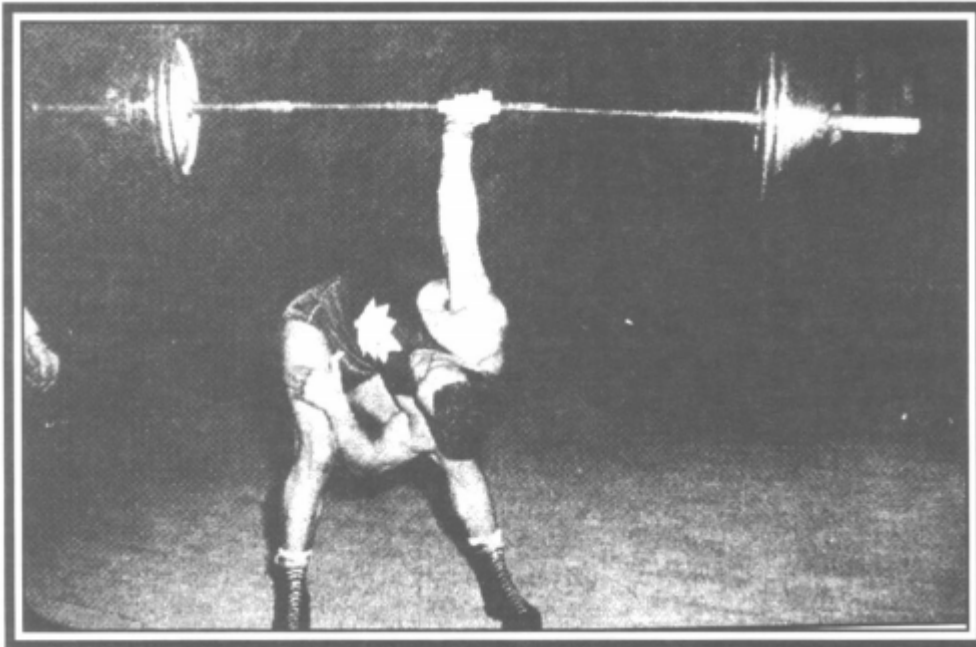
As they had agreed, the brothers were there that evening. Paul had to compete in the bent press with Mr. Charlie Dubus. Charlie weighed 260 pounds and Paul weighed 220 pounds. In the subsequent contest Charlie attempted 290 pounds but dropped the weight. It was then that Paul took the weight and bent pressed it, but after he got it to arm's length, he lost his balance, but everyone agreed he had succeeded in lifting it. (*Ed note: The S&H account of the exhibition indicates that both men failed with the heavier weight.*)

Then the show continued with Jean's muscular control. His demonstration was performed with such perfection of movements that he became the star of the evening. Thanks to these two fine performances, they earned good notices in both *Strength & Health* and *Time* magazines, and this allowed them to continue their performances while filling city arenas and parish halls. Now that they were much better known, they could try other strength shows.

### Paul Baillargeon--From Strength Feats to Wrestling

Paul was born on July 10, 1922, and he followed in the footsteps of his brothers by working in logging. Around the age of 23, he took a 13-foot-long spruce log that was 13 inches in diameter and around 20 inches at the base, and picked it up in the middle in order to stack it on a pile of logs.

Paul's specialty in strength feats was lifting a horse. In the beginning, in order to do this trick, he climbed up a telephone pole. Thereafter he brought a portable aluminum scaffold since this was easier to carry around due to his frequent moves. It was a challenge for Paul to carry out this feat since everyone said that it was impossible to lift a horse



Paul Baillargeon was a master of the bent press. He was unusually flexible and this flexibility, coupled with his strength, allowed him to make 321 pounds in this lift in front of reliable witnesses.

**AFFIDAVIT ATTESTING THAT PAUL  
BAILLARGEON BENT PRESSED 321 POUNDS**

Harry B. Paschall  
Words and Pictures  
1137 Franklin Avenue  
Columbus, 5, Ohio  
May 11, 1951

To Whom it May Concern:

This certifies that Paul Baillargeon has correctly lifted with his right arm only by the method commonly known as the one-arm bent press, at the Apollo Health Studio gymnasium at 74 East Gay Street in Columbus, Ohio, United States, on the afternoon of May 11, 1951, a barbell weighing three hundred twenty-one (321) pounds before witnesses and to the satisfaction of the following officers of the AAU.

HARRY B. PASCHALL  
JACK LIBERTORE  
FRAYSHER FERGUSON

Sworn before me,  
this 11th day of June 1951,  
at Columbus, Ohio, Franklin County  
MARGARET W. HORCHOW  
Notary Public

because they were too heavy.

It was in the village of Colebrook that Paul made his first attempt at lifting a horse weighing 900 pounds by climbing up a pole with a primitive harness. Some 800 spectators were witnesses to this feat, and that was the beginning . . .

Paul put the horse in a wooden crate and lifted the entire thing until the day when he realized the danger this might represent. (During the performance) the horse was made nervous by the excitement of the crowd, and it decided to depart from its wooden crate and to jump out with two feet on the ground. Paul felt a violent movement that shook his shoulders. This

unfortunate experience permitted him to make other more careful arrangements for future shows: he installed a harness on the horse and tied it to his own.

Paul knew how to show great determination and to marshal his spirit in order to be victorious—and at every performance, too. Since he never traveled with his own horse, he had to borrow one after he arrived in the village where the show was being presented. He therefore never lifted the same weight. Finally, he bought a horse that traveled with him, in order to avoid the variety of weights. (Before he bought his own horse) he lifted from 900 to 2,000 pounds at these performances.

In weightlifting Paul succeeded several times in bent pressing 321 pounds with just one arm. What was remarkable with this young man was his physical appearance: he was very tall, 233 pounds, with sharply defined muscles, surprisingly wide shoulders, a narrow waist, and a youthful face. His lively and open spirit seemed to promise great intelligence. He exhibited determination in his character and a perfect balance in his movements.

Paul was forced to maintain the reputation of the Baillargeons at a demonstration of his superhuman strength at the Apollo Health Studio gymnasium in Columbus, Ohio in 1951, before an audience that was very skeptical of the French-Canadian's strength. With a determined attitude, he attacked the arduous task of lifting a 321-pound barbell with just one arm. In a titanic effort, he lifted this barbell that had defeated many strongmen before the witnesses and to the greatest satisfaction of the qualified officers of the A.A.U. By accomplishing this feat in 1951 he became the holder of a new North American record.

Paul had always tried to surpass himself in the bent press; that is why in 1950 he won the "Championship of Canada" trophy with a 301-pound bent press. Officially, he succeeded in lifting 321 pounds. In training, he twice succeeded in lifting 375 pounds. His goal was to attain 400 pounds, but much to his annoyance, an elbow injury prevented him from doing this. This lift is spectacular and specialized. It calls for strength, good balance, and endurance for it must be done slowly while using all the muscles of the body.

The newly opened Saint Damien's arena was the

location of Paul Baillargeon's debut as a wrestler in 1949. Circumstances were such that his first professional match was against Paul Lortie. Paul Baillargeon was very impressed because he remembered their first encounter and Paul Lortie's arrogant remarks when the wrestler had been introduced to Paul several years earlier. At that time Lortie had told Paul that he was a strapping young man, certainly very strong (as he took him by the biceps). This was all very well, he continued contemptuously, but it took guts to be a wrestler.

These words coming from Lortie, the famous wrestler, had made a deep impression on Paul. This would be a very exciting start to his career because Paul wanted to prove to him that he had guts! He would never forget this first match.

In order to entertain the audience before the match, Paul liked to present his favorite act: lifting his famous 1,400-pound horse. This was always met with the greatest enthusiasm by the spectators. Paul understood the importance of gaining the audience's confidence and of raising their adrenaline level in order to get them on his side when he had a wrestling match.

In everyday life Paul was extremely charming, but he transformed himself into a veritable tiger once he got into the ring. Paul's quickness and agility during a match increased the audience's excitement. In the newspapers, the wrestler was described as "the colossus of Saint-Magloire" who was endowed with phenomenal strength.

Paul used several holds such as the full Nelson, the bear hug, the head scissors, and the body scissors. But his most dangerous move was the "flying Nelson" with which he enjoyed twirling his adversaries around in midair.

His method of wrestling used a combination of strength, wrestling knowledge, and acrobatics. Once he was in the ring, if he saw that wrestling knowledge was not enough, or (more often) if he found himself up against a rascally opponent who took advantage of Paul's good character, he called on his strength.

In Minneapolis, the wrestler became a hero known as "the French-Canadian Bear," a super champion of Herculean strength thanks to his working out with weights. Paul's regular training with barbells had allowed him to attain a truly remarkable muscular

development.

Because of his successful record, Paul wrestled against Lou Thesz in 1954 in Toronto. Despite his defeat, Paul got a lot of satisfaction from this match, noting that the Toronto media such as *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *Telegraph* described him as being the biggest and the best wrestler ever to appear in Toronto. Paul was very proud of his excellent performance in this match, which lasted an hour and a half with only one fall.

Paul also wrestled in a team with Lionel, Antonio, and Adrien. It was with the latter that he presented very popular fights. He was "Canadian Champion" in 1956 and 1957, and he won the "American West-Coast Championships" with Adrien.

The wrestlers who impressed Paul Baillargeon most by their strength were (among others) Lou Thesz, Yvon Robert, Wladek "Killer" Kowalski, Bobby Monagof, Pat O'Connor, Bill Miller, Edouard Carpentier, Don Eagle, Don Leo Jonathan, and Yukon Eric.

Paul was "World's Champion" for a week because the champion, Wladek Kowalski, had lost his title due to a disqualification, and in the meantime Paul had been victorious over the new champion. But the Montreal Athletic Commission decided that a title could not be lost by disqualification, thus Paul's glory was of very short duration.

Virtually throughout his entire career, Paul wrestled while he was injured: sometimes in the back, sometimes in the ankle. But despite his injuries (broken fingers, cracked ribs, etc.), he continued to wrestle, and this merely aggravated his condition. During a fight, one's concentration is so intense that those who suffer an injury don't even realize it until the end of the match. Paul lost around eight to 15 pounds in some fights, and that shows how exhausting the effort was!

When his career is all totaled, Paul probably won 85% of his matches. Wrestling allowed him to travel throughout eight Canadian provinces and forty-five American states, fighting two thousand matches in eleven years.

Today, Paul Baillargeon is a resident of Sainte-Foy and "makes the time" to bask in the pure air of his native village, having purchased property in Saint-Magloire, the land of his birth.



Readers who wish to do so may now submit Grapevine items via e-mail. Simply send your comments and questions to [j.todd@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:j.todd@mail.utexas.edu) Be sure to include your full name, your hometown and your state. Letters, of course, are also welcome.

David Chapman recently sent the following notice:

A group of French-speaking barbell men have decided to form a new organization called the *Amicale des anciens culturistes* (The Association of Oldtime Bodybuilders). Like America's own Oldtime Barbell and Strongman Association, this new group is made up of former participants and instructors in the iron game who do not want to lose touch with one another. The inaugural newsletter has just appeared, and the group had its first general meeting near Paris at the end of September 1999.

President Raymond Miskolczi announces that membership in the association is currently hovering around 20 people, but he expects this group to grow quickly. "The legendary individualism of the bodybuilder," he urges in the first editorial, "should no longer be an obstacle for our getting together in order to exchange constructive ideas." He further announces that membership in the *Amicale* "is not reserved exclusively for former bodybuilding champions, but it is designed above all for those men or women who are over fifty and who have retained their love of bodybuilding."

Those North Americans who wish to join this worthy group should write to the following address: *Amicale des anciens culturistes*; 50, rue de Varennes; 36210 Chabris; France. Dues are 140 French francs per year payable in cash or international draft. The newsletter is written in French. -David Chapman



**Dear IGH:**

I have written to many magazine editors in my life. But I have never been compelled to write as I am right now, to offer huge congratulations on your "John Grimek, the Man" special. What a complete document! What a tribute, so well deserved. I had read so much in

past editions of *MD* and *S&H*, but reading again brought a new excitement. This is positively a thrilling issue and one you can be tremendously proud of.

**Robert Kennedy**  
Mississauga, Ontario

Bob Kennedy, the publisher of *Muscle Mag International*, has been a supporter of our game's pioneers for years. We appreciate his kind words and his support, just as we appreciate the kind words that follow.

**Dear IGH:**

My good friend, Vic Boff sent me your April 1999 issue that featured our beloved John Grimek. He was a longtime friend and was most supportive of the Hollywood Stuntmen's Hall of Fame. I am pleased to enclose some items including our latest newsletter which features my illustration of John and an article I did on a great stuntman, Dave Sharpe, which I would like to share with you. I have also included a few extra prints of my Grimek drawing. Much success to you with your publication.

**John G. Hagner**  
Hollywood Stuntmen's Hall of Fame  
Moab, Utah



**Dear IGH:**

Congratulations on the special issue commemorating John Grimek. While inevitably its contributions lacked uniformity of interest, as a whole, nevertheless, they effectively conveyed the peerless subject's multifaceted impact on the iron game.

The four I found particularly praiseworthy, however, were Vic Boff's moving tribute to a departed friend, David Chapman's illumination of the model-photographer pairing that serendipitously produced what Bob Hoffman aptly called "the greatest muscle picture ever made," Joe Roark's compilation of reliable data from a legendary physique career, and John Fair's reminder of the interconnection between bodybuilding and weightlifting that Grimek personified.

The foregoing quote, of course, is from Fair's new *Muscle Town USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell* (Penn State University Press). Ironically my ordered copies of this valuable book's unjacketed hardcover and trade paperback bindings

arrived shortly after your combined Grimek numbers were placed atop my stack of essential reading. And although I was delighted to find the picture Hoffman referred to reproduced with attribution on the paperback's cover, I was disappointed that its reproduction among the numerous illustrations accompanying the text inside was unattributed. But then none of them are, an odd lapse in publishing standards and a regrettable omission in an otherwise admirably documented study (and one, I hasten to add, that's compellingly written, in itself a notable achievement for a scholarly book).

Admittedly this failure to textually acknowledge Hanagan's work may seem minor to most readers, and indeed he was never part of the "York gang(s)" Fair focuses on. Even so, it's indicative of the larger failure overall to notice the contributions that photographers made in making "manly culture" visible. Undoubtedly Hanagan's classic photograph of Grimek alone galvanized enthusiasm for the York doctrine. And in essence, the role of Hanagan in documenting the allure of bodybuilding's golden age was synergistically comparable to what Grimek accomplished as a stellar physique competitor during the lionized era.

In candor, though, perhaps space constraints in a long book prohibited Fair from paying attention to the photographers York used to attract buyers for its magazines, etc. But had he found space to do so, he might have justifiably noticed Douglas of Detroit, Hanagan's contemporary and fellow *Strength & Health* picture maker. Sadly, Douglas died early this year, however, and I wanted to bring his passing to your attention in case you were unaware of it. Douglas Juleff by actual name, he was perhaps best known for his photographs of Vic Seipke, a leading amateur physique competitor in the 1950s and master's division winner at the 1976 Mr. America contest. *Douglas of Detroit*, a retrospective of his physique images (including one of 1952 Mr. America, Jim Park), was published late in 1997 by Janssen Versand of Germany.

**Bob Summer**  
Nashville, TN



**Dear IGH:**

I found your address in the *Iron Game History* publication. My name is Arunas Petraitis and I'm a sports journalist from Lithuania. Bodybuilding statistics and history is not only my biggest hobby but it is also important in my work as General Secretary of the

Lithuanian Bodybuilding Federation (IFBB).

I am working on the *Lithuanian Sports Encyclopedia's* bodybuilding chapter now. This book will be published in the year 2000. There'll be a few profiles and bodybuilding history. I'd like to contact Alan Stephan, two time "Mr. America" title winner. Maybe you know that he has Lithuanian background (Albertas Steponavicius) so that is why I want to find him. But I have no address of Alan Stephan (I guess he's still living in the USA) and no idea of another way to look for it. May I ask you or your readers if they can help me contact him. I'd be very thankful.

**Arunas Petraitis**  
**Lithuania**

*If anyone has an address for Alan Stephan, please drop us a line—or an e-mail—and we will forward it on to Mr. Petraitis.*



**Dear IGH:**

The John Grimek issue brought back a flood of memories. When I started weight training as a fifteen year old, it took a year of exercising just to look average because I was so thin when I started.

A source of inspiration were the "magazines." The training information, success stories and the pictures meant a great deal to me. As a young teenager I would ride the New York subways to Manhattan to look for *Strength & Health* and *Your Physique* at the newsstands. For these magazines weren't available where I lived for nearly two weeks, and I couldn't wait. On the ride home, I would force myself not to read these magazines from cover to cover, so I could savor it a lot longer. The Grimek issue I'm reading the same way and that same pure gold feeling I had in the past about the weight game, I've captured again thanks to you.

My first AOBs dinner was about 10 or 11 years ago when I had the privilege of meeting John Grimek. Of course I was in awe of him, but to my pleasant surprise he was approachable and friendly. Through the years I never saw him turn down a request for an autograph or a picture to be taken with him.

I will always cherish the John Grimek issue. Thanks Terry and Jan for a job well done.

**Dr. Joseph Sansolo**  
**Bronx, NY**

**Dear IGH:**

I recently received the April edition of *IGH* and just wanted to say that it's the best issue that's ever come out. The photos are outstanding. When I started weight lifting in the late 60s, John Grimek and Bill Pearl were my role models. Al Thomas' article was the best-written tribute I've ever read on another human being, as well as to the sport of bodybuilding itself. I was disappointed, however, that there was not an article dealing with Grimek's life history. I know the basics; but other factors such as when and why he started lifting, where was his wife from, who were his role models, I know nothing about. An article dealing with these and other points would have really rounded out an otherwise excellent issue.

All in all, though, I think you have an excellent magazine. Keep up the good work.

**Brent Laswell  
Kingwood, TX**



**Dear IGH:**

Excellent! In a word, I think the John Grimek commemorative issue of *Iron Game History* (April 1999) meets the standards of excellence developed by the late quality Guru-Dr. W. Edwards Deming. Keep up the good work by continuing the systematic study of physical culture and the improvement of *Iron Game History*.

**Grover Porter, Ph.D.  
Huntsville, AL**



**Dear IGH:**

The John Grimek issue was terrific. He was my inspiration when I started weight training over 30 years ago. I met John Grimek in 1976 and he looked about fifty years old then even though he was 66 years old at that time. The thing I remember the most is his James Cagney way of talking. I still have a photo of him standing next to his life size statue. Nice memories . . .

**Victor Tejada, MD  
Durham, NC**

**Dear IGH:**

I am pleased to see the new feature "Ironclad." Like Joe Roark and many others, I suspect, I get quite annoyed with errors regarding lifts, titles, etc., put out by some magazines. I actually have a copy of *Man's World* (A British magazine of the fifties/sixties) containing a photograph of Clancy Ross with a remark underneath giving his correct name and informing the reader that he (Clancy) had won the Mr. Britain in 1949! I have more of the same. Some might think it is too pedantic to expect accuracy. I think of new enthusiasts who read errors and take them as gospel for ever-afterwards. Anyway, I like the "Ironclad" feature!

Best regards to you both.

**Doug Ewington  
Birchmoor, Northern Tamworth, England**



**Dear IGH:**

Just finished reading your interesting article about Lee Birgir's *Physical Fitness Magazine*. Noticed that Roger Eells' wonderful magazine *Vim* published from February 1940 thru June 1941 was not listed among those in that era that failed. Your article so whet my interest I went to my library shelf and took my like new beautifully bound issues of *Vim* and spent the entire last evening and late into the night rereading this superb publication.

*Vim* was printed on the finest glossy paper, which was not true of *Physical Fitness* and it was profusely filled with excellent photographs and rich with articles from the leading authorities of the day. Among the contributors were Ray Van Cleef, George Weaver, George Jowett, J.C. Hise, Leo Gaudreau, Harry Paschall, David Willoughby, Dr. LaBerge, Dr. Frederick Tilney, Antone Matysek, Peary Rader, Jim Evans, Earle Liederman, William Oliphant, Arthur Gay, and many more to a total of over thirty of the world's most internationally noted authorities of the day. Copiously filled with advertisements and apparently backed by Eells, who seemed more financially able to have succeeded than most of the others, still it failed. Eells' editorial in the last issue gave no indication of problems and wrote glowingly of things to come.

Eells himself was a noted lifter, especially in the bent press, in which he lifted 270 lbs. officially at a bodyweight of 185. Also, Eells seemed to not have suffered from Hoffman's enmity as others did. In fact I

seem to remember they worked quite well together. I have come to the conclusion that what determined the success or failure of any magazine in those days was whether they could get newsstand distribution.

Hoffman related in *Strength & Health* how the only U.S.A. distributor, or at least the only one of importance delivering to newsstands nation-wide refused to accept *S&H* for distribution at first, because they were already distributing *Strength* and *Physical Culture* and it was their policy to protect the publications they already distributed. This was extremely important to the success or failure of any publication. Hoffman's tenacity and financial strength and the demise of *Strength* opened the field for *Strength & Health* eventually.

Since I made this an epistle I might as well reminisce a little further. One day, sometime between 1939 and 1945 I was walking the streets in New Haven, CT (a practice I enjoyed during those years when I ran my "Palace Academy of Health") when I noted this young fellow coming toward me. His face looked so familiar. With utmost confidence I stopped him and asked, "Are you Bernarr Macfadden's son?" "Yes," he replied. In the conversation that followed I learned that he was on the Yale University swimming team. Yale swimmers were considered the best in those days. His contempt for his father was evident when he said his father had squandered his wealth and barely had a million left. If it weren't for his scholarship he wouldn't have been able to attend Yale. Poor boy, he might have had to go to work after Yale. A fascinating story must lie in researching whatever happened to Macfadden's family in later years.

**Alton Eliason**  
Northford, CT

**Dear IGH:**

I'm enclosing a copy of the letter I received today from Roy Hilligen. I think he now knows right from wrong!

After our N.Y.C. Oldetime Strongman meeting in 1990 I found Vern Weaver living with his mother in a mobile home in Dover. He had a huge "pot-belly" and rode a big motorcycle. After the visit I told him I would keep in touch—but I didn't! Later he shot himself. I regretted that I had not stayed in touch. Since I had known Roy H. since 1950, I wrote him in jail. In his first letter to me, he made the comment: "What should I do—kill myself?" That shook my memory of Weaver. Deciding not to ignore Roy's statement, I wrote him several letters which leads to the letter I am enclosing! Let's hope he now is now determined to stay "clean!"

**Dave Collier**  
Knoxville, TN

*We saw Roy at a recent Oldetime Barbell and Strongman Association Dinner in New York City and he looked very fit and healthy, and in good spirits.*



**Dear IGH:**

I obtained a copy of Jan's new book—*Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful*—and am thoroughly enjoying it. It is a wonderful and fascinating account of the early history of physical education for men and its eventual but reluctant inclusion of women. How it began in Europe, then Great Britain, and finally its introduction in America. The exercise descriptions along with the many illustrations are so interesting and with the amazing pieces of weight lifting apparatus produced in those days, and the fact that some of them were forerunners to a few of our modern pieces in use in many present day gyms is somewhat startling to me. I never gave much thought to this, and how it would really affect our present day inventions!

I am going to deviate to something personal that may interest you. My maternal grandmother attended a Female Seminary in the 1870s (later named Wheaton College and in more recent years it also included male students). I am in possession of the yearly catalogues she received each year (1872 thru 1879—the year she graduated). Although I don't recall any description by her of her participation in either calis-



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Commemorative Issue?**

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***Iron Game History*, Anna Hiss Gym #22,  
Department of Kinesiology & Health Education,  
The University of Texas, Austin, Texas 78712.  
Postage is included in price.**

thenics or gymnastics, her school did offer them under the direction of a special instructor (but no name is given). She was, however, an ardent horsewoman for many years.

Her early schooling was given to her by her mother (who was a former schoolteacher in the 1860s) on board her father's whaling ship during the years from 1864 to 1871 from the age of six until they returned to New Bedford, Mass. in 1871. This home on board the ship—the John Howland—took them around the Horn, to a stopover in San Francisco, then whaling trips down to Baja California, then north to the Arctic water into the Bering Sea, then to Honolulu (another stopover) and came to a close with a long sojourn in Yokohama, Japan and surrounding whaling waters in the late 1860s.

As I read about the early history of physical education for women it brought to mind these catalogues and I became curious so reread them again, though as you mention in your book there is seldom a description of what exercise movements or gymnastics each school taught—this is not described in detail either. Too bad. Even though I had already started my days at Muscle Beach it never occurred to me to ask about that part of her schooling. She died at the age of 93 in 1950.

Jan, your book is wonderful and I am so glad that I have the privilege of knowing you and being able to learn so much. Thank you for sharing your research with all of us.

**Pudgy Stockton**  
Santa Monica, CA



**Dear IGH:**

The success of the Oldtime Barbell and Strongman banquet is due to a lot of hard work by people behind the scenes that never get the recognition they fully deserve. I know for sure that Vic Boff and a few others put a lot of time and effort into making the annual get together a success, so I just wanted to add my heartfelt THANKS. My family and I reaped the bene-

fits of his hard work and we're all grateful.

**Norm Komich**  
Beverly, MA



**Dear IGH:**

I really enjoyed the issue of *IGH* with the Apollon article and since it had my "one issue left" warning, I figured I'd better renew.

I'm still hoping you will write your autobiography. It would be the definitive study on strength in the twentieth century from someone who has seen most of the best strength athletes of the second half of the century. In the meantime, how about a collection (reprints) of your previous (*Sports Illustrated*) articles on people like Andre the Giant, Pacifico, etc.?

Also, any tips on researching strongmen or lifters from the Pittsburgh, western Pennsylvania areas? I was going to start with a list of national champs in weightlifting and powerlifting (Russell Knipp, Bob Weaver, Cal Shake, Tony Fratto, etc.) but I'm at a loss as to the old timers, if there were any. Anyway, keep up the great work and I hope to run into you again soon.

**Rege Becker**  
Pittsburgh, PA

*Western Pennsylvania has produced a number of strength stars. Although Ottley Coulter wasn't born there, he lived most of his adult life in Lemont Furnace, Pa., just outside Uniontown. And, one of your editors—Jan Todd—was born in Donora. You might also make note of the following letter.*

**Dear IGH:**

My great grandfather was a turn of the century "strongman". His name was Charles McCullough and he lived in Cannonsburg, PA. The photo enclosed, I think, is circa 1915. There is little family history about him. Do your readers have any information or other photos of my grandfather? Thanks for your help.

**Mark McCullough**  
Los Angeles, CA

*If anyone knows anything about Charles McCullough, please write us and we will forward it to Mr. McCullough.*



**Dear IGH:**

Do you have all of the back issues for sale? Do you sell reprints of any of the old magazines prior to 1934—*Sandow's Magazine, Physical Culture, Arena, Strength*, etc? I have several magazines, approximately 50, from 1934 to 1964 and am looking for the ones before 1934. Who is McLean? I know Ken Patera and he said Terry Todd and Jan Todd have a great collection. Gary Cleveland told me that also. Ray Van Cleef had several copies of *Sandow's Magazine*. Do you know where I can get reprints? I've read he had a great collection way back. I've tried the Internet but surprisingly not much is on it about old lifters (strongmen and strongwomen). I've called and written several collectors but few go back before 1934, and haven't produced any reprints yet. If you can help me please let me know. Thanks!

**Darwin Wilmar  
Minneapolis, MN**

*Back issues cost \$5.00 for Volumes 1-4 and \$7.50 for Volume 5&6. We have original copies still available of all issues except for Vol. 1 No. 1 and Vol. 1 No. 4 and 5. However, we sell a Xeroxed version of those issues for the same \$5.00 price. A full set of all back issues at this point is \$150.00 including postage.*

*Roy McLean taught weight training at the University of Texas from 1919 through 1965. During his tenure, U. T. had the best-equipped college gym in the country, along with the most classes in weight training of any university (an average of 24 classes with 30 or so students in each class in the 1950s and 1960s). He also had a fine collection of books and magazines in the field of weight training, and he was a great help to me as I began my career in the game and as we brought our own collection back to Austin.*

*We've looked into the idea of producing some*

*reprints but copyright laws and the relatively small pool of people interested in reprints didn't encourage us. So, keep searching. We concentrate on collecting and preserving.*



**Dear IGH:**

Many years ago I read the biography of the old-time professional strongman who went by the name of The Mighty Atom. His biographer made a veiled suggestion that besides the usual exercises this Jewish strongman developed exceptional mental focus by the study of the mystical system of Kabbalah. I recently read in a physique magazine that his protege is still giving performances. Can this be verified and elaborated? There is so much talk of "visualization" and "psyching up" for an athletic performance, that I wonder if there may be something to the idea a particular set of spiritual exercises could prepare one for an enormous exertion of strength. More generally, are there plans to profile old-time strongmen such as The Mighty Atom?

**C. Verratro  
Via Internet**

*Atom's main protégé is Slim "the Hammerman" Farman, who was honored by the Oldtime Barbell and Strongman Association in 1998. Slim uses visualization himself in his strength feats. However, Dennis Rogers, of Houston, who performs as "The Mighty Mite," is also a spiritual heir of Atom's.*



*During the past year, we've lost a number of friends in the Iron Game. We thank Joe Roark for providing us with their dates of death: Joe Di Pietro, 84, March 19; John Terlazzo, 83, April 1; Andy Jackson, 94, July 3; Claude R. Barnholth, July 4; Charles Roman, 94, July 16; Curtis Leffler, 36, September 1, and Jack Woodson, 61, October 30.*

# THE FLEMISH HERCULES

David P. Webster, O.B.E.

One of Astley's finest performers was Peter Ducrow, billed as the Flemish Hercules, having been born in Bruges around 1765. The inscription on his tombstone indicates that he died on 6 January 1815 at the age of forty-nine but the burial register of St Mary Lambeth Churchyard, where he was put to rest, records his age as 57.

Ducrow performed noteworthy feats of strength, appearing before Royalty on several occasions. He was thoroughly professional and used his versatile talents in a great many acts and roles during his career. Eventually demand for his equestrian skills outpaced those for his feats of strength and he became known as an intrepid rider. Whether he was on horseback, the slack wire, or in acrobatics, his strength was obvious in the type of work he did.

In the 1790s Peter was as agile as he was strong, and had tremendous leg power. One of his feats was leaping over the backs of seven horses and through a hoop of fire. I believe that Peter Ducrow first appeared in Britain in June 1792 with Thomas Franklin's presentation at the Royal Circus, London. In his act at this time he jumped over eight horses with four men sitting on them.

When Franklin's company closed at the Royal Circus on 14 October 1792, Ducrow and some of his colleagues made their way to Edinburgh where a circus was based at the New Sadler's Wells Theatre, erected just two years earlier. The season lasted until the end of December when the manager, Riding Master George Jones, and most of this company moved to Glasgow. Ducrow may have stayed with Jones for some time for in May 1795 he was again advertised at the Royal Circus, London, where Jones was one of the lessees. During this season Jones's troop were booked to appear before the Royal family at Frogmore as part of the birthday celebrations for the Queen and Princess of Wales so the Royal Circus was deemed to be appropriately



Andrew Ducrow in an illustration for a performance at Astley's Amphitheatre.

named. Ducrow was on the Royal posters the following year with exhibitions of his wonderful heavy balances of a coach-wheel and ladder with a child poised on it. This youngster was probably his oldest son Andrew Ducrow making his circus debut at the age of three. Peter also did a slack wire act.

Extensive research reveals a wealth of information about this nomadic showman and his young son. The following engagements give just a flavor of their eventful lives. Important bookings were obtained in Portugal and on 25 October 1797, "Mr. Du Crow and the Infant Hercules" appeared at the Theatre Royal, San Carlos, Lisbon. This engagement was often referred to in later advertising in statements such as "Ducrow from Portugal," "from the Theatre Royal, Lisbon." It was good for his curriculum vitae. During his strongman career Ducrow was named in various ways including Duc Crow, Ducroe, Ducreau, Ducross and Myheer Ducrow.

By the following Easter the powerful Dutchman was back at the Royal Circus in London. Always extending his repertoire, later that season he appeared as a well-built slave in "Black Beard." His strength act at that time was titled "The Modern Hercules."

It was the ambition of many circus acts to enter the prestigious ring of Astley's Circus and Peter Ducrow, having proved his worth elsewhere, eventually got this plum booking. On 4 September 1898 he showed his great agility and strength at the Amphitheater in a spectacular act where it was advertised that he somersaulted through a hoop of fire, sailed over seven horses and leapt over a banner twelve feet high.

From 16 April until 31 May 1799, Ducrow was prominent at the Olympic Circus, Shaw's Brow, Dale Road, Liverpool, in the north east of England. The Infant Hercules was also featured in some of the programs during the season. While in Liverpool the bills proclaimed their appearance during the past twelve

months in the Prince of Wales riding school at Carlton House and also for the Royal Family at Windsor. In later advertising there were similar claims for a royal appearance at Frogmore in 1800.

From Liverpool the company traveled south to a circus in Bristol. The temporary nature of the structure was less than perfect and on getting a good house for a benefit, the gallery collapsed. Their lives were never uneventful. Manchester was next on their itinerary and they opened there at the circus on 22 July 1799, alternating appearances between circus and a theatre. Ducrow's second son John, born in or around 1796, was also included in the show and the three Ducrows were given a benefit on 28 August. Andrew was not by any means overlooked and Master Ducrow, it was advertised, would demonstrate his "balancing feats of strength."

After touring the provinces for a year the family went back to London in 1800 and on Monday, 14 April appeared at Astleys. It was supposed to be a short engagement but the Flemish Hercules was re-engaged time after time. At the end of May a new stunt was featured when he balanced a horse. It is believed that this was done in the same manner as Sandow performed the feat. The athlete supported a see-saw platform and a trained horse walked to the middle of the contraption and with a step forward and backward tilted the apparatus first one way and then the other.

A few weeks later on 14 July 1800 the Ducrows appeared before the Royal Family at Frogmore House, Windsor. Although it was not Peter's first royal performance it was certainly a notable one for he and his sons were given the monarch's personal attention. The Frogmore Fete was an informal affair where spectators and some of the performers moved around. Having been entertained by some singing "gypsies," who were in reality actors playing the parts, the Royal party, family and guests, moved on to view the stage allocated to Mr. Du Crow, the Flemish Hercules, who gave a very extensive and impressive exhibition.

The newspapers of that time wrote of "his inimitable performance on the slack wire; and afterwards on the stage his extraordinary feats of strength, such as balancing on his chin three large coach-wheels, also a ladder to which were affixed two chairs with two children on them." That was not all; on his hands and feet he supported a table in the form of a pyramid, and on different parts of this contraption eight people were seated.

His Majesty King George III was astounded and personally questioned Peter Ducrow about his muscles. Ducrow informed him that surgeons said they were one fifth larger in size than those of men who were

taller and heavier.

It was probably on this occasion that the stage collapsed under the weight of Ducrow's apparatus and company. The story has been told in Andrew Ducrow's biography, "...at the fete of Frogmore where (he) his father and brother were engaged: a stage was erected for the exhibition, and in consequence of the weight upon it by some of Mr. D.'s fetes (feats) part of the stage broke in and our hero's little brother fell through. His Majesty instantly rose and came in person to see if the little fellow was hurt. On being answered with the utmost simplicity by the child . . . the King asked him several questions...."

Peter was concerned that his small son was not aware of the importance of addressing the Sovereign and tried to explain to the boy. The King would brook no interference and declared himself content with the title of Mister until the stage was remedied. The result of this memorable appearance was immediate. The Ducrows were quickly booked to appear at Astley's to give the same program as at Frogmore "when his Majesty condescended to honor the Flemish Hercules with his approbation on his superior strength."

For once it truly was a short engagement for four nights only as Peter had other bookings lined up at Norwich, Yarmouth etc. He toured with Astley's and went back to London with them to the Amphitheater when it reopened on Easter Monday 1801.

Ducrow would balance three wagon wheels on his forehead or chin and for a change would sometimes balance two wheels and get one of his sons to climb on top of them! It was a hazardous feat for father and son and the weight must have been well over two hundred pounds. In another feat he would support on his hands and feet a platform with ten men, and on his benefit nights he would increase this to twelve men.

The splendid Flemish artist Pannemaker produced a very detailed circus picture circa 1815 and in it, although not the main subject, there is a strong man with arms folded in the so-called block pose. This is perhaps the earliest example of what became a standard posture for such performers. Since Ducrow was the best known Flemish Hercules of that era, one speculates that the image could well have been based on him. If not depicting Ducrow it could perhaps be Jan van Moritz, who also adopted this *nom d'arena*. Regardless, it is an important early portrayal of the genre, especially since amongst the equipment lying in the ring is a short globe dumbbell and it wasn't until much later that one hand lifting of such weights became a popular part of a strength athlete's repertoire.

Ducrow became quite famous throughout Europe but some snippets written about the strongman

reflect badly on him as an individual. He raised his son Andrew in a very regimented, toughly disciplined way, training him in circus skills from a very early age. Andrew was billed as the Infant Hercules but this was for just one of his acts. The youngster had also to perfect horse riding and rope dancing turns. By today's standards Peter Ducrow's treatment of the lad would be considered cruel and not permitted by law.

In November 1805 Ducrow and his sons were hired to appear at the Olympic Circus in Edinburgh, Scotland. Advertising claimed that the celebrated Flemish Hercules "being his First Appearance in this kingdom" would go through the same program as he had given before the Royal Family at Frogmore. It was not of course his first appearance in Scotland, although probably the first time his two sons had appeared with him there. The lads were particularly popular and were now treated as stars in their own right, with a head and hand-balancing act being a highlight. The *piece-de-resistance* in this was a balance on a 12' ladder that broke in half and left Andrew balanced on one side.

The season extended over the Festive season until, in the final week, the Ducrows were given a benefit on 4 February 1806. Moving immediately to Glasgow, the family appeared at the Olympic Circus, Albion Street, Glasgow. Fortunately the bills for this show are preserved in the Library of Glasgow University.

After Glasgow there were appearances in Liverpool where the trio made numerous appearances on the program. During this season the circus used the best drawing I have seen of Peter Ducrow's coach-wheels and boy balancing specialty. It appears on the bill of May 8, 1806, a week before they were given their benefit in Liverpool. During the autumn of 1806 they performed in a Manchester circus; all the time Andrew's talents and acts became more diversified.

The strongman, like so many of that ilk, became a proprietor when he built an amphitheater at Bathwick Fields in Bath. Back in London in 1807 they were engaged by William Davis who had an ulterior motive in keeping them at Astley's. He wished to promote his own two sons as horsemen and he kept the Ducrow name out of the program. The most Peter could get in his billing was "Herculean Equilibriums," no mention of his name or his sons. In the last week of the season when they received a benefit the Ducrows showed what they could do. Andrew did his riding and tightrope acts, polandric balances (after the Little Polander, balancing master) with ladders, chairs and tables and Peter performed his strength act, including a feat where he supported on his hands and feet a platform bearing ten persons.

By 1811 Peter had more or less phased out his feats of strength and other performances, concentrating

instead on becoming business manager for Andrew, his talented son. He traveled all over the country with him, doing quite well in his self appointed task. There was a full engagement book and they obtained good fees, but perhaps these had as much to do with Andrew's abilities as Peter's negotiating skills.

On one tour while they were in Edinburgh, Peter got drunk and the room was accidentally set alight during the night. Andrew managed to put out the fire but aggravated a previous leg injury. He forced himself to perform although in great pain. At his next engagement, which was in Wales, he had to do most of his tight-rope work on one leg.

The Ducrows went to London to finish a very financially successful tour and with his earnings Peter Ducrow rented the Royal Circus and Equestrian Academy, then known as the Surrey. After restoring the ring he presented a series of shows. This was probably around 1813-1814. I have been unable to find many details about their activities in 1813 but have noted that Andrew Ducrow wrote of his appearances at the Surrey in 1814 when he included a most dangerous ropewalking feature in his act. A rope was fixed from the stage to the gallery and balanced on this he wheeled a boy in a barrow right up the rope and back down again. The journey from the gallery back down to the stage was particularly difficult and after the first experience the boy defected.

Peter Ducrow's last seasons at the Royal and at the Surrey were bad ones which left him bankrupt and he died a little later on 6 January 1815. It is my view that the Flemish Hercules has never been given the credit which is rightly his and there seems to be a number of good reasons why this may be the case. The Napoleonic conflicts, which coincided with his career, had greatly restricted his free movement in Europe. In spite of this he still became a very significant figure in the history of strongmen. There is also the question of his brutal personality, which may not have been so different from others of his era but nevertheless did not earn him many friends.

There is a third rather interesting speculation. Although this resume gives a fairly comprehensive overview of the career of the Flemish Hercules there are a few gaps, partly caused by circus politics. The influential circus manager and proprietor William Davis was closely associated with many of Ducrow's bookings over the years. He and the Ducrows did not get on at all well for they both had two sons they were trying to develop and promote on almost identical lines. Neither of Davis's sons was of comparable caliber to Andrew Ducrow as an equestrian or versatile performer. Davis would frequently suppress the names of the Ducrows in bills and in programs, giving the act a title or descrip-



One of Andrew Ducrow's most notable contributions was the introduction of posing on horseback. Here is the top part of an advertisement for Astley's Amphitheatre, that reads, "Mr. Ducrow, the Celebrated Equestrian at Astley's Amphitheatre Performing Roman Defence to the Different Attitudes of the Gladiators taken from Drawings made for Napoleon Buonaparte."

tion without actually naming the performers. I also note that in Davis shows the name Du Crow was sometimes used. Numerous such ploys seem to take parental rivalry a little too far.

In spite of many obstacles Peter Ducrow had seen his oldest son, so physically abused by him, become a busy artiste and popular with the public. Little did he know that his offspring would become a legendary figure with lasting fame in the circus world.

#### ANDREW DUCROW - THE INFANT HERCULES

While Peter Ducrow was appearing in Astley's circus his son Andrew was born in the Nag's Head, Southwark High Street on 10 October 1793. Little Andrew had to begin training as soon as he could walk and his name soon became a talking point amongst the fraternity of the sawdust ring. The lad first appeared in an act at three years of age and at four he was justifiably billed as "The Infant Hercules."

A biographical article about young Ducrow, published in the Edinburgh *Opera-Glass* on 4 Sept. 1884, states that between the age of three to fifteen the boy had to work around sixteen hours a day on a regular basis. I believe this would probably include education, domestic chores and circus training. As a very small boy he was put on the tight-rope and told to stay there or be "leathered." At four he appeared in public as a rope walker and at seven he made his first appearance with Astley.

Andrew knew that if he did not work long and hard he would get a thrashing. Once during a performance at Bath young Ducrow fell off his horse and the

Flemish Hercules dashed in and carried him out of the ring. His apparent affection was appreciated by the spectators but behind the scenes there was a different behavior. The audience believed the boy's cries of pain were caused by his leg injuries but this was not so. Instead of sympathy the lad was horsewhipped for being careless and for putting himself out of action. In future he could not allow himself to be accident-prone with a parent like this. On one occasion Joe Grimaldi is said to have remonstrated with the tyrannical father for hitting Andrew. Ducrow responded saying that it was best to "make an impression when the wax is soft." "Yes," retorted Grimaldi "But the w(h)acks were not soft!"

Andrew received a great education at a good acting school in London and excelled in mime. Apart from his father he had three excellent tutors, J.H. D'Egville (sometimes Dagueville), a noted ballet master at the Opera House, Jack Richer, a superb rope dancer who was also praised for his facial and physical appearance, described once as the "best-made man in England." The third teacher was Collett (Collet) from a famous family of equestrians and his teachings were fundamental in Ducrow Jr.'s future success.

At fifteen Andrew Ducrow was earning a very good living, receiving £10-£15 a week as a rider and tightrope walker. He had not been a sturdy lad and away from his father's influence he was quite unruly. He fell for a Miss Saunders, who was with acrobats and riders at shows in Bath. The young lady, much more experienced in the ways of the world, rejected him and the motivation provided by this, combined with ever

increasing physical work, may have led to him developing a fine physique. While appearing in Edinburgh the noted anatomist Dr. Bartlett saw the young circus star and told his anatomy students to go to see the act so they could study the perfect human body. Bartlett also hired Andrew Ducrow to model at one of his lectures and placed him between two skeletons. Old Peter was scared, thinking they were preparing to dissect his meal ticket! In passing it should be noted that the mature Miss Saunders married one of the acrobats, a vaulter named Brown and in time their children became circus stars all over the world. Some of them changed their name to Toumaire while others retained the family name. One of the Browns appeared in Cooke's Circus doing acrobatics and feats of strength.

Andrew Ducrow originated the concept of equestrian 'Poses Plastique', the portrayal of classical statuary on horseback, and in the 1820s there were more prints and engravings of him than of any other stage or ring performer of that era. These pictures often depicted his excellent physique in the roles he popularized.

Andrew appeared at the Amphitheater during one season before leaving Britain, with his father, for bookings on the continent. He went back to mainland Europe after his father's death having married a Miss Griffiths, a horsewoman from Liverpool, on 24 May 1818, and they, along with his sisters, two boys and ten horses traveled all over Europe, filling his money bags to overflowing.

The first of these engagements was Blondin's Cirque Olympique for a tour of Belgium. Another was with Franconi Circus Olympique, then in Holland. He was acclaimed in Paris in 1814 and gradually became the idol of France. Ducrow produced a fresh equestrian act in 1828 that took England by storm. His great talent for posing and mime were seen to advantage in his presentation entitled "Raphael's dream" where the finest conceptions of ancient Greek sculptures were portrayed by him *while standing on horseback*. The act evoked immense and sustained applause at every exhibition. Such was Andrew's popularity that William IV had a temporary amphitheater constructed for a performance by Ducrow on 19 November 1832. The great equestrian was summoned to the Palace the next day to receive the congratulations of the King via the Earl of Erroll.

The posing part of Andrew Ducrow's act was so popular that many others copied it and one of these was an acrobat, Constantine, who traveled from London to star in James Wild's traveling circus which was at Keighley Fair in Yorkshire. The rival Walleth Circus appeared at the same time but was poorly attended until Walleth made overtures to Constantine over a few bottles of beer. Walleth managed to buy all the acrobat's props to depict Ajax, Achilles and other heroes from

Homer. From then on Wild's Circus was deserted, Constantine dejected and Walleth triumphant, with the new posing act drawing full houses to his circus.

Andrew inherited some of his father's traits and was well-known for his coarse speech and blunt manner. Clyne, the German rope-walker, was hired by him in 1832-3 to traverse rope from stage to balcony, and at rehearsal was reluctant to begin, saying the rope was not properly secured. Ducrow's home was next door to the amphitheater and he went straight there from his breakfast, still in dressing gown and slippers. He snatched the balancing pole from the German and mounted the rope. "Afraid for your pretty face, are you? Well I am not so pretty," and with his dressing gown flapping wildly around him he went right up the rope and down again, snorting that there was nothing to fuss about! On the other hand, in spite of his bluster, it is on record that he looked after his employees very well in times of distress.

Always trying to progress, Ducrow managed Astley's Amphitheatre from 1825- 1841 and on 20 May 1840 had an afternoon visit from Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The Royal box was preserved and effigies of the Sovereign and Price Consort thereafter presided over the circus scene.

There is a tragic end to the Ducrow saga when he went out of his mind in 1841 after his circus was destroyed by one of the many fires that haunted early shows. He partly recovered but on 22 January he suffered a stroke in which he lost the use of one side of his body. He also lost his speech. A second stroke followed and on 27 January 1842 at 8:30PM he slipped away at the age of forty-eight. He left £47,000 to his second wife Louisa (nee Woolford) and he was laid to rest in an impressively built mausoleum at Kensal Green Cemetery in London. His fame lives on as an important, indeed a *pivotal* part of circus history.

### Further Reading

*To the best of my knowledge this is the first comprehensive study of the Flemish Hercules, Peter Ducrow, as a star in his own right. Much more has been written about Andrew Ducrow, who was undoubtedly the most famous circus star of that era, the epitome of a romantic age. Most of his activities as an actor animal trainer, choreographer, designer etc. are outside the scope of this article but for those whose interests go beyond the Infant Hercules period and his physical accomplishments, many excellent books are to be found. By far the best is **The Life and Art of Andrew Ducrow** by A. H. Saxon, Ph.D. of Yale University.*

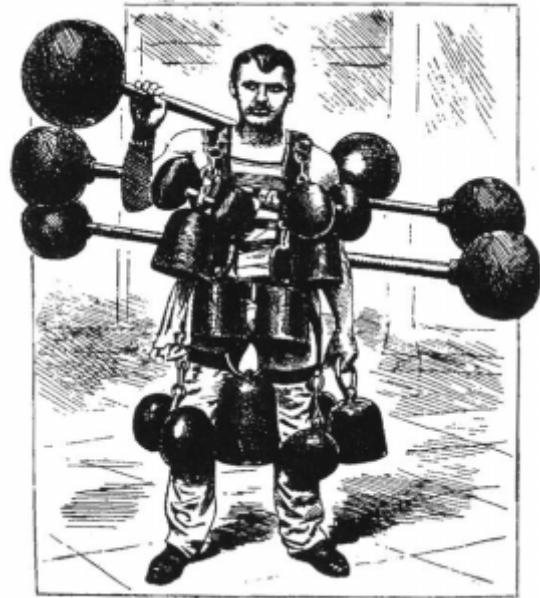
*For additional materials the excellent collections of circus bills at the British Library, Victoria and Albert Museum and the Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen are also worthy of study.*



# IRONCLAD

by Joe Roark

## Paul Anderson's 1953 Hiplift



*Editors' Note: In some circles, those who have raised questions about certain of the claimed feats of the late Paul Anderson have been criticized for having raised any questions at all. Our policy at IGH has been, and will be, to give every strength athlete his or her full measure of credit. To do less is to detract from the accomplishments of the Game's pioneers. To do more—to give them unexamined credit for questionable or exaggerated lifts, for example—is to detract from the accomplishments of those that have competed in the same events at an earlier or later date. This is not to say that we haven't made mistakes of fact, or that we will not make such mistakes in the future. This is only to say that we will do our best to give credit where credit is due. This is also not to say that Paul Anderson (or any other particular lifter) exaggerated any of his accomplishments. But many lifters have, indeed, exaggerated in recounting their lifts, just as many bodybuilders have exaggerated in listing their measurements. As historians, our loyalty must rest with the Iron Game itself and not with any given athlete.*

*The heyday of the professional strongman, in particular, was rife with exaggeration as most, if not all, of the professionals claimed lifts they had never done; and many claimed, simultaneously, that they were the "Strongest Man in the World." Often, of course, this claim was made in economic self-defense, but an exaggeration is an exaggeration; and it has*

*been up to people like David P. Willoughby, David Webster; and Joe Roark to set the record as straight as they can.*

*My own opinion is that Paul Anderson, at the time of his greatest prominence (roughly 1954-1965), had more right than any other lifter to be considered the world's strongest man. I saw him lift many times, in public exhibitions and in his outdoor gym in Vidalia, and he was prodigiously strong, especially in the legs and hips. He beat the best men of his day in weightlifting, won a gold medal in the Olympics, set many world records, and did several over-900 pound squats in public—with standard bars and plates. To me, these squats were the greatest ever done when attire and technique are taken into account. What's more (even though it is neither here nor there as far as his lifting feats are concerned), Paul used his celebrity to help many youngsters have a more stable life by serving—with his wife, Glenda—as their foster parent in his youth home. Paul was an exceptionally proud man, a bit of a loner, and I'm grateful to have spent so much time in his company and to have co-authored a series of articles with him in **Muscular Development**. He was an excellent companion—witty, charming, and possessed of a full measure of Southern good humor. It was a great regret to me that his later years brought him so much grief. When I was a young lifter, he was my hero, and we always want the best for our heroes, even though the best is sometimes beyond their reach.*

*Joe Roark is also a man with many admirable qualities. In my many discussions with Joe, I have never known him to play favorites. He is today's Willoughby—tireless, obsessive, bright, dedicated, idiosyncratic, fair-minded, and honest—and Jan and I are grateful that he chooses to publish the results of his research in IGH. We are proud to feature his analysis of Paul's hip-lift, and we present it in the hope that it may cause new information about that lift, or others made by Paul or anyone else, to surface.*



any years ago I began to research the life and lifts of Paul Anderson and like many, if not most, of his fans I simply assumed that what had been presented as fact was fact, whether

it had come from him directly or from others. Indeed, most—if not all—of what is asserted about his publicly performed lifts can be proven. Official judges were present, audiences carefully watched as he lifted weights that had been weighed on certified scales, and data from these events prove that Paul Anderson, in his time, and in terms of overall strength, earned the right to be called the strongest man in the world. And in terms of pure hip/leg strength, his equal, particularly in the heavy squat without substantial supporting gear, may not yet have come along. Terry Todd, in fact, has stated that Paul should be considered history's greatest performer in the squat.

Over the years, however, the poundages given for some of Paul's unofficial lifts or feats of strength appear to have reached levels that fact and reason cannot support. In the coming months, some of these discrepancies will be examined as objectively as possible, and I invite readers who have information that can cast light on this matter to contact me through *Iron Game History*. One example of the need of some writers to almost deify Paul is the frequent notion that he was undefeated in weightlifting competition, or that he was only defeated once.

I began my study of Paul's career by *assuming* that some of his unofficial lifts had evidence awaiting discovery, so my motive, though journalistically unsound (i.e. assuming that something is true before doing any investigation into the facts) was not anti-Paul; nor am I now such. I am only interested in finding out, as nearly as possible, the truth about various

famous feats in our game. In this issue of *IGH*, I will deal only with Paul's early experiences with the hiplift, as those experiences and how they have been written about in the years since should illustrate some of the difficulties of separating the man from the legend.

Regarding his hiplift training in early 1953, Paul Anderson wrote: "I built a platform in the yard that allowed me to set a heavy object on the ground five feet beneath it. I would stand on the platform and squat to hook the belt to the object, then rise until I was standing upright and lifting the object off the ground."<sup>1</sup> Below the platform, Paul placed one object, an old manganese safe whose cavity he filled with concrete and "weights." He then welded the safe shut, added slots to which he attached his belt, and he was ready to lift what he asserted was "...thirty-five hundred pounds to struggle against."<sup>2</sup> Paul stated that at first he failed to lift the safe, but that by using isometric principles and straining against the weight he finally built enough strength to lift it.<sup>3</sup> From that point, Paul said he, "...was spending hours alone on that five-foot wood platform, building my leg, back, and torso muscles into bulging sinews."<sup>4</sup> Paul also implies that he had been performing the hiplift with other weights prior to locating the manganese safe. He stated, "I finally found something I knew would test me," referring to the safe.<sup>5</sup>

Now comes the problem. Paul explains in his autobiography, *A Greater Strength*, that "About a month before the tryouts for the (1953) world (weightlifting) championships in Stockholm" he injured his right leg during a hiplift workout, and was thus unable to compete in the tryouts, held in early June 1953.<sup>6</sup> A careful examination of the timeline, however, reveals that time does not follow the chronological line as he unfolds it. In other words, things could not have happened in the way he says they did.

### Some Early Background

Paul's first public weightlifting competition took place at the Frye Institute in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and he won the heavyweight class by pressing 275 pounds, snatching 225 pounds, and lifting 300 pounds in the clean and jerk for an 800 pound total.<sup>7</sup> He was exactly 20 years two months old on that day—December 27, 1952. Paul wrote in his autobiography that in the late spring of 1953, about a month prior to the tryouts for the World Weightlifting Championships, he was injured while training the hiplift, and was thus unable to compete in those tryouts.<sup>8</sup> (The Senior

National Weightlifting Championships had been scheduled for June 6-7, 1953, and would serve as the tryouts for the World Championships, which were to be held August 26-30, 1953 in Stockholm, Sweden.)

Whatever Paul was attempting to hiplift on the occasion of his injury (and a discussion of that amount will have to wait for another time), he maintained that it caused an injury to his right leg. He recalled that the weight-situated on the earth beneath a platform five feet high—had become frozen to the ground later that evening, after he had lifted it on several occasions earlier in the afternoon.<sup>9</sup> The chronology, as well as the circumstances causing the injury, present problems.



During Anderson's years as a professional strongman he often did hiplifting as part of his act. Here, at the Mapes Hotel in Reno, he lifts members of the chorus and band while playing a trombone.

### The Chronology

“About” a month before June 6 would have been May 6 (or May 1, to allow for conversational meaning). Paul at that time was living in Elizabethton, Tennessee, some three or so miles from Wautauga Dam, the closest weather reporting station for which records were kept in 1953. Keeping in mind that the air temperature *must* be 32 degrees or below for water to freeze, the final spring frost of 1953 was April 21, when the temperature reached 31 degrees Fahrenheit. Wayne Wendland, Illinois State Climatologist, wrote, regarding the weather conditions, “Mr. Roark: Elizabethton TN, (reports) only precip for 1953. I’ve enclosed temp data Wautauga Dam, TN (2-3 miles to the west). Last spring frost in Wautauga in 1953 was 21 April with 31F.”<sup>10</sup> So Paul’s injury must have happened on April 21, or earlier, which puts it at least seven weeks, or more, prior to the tryouts. (The coldest night of May 1953 in that area was 44 degrees on May 9, so there were no May frosts there in 1953.)<sup>11</sup>

So, reasoning that the injury occurred in April 1953, or earlier, and that Paul was injured badly enough to prevent his participation in the tryouts in early June, it would be logical to assume that he would not have lifted publicly during this period. We do know that on

March 21, 1953, precisely one month before the final freeze, Paul lifted in Atlanta, Georgia, at the Dixie Championships, and won the heavyweight class with 300-250-325 for an 875 pound total.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, Paul was healthy at that time. We also know that on May 17, 1953, Paul placed second to Doug Hepburn at the Junior National Weightlifting Championships in Cleveland via 300-270-370 for a 940 total, so his leg was sound three weeks before the tryouts.<sup>13</sup> What’s more, on May 30 (a mere week before the tryouts) Paul squatted 714.75 pounds.<sup>14</sup> So, when did this hiplift-induced leg injury in late spring of 1953 happen? Paul was lifting March 21 through May 30. When did this leg injury occur, and how could it have kept Paul from lifting in the Senior National Championships during the first week of June?

### The Frost

Earlier on the day in which Paul suffered the injury, according to his account, he had successfully hiplifted his apparatus several times. However, after supper, he decided to hoist it again, and he was unable to do so. He reports that he applied extra effort, and ended up injuring himself. He states that the leather belt he was using stretched several inches, and that he

“stretched” the muscle in his right leg as well, causing the injury.<sup>15</sup>

According to Paul’s account, sometime between his afternoon lifting and his after-supper attempt, the apparatus had become so solidly frozen to the ground that he could not lift it. But anyone who has spent any winters in America’s northern sections knows that there is a major difference between a light frost and a solid freeze, and that as the temperature continually decreases, and time passes, the ground-depth of the freeze increases. That’s why water-carrying pipes are placed about three feet below the ground surface. Further, a simple frost will not “freeze” anything to the earth in a few hours, because the depth of the freeze would be so insignificant. Furthermore, low temperatures are almost always recorded in the early mornings, not in the 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM time when Paul would most probably have made his after-supper attempt.

For a moment, let’s digress, as have others who have written about this.

**The Case of the Frozen Backlift**

Judd Biasiotto offered, in *Power-lifting USA*, November 1988, a version of a frozen lift he got from York Barbell Company founder Bob Hoffman. But Bob’s version is a backlift, not a hiplift. Biasiotto recalls that Hoffman said the table had been constructed in Paul’s backyard. However, by his own account Paul did not train on the backlift when he lived in Tennessee, and only became interested it after he moved to Toccoa, Georgia in late 1953 or early 1954. Biasiotto continues Hoffman’s story by indicating that Paul finally succeeded in the frozen backlift after reducing the amount of weight on the table and by literally pulling twelve inches of earth, which had become frozen onto each table leg, out of the ground as the table broke free.<sup>16</sup> There are some difficulties here: Paul’s famous backlift of 1957 is described by him as a platform lift off trestles, so no table legs would leave the ground. Only the platform resting upon the supports would move, and the temperature—at least as a freezing factor—becomes irrelevant in that scenario.

**A Further Digression: The Frozen Barrel Lift**

Paul’s brother-in-law, Julius Johnson, offers a version that was presented in a Toccoa, Georgia, newspaper tribute after Paul passed away.<sup>17</sup> In Johnson’s version, only the date of February is offered (hardly late spring) but the apparatus changes to two fifty-five gal-

lon oil drums partially filled with concrete hanging on a steel bar, situated over a hole in the earth into which Paul would step to perform a partial squat. In this version, the lift is not successful, and Paul’s mother good-naturedly chides him for trying “to lift the whole earth” when they both realized the barrels were frozen to the ground.

But back to the safe, and a question. How could it be determined that the safe was frozen to the earth without lifting it? Did it just “look” frozen? Perhaps—and this would seem to make the most sense—Paul was tired after his hiplifts in the afternoon and the safe was “heavier” after he’d cooled off and had supper, causing him to overstrain and injure his tired quadriceps. This would explain his subsequent belief that the safe must have “frozen” to the ground, or else he would have lifted it, having lifted it on several occasions earlier in the day. Such a series of events would demonstrate that Paul was not trying to mislead anyone about the “frozen” safe, but had merely misunderstood the reason for his failure and the related injury. This explanation still does not explain how the injury could have prevented him from lifting in the Senior National Championships that year, as he lifted several times in the weeks leading up to the June meet.

In any case, to summarize these three stories:

	Johnson	Biasiotto	Anderson
<b>Lift</b>	Squat	Backlift	Hiplift
<b>Time</b>		Morning	Evening
<b>What</b>	55 Gallon Drum	Safe & Junk	Safe
<b>Where</b>		Georgia	Tennessee
<b>Injury</b>	No	No	Yes
<b>Success</b>	No	Yes	No
<b>Witness</b>	No	No	No

### Back to the Main Story

As to the explanation offered at the time of the tryouts for the World Weightlifting Championships, when Paul did not compete, *Strength & Health* reported simply, "Paul Anderson did not make the trip to Indianapolis, and it was reported that Doug Hepburn had injured his neck while wrestling with Charlie Smith."<sup>18</sup> I have been unable to find any other public explanation for Paul's absence. Clearly, however, since he lifted in the Junior National Championships three weeks before those June tryouts, and squatted more than 700 pounds in a public exhibition only one week before the tryouts, any injury he suffered in trying to lift the safe was not the reason for his absence from that 1953 meet.

Paul's scenario simply will not fit the time frame into which he places it. Things become even more confused by an account published a year later in *Lifting News* magazine, because the text suggests that Paul had been unable to compete in the 1954 (yes, 1954) Senior National Championships as he had injured himself attempting a heavy hiplift, which "swung on him."<sup>19</sup> But it becomes more confusing still as the following correction is printed in the September 1954 issue of *Lifting News*: "...we find we were in error in reporting that an injury to his leg kept him from the Nationals. Other things interfered with his making the trip."<sup>20</sup> Those other things are not explained, nor does the text ascribe the leg injury as a belated explanation for the 1953 event. Perhaps the ill-fitting facts result from the effect of time on memory. Perhaps Paul injured himself while attempting a hiplift some other time, then subsequently mis-remembered the sequence of events and blamed the blameless injury for his absence from the 1953 Senior National Championships and, by extension, the 1953 World Championships.

### NOTES:

1. Paul Anderson with Jerry B. Jenkins and James R. Adair, *A Greater Strength*, foreword by Tom Landry. (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 990 copyright by Paul Anderson), 32. Anderson's autobiography originally appeared as: Paul Anderson & Jerry B. Jenkins, *Paul Anderson: World's Strongest Man* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1975). The story of the hiplift appears on pages 43-46 of this edition.

2. Anderson, *Greater Strength*, 32.

3. *Ibid.*, 33.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 32.

6. *Ibid.*, 33 & 34.

7. Paul lost in the following competitions: 1) May 17, 1953, Junior Nationals to Doug Hepburn who won with a 1015 total to Paul's 945; 2) September 5, 1953, All Dixie Championships, failed all his clean and jerks; and 3) Jan 16, 1954, Middle Atlantic Open in Philadelphia because he broke his wrist while lifting in the competition.

8. Anderson, *Greater Strength*, 33.

9. *Ibid.*, 35.

10. Personal communique from Wayne M. Wendland, State Climatologist, Illinois State Water Survey, and Professor of Geography, University of Illinois.

11. *Ibid.*

12. "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* (July 1952): 23.

13. "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* (September 1953): 62. At that meet Paul made 300-270-370-940 to Doug Hepburn's 365-290-360-1015.

14. "Reader's Roundup," *Ironman* (September 1953): 39.

15. Anderson, *Greater Strength*, 35.

16. Judd Biasiotto and Arny Ferrando, "The Greatest Athlete of All," *Powerlifting USA* (November 1988): 33.

17. The *Toccoa Record* published: "A Tribute to Paul Anderson," on Thursday, 6 October 1994. Supplement C includes 22 remembrances of Anderson. Mr. Johnson's reminiscence, written 20 August 1994, is Number 9 in the order.

18. Bob Hoffman, "The 1953 National AAU Championships," *Strength & Health* (September 1953): 37.

19. "Lifting News," *Iron Man* (July 1954): 11.

20. Peary Rader, "Grunt & Groan," *Iron Man* (September 1954): 6.

