



IRON GAME HISTORY



THE JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

Volume 9 Number 4

May 2007

Strongest of the Strong: Savickas Earns Fifth Straight Title at 2007 Arnold Strongman Classic

Jan Todd

As Zydrunas Savickas, the five time winner of the Arnold Strongman Classic, sat backstage on a precariously lightweight chair on Saturday afternoon during the Arnold Sports Festival, a smile flitted briefly across his handsome face as he watched a group of large, portly men strip down to their *mawashis* in preparation for a demonstration of sumo on the Expo stage. The irony of this chubby group coming on stage immediately after ten of the strongest men on the planet had just finished two grueling events was clearly not lost on Savickas. Before arriving in Columbus, Ohio, these sumo wrestlers may have believed they were *rikishi*—the Japanese word for strongman—but after watching American Steve MacDonald lift a world record 522-pound stone over a 47” bar in just 15.7 seconds, and then seeing Savickas motor across the Expo stage in 10.10 seconds with an 1116-pound yoke on his shoulders, they admitted to everyone within earshot that the real *rikishis* in Ohio that first weekend in March were the ten stupendous athletes (average height 6 feet 3¼ inches, average weight 346 pounds) who competed for the \$140,000 in cash and prizes put up by contest sponsor and food supplement company Maximum Human Performance (MHP).



Zydrunas Savickas rests between events at the 2007 Arnold Strongman Classic.

partner and the organizing force behind all the activities at the colossal Arnold Sports Festival, first approached Terry Todd about developing a strongman contest, Terry agreed, if Jim and Arnold would help him provide prize money beyond anything ever awarded in a Strongman contest. Terry also told Jim that he wanted to consult with David Webster and Bill Kazmaier and then to invite the strongest men in the world from the various strength sports to compete in a set of newly-created events that would primarily test what exercise physiologists define as “strength”—maximum muscular force—rather than events that relied heavily on muscular endurance and quickness as was then (and is still) common in contests like ESPN’s “World’s Strongest Man” show. Jim and Arnold agreed, and six years after that first 2002 show the Arnold Strongman Classic is regarded by most experts as the premier brute strength contest in the world—with the biggest prize money, the best strength athletes, and the heaviest set of events of any Strongman contest held anywhere.

The fact that Zydrunas Savickas has now won the contest for five straight years—and has improved in nearly every event each year—is so remarkable that the buzz behind-the-scenes among the contest’s top officials was that it was

In 2001, when Jim Lorimer, Arnold’s

time to give the large Lithuanian his due and acknowledge that Zydrunas Savickas is not just the world's strongest man over the past five years, but that he has a very solid claim to an even grander title—*The Strongest Man in History*. I mean no disrespect to Magnus Ver Magnusson of Iceland, a four-time winner of the ESPN World's Strongest Man Contest and a man who honors the Arnold Strongman Classic by coming each year to help with judging; and I certainly don't want to cast any aspersions on the late Jon Pall Sigmarsson, who matched Magnus' four wins in the ESPN contest. Nor do I want in any way to make light of the fabulous career and phenomenal strength of legendary three-time WSM winner (and my good friend) Bill Kazmaier, who has worked

with Terry and David Webster over the past six years to choose the events. And I especially don't want to slight my adopted "son," Mark Henry, who I suspect may have become even stronger than Zydrunas had he not decided 12 years ago to assure his financial future by becoming a professional wrestler. Similarly, I have great respect for Andy Bolton, the first and only man to deadlift 1000 pounds, and for weightlifters such as Iran's Hossein Reza zadeh, the current world and Olympic champion, and Russia's Leonid Taranenko, who holds the all-time bests for both the clean and jerk and the total. All of these men either were, or are, prodigiously strong. However, as Terry, David Webster, and others sat around talking after the show, everyone involved—including Mark

Iron Game History

The Journal of Physical Culture
Vol. 9 No. 4 May 2007

Table of Contents

- 1. 2007 Arnold Strongman Classic Jan Todd
- 7. Bill Colonna's Picnics John Fair & Jeffrey Wells
- 21. Hermann Goerner . . G. Bonini, M. Kodya and J. Roark
- 33. Grapevine Staff

Co-Editors-in-Chief **Jan & Terry Todd**
Associate Editor **Kim Beckwith**
Assistant Editor **Thomas Hunt**

Editorial Board . . . John Balik (Santa Monica, CA), Jack Berryman (Univ. of Washington, Seattle), David Chapman (Seattle, WA), John Fair (Georgia College & University, Milledgeville, GA), William Goetzmann (Univ. of Texas, Austin), Charles Kupfer (Penn State, Harrisburg.), Grover Porter (Univ. of Alabama, Huntsville), Joe Roark (St. Joseph, IL), Al Thomas (Ocean City, NJ) and David Webster (Irvine, Scotland).

Iron Game History is published by the McLean Sports History Fellowship at the University of Texas at Austin, under the auspices of the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education. U.S. subscription rate: \$25.00 per four issues, \$40.00 per eight issues. McLean Fellowship subscriptions \$60.00 per eight issues; Patron subscriptions \$100.00 per eight issues. Canada & overseas subscriptions: \$30.00 per four issues and \$45.00 per eight issues. U.S. funds only. See page 36 for further details.

Address all correspondence and subscription requests to: *Iron Game History*, Anna Hiss Gym #22, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas 78712. Telephone: 512-471-4890. **Back issues are available through our website, by contacting IGH at the address below, or via email.**

Jan Todd's email: j.todd@mail.utexas.edu
Terry Todd's email: terrytodd@mail.utexas.edu
Subscriptions/Kim Beckwith's email: beckfish@peoplepc.com
Website: www.irongamehistory.com

Iron Game History is a non-profit enterprise.
Postmaster: Send address corrections to: *IGH*, Anna Hiss Gym #22, University of Texas, Austin, Texas 78712.

Patron Subscribers

John Balik	Norman J. Komich	Keith Scruggs
Chuck Burdick	Jack Lano	Richard Sorin
Jerry Byrd	Leslie Longshore	Al Thomas
Dean Camenares	James Lorimer	Dr. Ted Thompson
Gary Camillo	Don McEachren	Tom Townsend
Bill Clark	David Mills	Dr. Stephen R. Turner
Kevin Collings	Ben Mitcham	Kevin R. Wade
Robert Conciatori	Quinn Morrison	David P. Webster
John Dever	Graham Noble	Joe & Betty Weider
Lucio Doncel	Ben Oldham	
Dave Draper	Rick Perkins	
Salvatore Franchino	Piedmont Design Assoc.	
Dr. Peter George	Dr. Grover Porter	In Memory of:
Fred Hahn	Tom Prochazka	Joe Assirati
Howard Havener	Terry Robinson	Steve Reeves
John V. Higgins	Jim Sanders	Chuck Sipes
Robert Kennedy	Frederick Schutz	Les & Pudgy Stockton
Ray Knecht		

Fellowship Subscribers

Bob Bacon	Larry Davis	Anthony Lukin	Dr. Ken "Leo" Rosa
George Bangert	Clyde Doll	Patrick J. Luskin	John T. Ryan
Alfred C. Berner	Alton Eliason	Paul Manocchio	Pete Ryan
Terrence Bogard	Bill Hansen	Richard Marzulli	David B. Small
Dr. Anne Bolin	Charles Hixon	Robert McNall	Edward Sweeney
Mike BonDurant	Martin Hoffman	Louis Mezzanote	Dr. Victor Tejada
Lewis Bowling	Raymond Irwin	George Miller	Harold Thomas
James Bradford	Dr. Serafin Izquierdo	John Morton	Lou Tortorelli
Victor Burdett	Gene Jantzen	Tony Moskowitz	Michael Waller
Jerome Carlin	Jose Jara	Bill Nicholson	Reuben Weaver
Vera Christensen	Dale Jenkins	John F. O'Neill	
John Coffee	Carroll B. Johnson, Jr.	Kevin O'Rourke	
Bruce Conner	Daniel Kostka	Susan O'Shea	
John Corlett	Thomas Lee	Dr. Val Pasqua	In Memory of:
John Crainer	George Lock	David Pelto	Bob Bednarski
		Barnet Pugach	



Left—Zydrunas Savickas (6'3", 400 pounds) once again dominated the field as he pressed (not jerked) the 366-pound replica of Apollon's Wheels for eight repetitions after bringing the bar from the floor to his chest on each repetition.

Center—Vasyl Virastyuk finished second to Savickas in the overall standings once again, but he won the Circus Dumbbell event with six repetitions.

Below Right—Estonian Andrus Murumets was a last-minute addition, but he lifted as if he'd been training for the "Arnold" for years, finishing third and setting a new record in the Timber Carry.

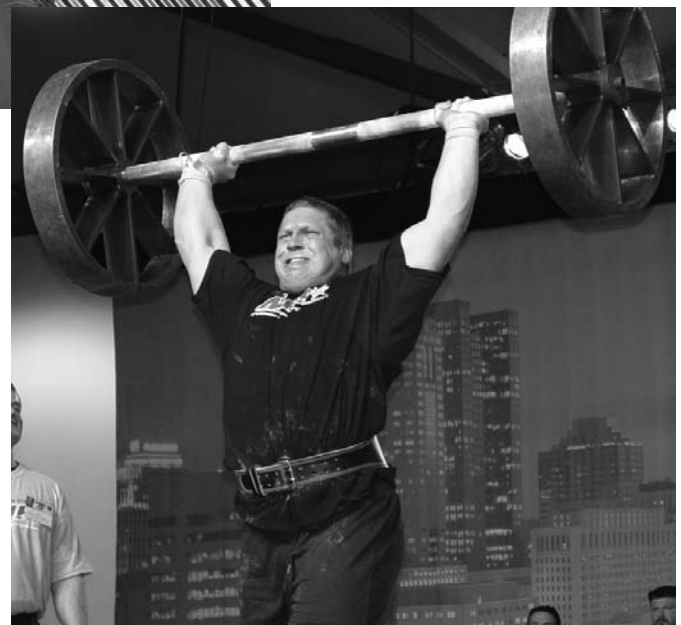
All photos by Jan Todd

to lift overhead, however, is that the bar is 1.92 inches in diameter and is fixed to the wheels on each end so that if the bar rotates, so do the wheels. When you clean Apollon's Wheels you create terrific centrifugal force

and all 366 pounds come crashing down on your chest. In 2002, the first year we held the show, the Olympian, World Powerlifting Champion, and WWE wrestler, Mark Henry power cleaned the Ivanko replica of the Wheels three times and push-pressed it overhead three times. Everyone else failed. In 2007, Savickas pulled the bar to the top of his chest using two or three motions on each repetition and then pressed—not jerked—the weight overhead for eight reps using either no leg drive or very little. The audience could hardly

Henry, who won the Arnold Strongman Classic the first year; Odd Haugen, the 57-year-old phenomenon who is one of our judges; Magnus Ver Magnusson; and even Bill Kazmaier agreed that in the low-gear, heavy-duty realm of total-body pure strength, the 400-pound Zydrunas has probably reached a level never before seen. What's more, he has also dominated the International Federation of Strength Athletes over the past several years. What had so impressed everyone at the "Arnold" wasn't just that Zydrunas took first place in three of the six events and placed second in two of the others on his way to the \$30,000 first prize check, the \$25,000 Audemars Piguet watch and the \$10,000 Louis Cyr trophy courtesy of Joe Weider—it was how he performed in certain key events that literally took our breath away.

For example, the signature event of the Arnold Strongman Classic is the lifting of the "Apollon's Wheels" barbell made by Ivanko and used only in this contest. Modeled after the famous stage weight owned by the French strongman Apollon (Louis Uni), the barbell weighs "only" 366 pounds. What makes it difficult





believe it. It was, indeed, one of the most impressive exhibitions of arm and shoulder strength I've ever seen. Several other men also turned in great performances with the Wheels this year. For example, the world's strongest powerlifter, Brian Siders, put them overhead seven times; and both Vasyl Virastyuk of the Ukraine and Estonia's Andrus Murumets managed five cleans and overhead jerks. (Invited as a replacement for Mariusz Pudzianowski, Murumets was very impressive, astonishing the crowd by cleaning the wheels on each repetition



with a double-overhand grip and creating a new record in the Farmer's Walk by carrying the 865 pound Timbers up the 36-foot ramp in 6.87 seconds.) It should probably be added that Zydrunas has won the Wheels event each year—and has created a new “world record” every year except one, when he “only” tied it.

This Baltic Superman isn't just strong in his arms and shoulders, however, as he demonstrated in the Tire Deadlift, when he pulled a record 1016 pounds on his third attempt wearing no supportive gear except his belt. The deadlifting contest proved to be one of the highlights of this year's Classic as four men succeeded with second attempts at 950 or more, and three men attempted more than 1000 pounds in an effort to break Savickas' 994-pound record, set in 2006. New-comer Oleksandr Pekanov of the Ukraine was the first to cross the half-ton barrier with a 1005 pound belt-buster that brought roars from the six-to-eight thousand fans flocked around the stage and watching the Jumbotrons. The 410-pound Pekanov's record didn't last long, though, as Savickas then strode onto the stage and easily pulled the 1016 to reclaim his spot in the record book. Brian Siders, however, who'd made 961 on his second,



Above Left—West Virginia's Pfil Pfister had the highest finish among the US Strongmen, and although he lifted Apollon's Wheels “only” five times, at 6'7” he lifted it higher than anyone. **Center**—Unfortunately, the immensely talented weightlifter/strongman Mikhail Koklyaev injured his leg in the first event and thus was unable to push Savickas as he was expected to do. **Right**—Although this was his first time to compete in this contest, the 410 pound Ukrainian, Oleksandr Pekanov, set a new (albeit briefly held) world record in the Tire Deadlift and tied Koklyaev for fifth place overall.

then asked that all four Hummer tires be loaded onto each side of the springy 14 foot bar, bringing the total weight to an astonishing 1062 pounds. The crowd roared when it was loaded and went truly crazy when Brian got it well above his knees. But then the bar began flexing and whipping so much with the great weight that Brian finally had to let it go. Almost certainly he could have lifted a few pounds more than Savickas' 1016, but by bravely trying all eight tires he became a hero to everyone.

Although every man who accepts a coveted invitation to the Arnold Strongman Classic is a hero of some sort, I can't close this brief report without mentioning how proud I was to see West Virginia's Phil Pfister, winner of ESPN's 2006 World's Strongest Man Contest, come to Columbus and lay his title on the line. (For additional information about this redoubtable athlete, read the "Iron Grapevine" section of *IGH*.) This marked Phil's fourth appearance in the Arnold Strongman Classic and he knew, coming in, that with men like Savickas, Vasy Virastyuk, Mikhail Koklyaev of Russia (who finished third last year), and Estonian Andrus Murumets



(one of the best Strongmen in Europe) it was unlikely that he would finish first in this series of extreme events. At 6'7" it's taken Phil a long time to grow into his enormous frame, but at approximately 350 pounds he is truly high and mighty now, and he proved it when he dethroned the supposedly unbeatable Mariusz Pudzianowski this year in the challenging—if lighter—events used in the WSM show. This year Phil ended up



Left—Steve MacDonald qualified for the Arnold Strongman Classic by winning the American Strongman Championship and he really shone with the Manhood Stones, creating a new, all-time world record by putting this 522 pound stone over the 47" bar as Chief Referee, David Webster of Scotland, looks on approvingly. Center—Veteran strongman Karl Gillingham was nursing an injury, but somehow managed to tough it out and trudge through the full distance with the Heavy Yoke, which weighed 1116 pounds. Top Right—Texan Travis Ortmeyer had the bad luck to sustain an injury coming into the competition, and was not at his best. Even so, he finished the contest and finished third in the Timber Carry. Note Mark Henry in the background.



One of the high points in the entire Arnold Strongman Classic came when the former World Powerlifting Champion, Brian Siders, called for all eight tires (1062 pounds) on his final attempt and barely missed locking it out.

fourth overall at the “Arnold.” Even so, he had a terrific contest and tied Zydrunas in the Circus Dumbbell lift, putting up the massive, three-inch-thick-handled 202-pounder five times with his right hand to the delight of his many fans at Saturday night’s finale at Veterans Memorial Auditorium. Vasyl Virastyuk—who finished second again—actually won the Circus Dumbbell lift this year with six repetitions but, as in the Apollon’s Wheels,

Savickas’ five strict, *easy* presses with the dumbbell—when he knew he had the contest already won—left the most indelible memory.

It’s a memory that will always be with me. Who knows what rough beast will come round next year to challenge the Lithuanian Hercules? Maybe someone will finally unseat him, but maybe he’ll simply extend his streak. He just turned 31—

not old for the Strongman sport by any means. If you have never seen Zydrunas Savickas in person, you should make every effort to come to Ohio next March and see this majestic wonder of nature for yourself. After all, it’s not every day you get a chance to see a man who may soon be widely regarded as The Strongest Man in History.

Ed Note: Some of the material in this article will be published in Jeff Everson’s Planet Muscle magazine later this summer.

MHP Setting New Standards in Sports Nutrition		2007 Arnold Strongman Classic Final Results March 2-3, 2007 in Columbus, Ohio; Sponsored by MHP																	
Competitors	Timber Carry	Place	Points	Apollon's Wheels Cleans- Continental- Jerks	Place	Points	Deadlift	Place	Points	The Manhood Stones Stone 1 = 522 lbs Stone 2 = 484 lbs	Place	Points	Heavy Yoke 1116 pounds	Place	Points	Circus DB R=right hand L=left hand	Place	Points	Final Points
1. Zydrunas Savickas	25'2"	6	5	0-8-8	1	10	1016 WR	1	10	#1 x 1 rep in 17.44 sec.	2	9	10.10 sec.	1	10	5-R	2	8	52
2. Vasyl Virastyuk	7.75 sec. WR	2	9	6-0-5	3	8	856.5	6	5	#2 x 2 reps in 33.24 sec.	4	7	10.56 sec.	2	9	3-R 3-L	1	10	48
3. Andrus Murumets	6.87 sec. WR	1	10	5-0-5	4	7	873	5	6	#2 x 1 reps in 16.61 sec.	7	4	14.02 sec.	5	6	4-R	5	5.5	38.5
4. Phil Pfister	24.82 sec.	4	7	0-5-4	5	6	845.5	7	4	#2 x 1 rep in 19.5 sec.	8	3	11.79 sec.	3	8	5-R	2	8	36
5. Mikhail Koklyaev	13' 4"	9	2	3-0-3	6	5	950	5	7	#2 x 1 rep in 7.25 sec.	5	6	20.59 sec.	6	5	5-R	2	8	33
5. Oleksandr Pekanov	16'1"	8	3	0-3-2	7	3.5	1005 WR	2	9	#2 x 3 reps in 51.12 sec.	3	8	24.06 sec.	7	4	4-R	5	5.5	33
7. Brian Siders	3'3"	10	1	0-8-7	2	9	961	3	8	Unable to lift #2	9	1.5	12.00 sec.	4	7	1-R	9	2	28.5
8. Steve MacDonald	19'	7	4	0-3-2	7	3.5	840	8	2.5	#1 x 1 rep in 15.70 sec.	1	10	8'9" 3 touches	9	2	0	10	1	23
9. Karl Gillingham	27'9"	5	6	0-3-0	10	1	Pass	0	0	#2 x 1 rep in 8.16 sec.	6	5	25.17 sec.	8	3	3-R	7	4	19
10. Travis Ortmyer	19.94 sec.	3	8	0-2-1	9	2	840	8	2.5	Unable to lift #1	9	1.5	Pass	0	0	2-L	8	3	17

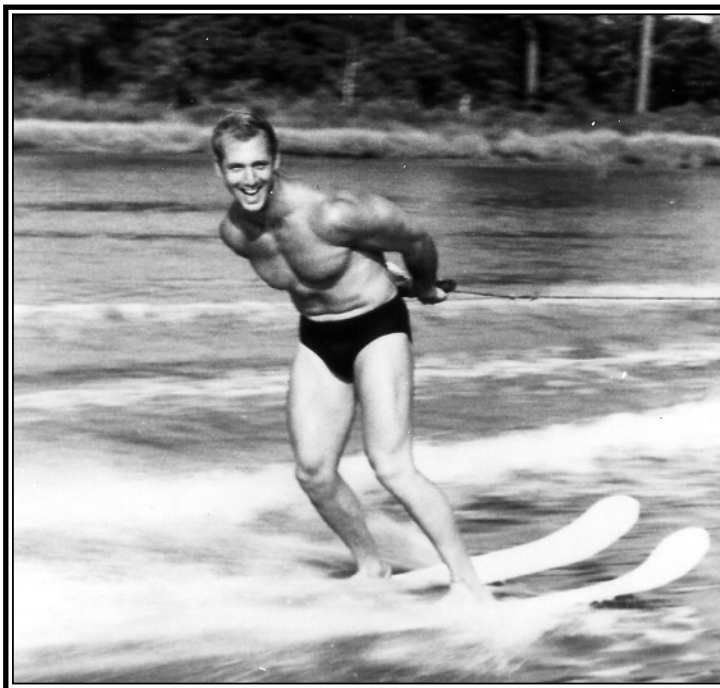
PHYSICAL CULTURE FROLICS IN THE OLD DOMINION: BILL COLONNA'S PICNICS, 1953-1961

John D. Fair, Georgia College & State University
&
Jeffery C. Wells, Georgia Military College

Among the many blessings bestowed by Bob Hoffman during the half century he dominated America's iron game, the sense of community he fostered among weightlifters ranks high. Whether the concept originated with the social amenities provided by early German-American athletic clubs in major cities (as an extension of earlier Old World traditions), the fraternal spirit embedded in George Jowett's American Continental Weight-Lifting Association and his Strength and Health League, or Bob's own experiences with his comrades in France and on board ship during the Great War cannot be determined.¹ But it becomes evident by the late 1920s in the camaraderie of Hoffman's lifter/employees (the nucleus of the York gang) as they competed and performed strength feats with each other on a platform located in the middle of his oil burner plant on Broad Street. The intense rivalry and bonding spurred by these mini-competitions no doubt had much to do

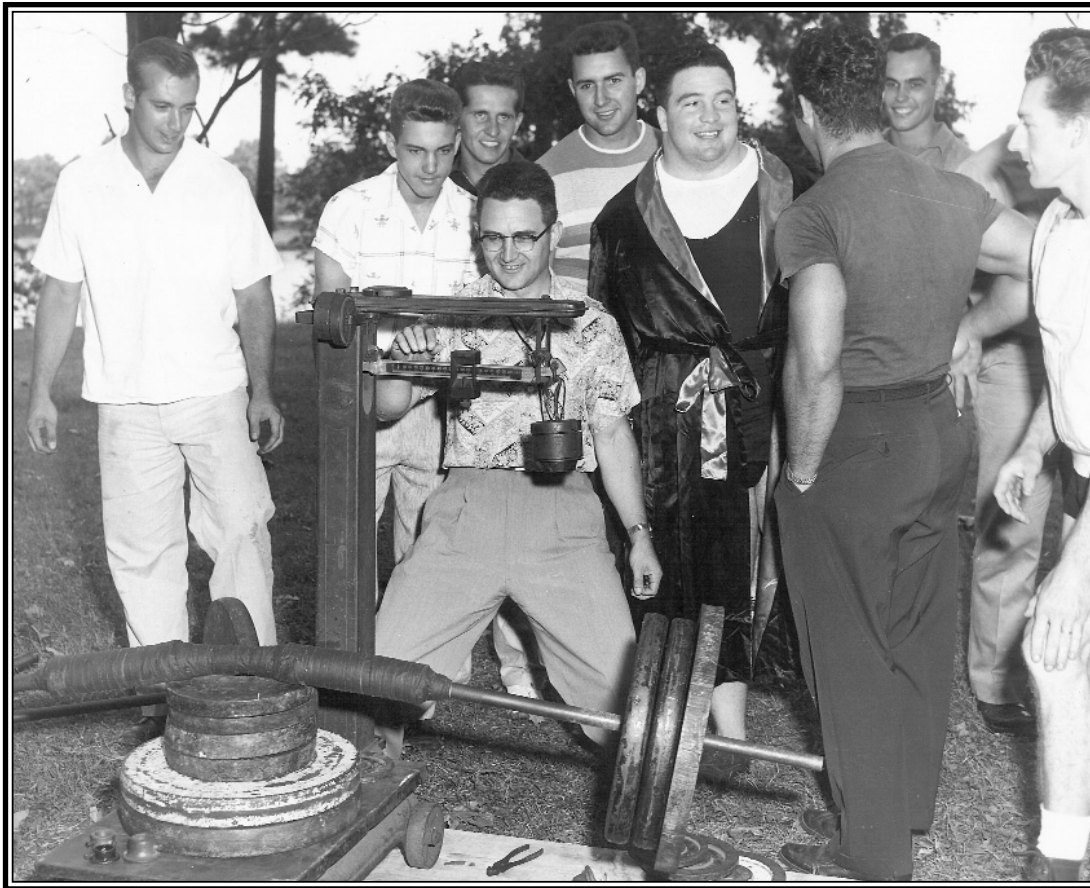
with the early success of the York Oil Burner Athletic Club in its encounters with other regional teams. But these socialization practices also extended to other activities such as festive meals, weekend outings, and trips to meets (often including women) where Bob's boys extended their fellowship to a broader circle of strength athletes.

As a result of these friendships and the heightened level of consciousness they infused in the sport, Hoffman conceived the idea of holding periodic strengthfests, some with food and drink, by the mid-1930s. One of the most notable was held at the York clubhouse on Lightner's Hill in December 1934. "What a wonderful time, what fun," reported *Strength & Health*. "Good fellowship, records smashed galore, plenty of eats, visits with old friends, meeting with new ones. A day of days."² Most of these displays of strength and fitness (including annual celebrations of Bob's



Bill Colonna, who grew up around boats and water, was as skilled on water skis and he was with the barbells. This photo was taken in 1955.

All photos courtesy Bill Colonna



In 1953, Paul Anderson created a sensation at Colonna's picnic by squatting a world record 762 1/4 pounds. As was the custom in those early days of lifting, the barbell and all the plates were immediately weighed to ascertain the correct weight of a new record. Long-time York Barbell general manager John Terpak is shown in the center, weighing the bar and plates. Left to right around him are Bill Colonna, unidentified man, Paul Anderson, Jim Park (back to camera) and Frank Stevens. Behind, in the second row are Steve Klasinin, Bob Crist and Arnold Pope.

birthday) took place at the York YMCA in the fall and winter months.³ In 1937, however, Hoffman staged a picnic at Lightner's in August, designed in part to show that weightlifting was not just a cool-weather indoor sport. Dubbed a "convention," he called it "the greatest event of its kind ever staged."⁴ Bob's acquisition in 1940 of Brookside Park on 32 acres of woodland near Dover set the stage for the first so-called Strength & Health Picnic on June 23 of that year. It was a gala event which included, according to Hoffman, "the usual strength show, consisting of weight lifting, strength feats, hand balancing, tumbling, contortion and muscle control, and the races, rope climbing, archery and other contests." What made the picnic so special were the extras he provided. "The ladies who live near Brookside Park were handling the food concession and those present made good use of the chicken corn soup, the 25 cent

platters of salad and sandwiches, the ice cream and lemonade and other delicacies." An orchestra started playing at six o'clock and dancing, including a jitterbug contest, went on till nearly midnight. So pleased was Bob with the conviviality displayed by all who attended this affair that he intended to stage a similar gathering in September.⁵

Such plans never materialized, and the next Strength & Health Picnic did not occur until June of 1945, after a five year hiatus attributable largely to the war.⁶ But for the next 27 years it became a festive centerpiece

of York culture, attracting hundreds of visitors—young and old, male and female, novices and world champions—from all over the region to experience the joy of each other's company. Al Thomas, in his 1991 article in *Iron Game History*, provides a nostalgic glimpse of this socialization ritual and an indication of how vital this seemingly frivolous activity was to the health of the sport during the post-war era. It was "a community of people . . . gathered to celebrate strength and health, but more importantly, to celebrate each other as celebrants."⁷ Amidst the friendliness and goodwill displayed by the participants in the largely spontaneous and impromptu competitions, there developed a greater love for lifting and a desire to excel. Notwithstanding any commercial or political advantages that might accrue to Bob as a result of these yearly rituals, they were both functional and fun, and it is hardly coincidental that their rise and

demise corresponded with the so-called golden age of American weightlifting.

While physical culture activities at York and most other pre-war centers were seriously hampered by the war effort, interest in weightlifting and bodybuilding actually intensified in the Norfolk area. Heretofore competitive events in Virginia were largely limited to Roanoke and Winchester. In 1936 Ken McCorkindale staged the state's first meet at the Roanoke YMCA, and in 1939 the first Virginia Weightlifting Championships was held at the health club of Dr. Howard James in Winchester with John Grimek, Tony Terlazzo, Steve Stanko, Hoffman, and other members of the York gang treating the audience of 350 to exhibition feats. At the second state championships in 1940 teams from Winchester and Roanoke dominated the competition.⁸ The first weightlifting meet in Norfolk, featuring seven lifters, was held in early 1938 at the Central Gym, but it was not until the formation of the Apollo Athletic Club in 1940 by George Greenfield at the Navy YMCA and the onset of World War II that the city became a hotbed of lifting.⁹

They first took the form of occasional team competitions between City Park, Edgewater, and Portsmouth YMCA weightlifters. Later in the war they incorporated other physical culture displays, such as chinning, hand-balancing, tumbling, bent pressing, and muscle control in regular outings at the Navy YMCA.¹⁰ Bob Crist, an early Apollo member, explains that "the Navy Y was right down the street from the Colonial Theater. There would be vaudeville acts there on weekends, and the guys would get inspired from them, and the performers would show them the moves."¹¹ By 1944 physical culture frolics at the Navy Y were occurring monthly. On several occasions the audience was treated to a hand-balancing act by Hank and Evelyn Hamilton. Hank, a machinist at the Norfolk Navy Yard, once bent-pressed 240 pounds at 190 bodyweight, and Evelyn, weighing only 124, deadlifted 300 pounds.¹² But this concentration of interest and activity owed mainly to the leadership of Greenfield, who lifted in virtually all of the meets, and the interest generated by the presence of so many young servicemen in the Norfolk area.

After the war the Navy Y remained the major center for Virginia weightlifters and contests, replete with hand-balancing, tumbling, and muscle control exhibitions. In 1947 one of the leading spirits of the Apollo Club, Herb Bradley, was featured in *Strength & Health* for performing two 285 pound floor presses at 123 body-

weight.¹³ By 1949 a Mr. Virginia Contest and a Most Muscular Man title were added to the annual weightlifting championships, but in the 1950s it was evident that the Navy Y was no longer paramount and that lifters and bodybuilders were gravitating to other locations.¹⁴ These new centers were not only filling a void but were providing opportunities for innovative physical culture activities in other parts of the metropolitan area.

By this time too Hoffman's strengthfests, including Strength & Health picnics, were thriving again and providing a model and inspiration for similar strongman gatherings throughout the country. As much as the feats of strength and displays of muscular development and proficiency, it was the spirit of camaraderie engendered at York that was admired and imitated.¹⁵ Bill Colonna, Jr. of Chesapeake, Virginia, who was nurtured in the friendly competitive environment created by Greenfield and others in Norfolk seemed susceptible to Bob's gospel of socialization. Born 1 February 1929, the son of Will and Esther Colonna, Bill grew up along the Indian River, an estuary of Hampton Roads, in the shadows of the family shipyard, which was founded in 1875 by his grandfather, Charles Colonna. After attending the College of William and Mary for a year, he resigned to enroll in shipbuilding apprentice school in Newport News and then entered the family business. In the meantime, Colonna, as a skinny (137 pound) teenager, had seen a picture of 1946 Mr. America Alan Stephan and started to think about toning his muscles and improving his strength and appearance. Although lifting weights was at that time widely frowned upon and well outside the social norm, Colonna's curiosity grew. His first hands-on experience occurred when a friend who lived nearby invited him to work out with the 150-pound set in his garage. Such was the appeal of weight training and Colonna's personal improvement from it that in 1947 he set up a modest workout facility in the basement of a clapboard structure on his family's property where local lifters converged. It was affectionately called "the dungeon."¹⁶ That he was pursuing the right course was confirmed by an incident Colonna witnessed at his high school where the football coach, like so many coaches of that era, prohibited his players from lifting weights and even threatened expulsion from the team. The coach's attitude changed, however, when he realized that the losses his team had incurred came from those rivals who had gained superior strength and speed by employing weights in their training regimen. Imagine Colonna's



At the 1954 picnic, Bob Crist's wife, Yolanda, dips out ice cream made with Hoffman Hi-Proteen powder under the watchful gaze of the president of the York Barbell Company, Bob Hoffman. The protein-laced ice cream was, according to Colonna, a "pleasant surprise for Bob Hoffman, and made him very happy."

surprise when the coach showed up at his front door one day asking where he could buy a set of weights!¹⁷

Colonna knew exactly where the coach could get weights, for by this time he had been bitten by the iron bug from reading *Strength & Health* and was thoroughly familiar with the York system and the personalities associated with it. He also gained inspiration from visiting "Mecca," where he was surprised to discover that the old Broad Street gym was just as dilapidated as his own meager facility, yet it was producing world champions and Mr. Americas. Like the York gym and a later "dungeon" in Santa Monica, there was a certain mystique attached to Colonna's creation. Upon its demolition in 1982, an article in the *Tidewater Physique* reminisced:

This foreboding place has had the uncanny and unnatural ability to turn out an impressive product. It holds court with a select few and a visitor has the choice of negotiating terms with his lower extremities to keep from being inundated by massive poundages of weights. Or gracefully

pushing aside mounds of cobwebs arched from the ceiling, while attempting to step over rain-soaked sections of flooring which could possibly be sweat. Once inside you can actually feel a certain electricity. A particular atmosphere or quality that seems to arise from the worn concrete floor. You are enveloped with that 'feel' and only the die-hard bodybuilders who have chosen America's least popular and most misunderstood sport, know what that 'feel' is.¹⁸

Contrary to conventional wisdom, it seems almost axiomatic in the annals of American weightlifting and bodybuilding that the dingiest workout facilities usually produce the greatest results. Perhaps it has something to do with the counter-culture nature of the sport. But Colonna's was truly a "sweat gym" and such was the intensity of interest and its proximity to York (and the beach!) that Hoffman actually came to Norfolk several times. It would be hard to imagine a greater thrill for an aspiring bodybuilder than to be seated in the backseat of

Bob's Cadillac on the way to Virginia Beach with multiple Mr. America John Grimek demonstrating how to bend bars. Colonna eventually got to know Hoffman and others of the York gang "pretty well" and also attended at least one of the annual picnics at Brookside Park which seemed to exude the same kind of camaraderie that existed in his gym.¹⁹

By the early 1950s Colonna started staging some picnics and shows, albeit on a much smaller scale, on the grounds outside his gym. Through the insistence of Buck Cowling, physical director of the Portsmouth YMCA, these affairs included a Miss Virginia Contest, a feeder event for the nascent Miss USA and Miss Universe pageants in California.²⁰ It was not until 1953 that Colonna felt sufficiently confident to organize his own picnic on a much broader scale. In addition to his inspiration from York, several other factors influenced his decision. He was not only a serious bodybuilder but had always (like Hoffman) had an interest in water sports, especially water skiing, and the land owned by his father, called "The Point," on the banks of the Indian River seemed an ideal venue for indulging in both activities within the context of a picnic. Colonna's close friend Bob Crist thinks the picnic started because George Greenfield convinced Bill that the land was there and also the weights.²¹ "When you start these things," Colonna observes, "you don't really know how much work is involved in putting them on. Publicizing, getting judges, emceeing, ordering trophies, etc." But Colonna had assistance from Greenfield, who organized the lifting contest, while Colonna handled the physique competition and other events, including the aquatics. Colonna's wife, Earlene, also a lifter, assisted as an organizer and participant, and there was no shortage of pals from the gym to help out in all phases of the picnic.²² Like Hoffman, Colonna would charge no entrance fees and would provide free food and drink—soft drinks, no alcohol. In the promotional brochure, he issued an invitation to his picnic which would be held on Saturday and Sunday, June 25-26, 1953, emphasizing that it was open to "everyone" and that "anyone is eligible to compete." The main events would be held on Sunday afternoon, "rain or shine," and would consist of all seven divisions of Olympic weightlifting, a "Mr. Health" physique contest (with sub-divisions), and so-called "odd events" consisting of the bench press, squats, curl, standing broad jump (always a York favorite), best balancer, and a freestyle swimming race. "We plan on hav-

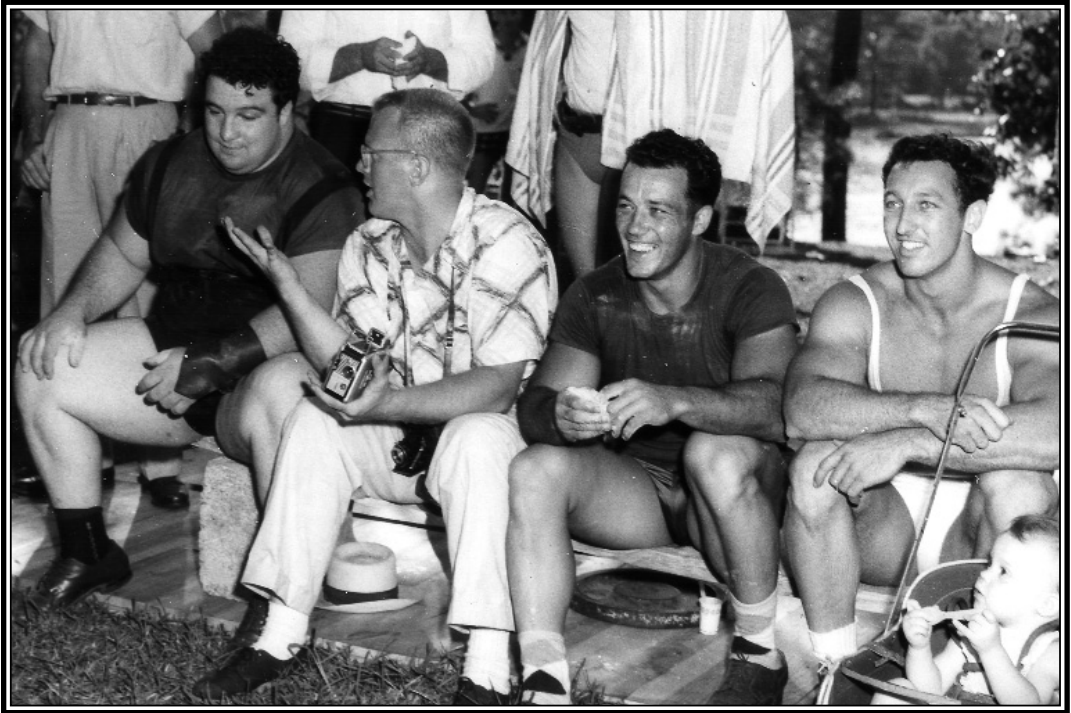
ing a great time and expect you there."²³

Hoffman did not attend, but he did send John Terpak, his chief lieutenant and general manager; Jim Murray, managing editor of *Strength & Health*; and Jim Park, 1952 Mr. America, who put on a special posing exhibition. What made the event a resounding success, however, was the presence of a strength phenomenon, arguably the greatest in American weightlifting history—the legendary Paul Anderson. Exactly who "discovered" Anderson has never been a matter of dispute, it being safely assumed that it was done by legendary deadlifter Bob Peoples of Johnson City, Tennessee, in the summer of 1952.²⁴ Colonna, however, relates another story of Paul's early prowess, possibly predating that of Peoples.

It occurred by happenstance through an experience by one of Colonna's closest friends. At 6' 1", 210 pounds, with a 48½" chest and 27" thighs, Ray Tipton was one of the strongest men in the South.²⁵ His family home was in East Tennessee where an early Tipton was largely responsible for squashing John Sevier's attempt to carve the free state of Franklin out of Western Carolina lands in the late eighteenth century. While Tipton was visiting his parents in Elizabethton, he asked around for a place to work out. Although there was no gym in the area, he was told that there was a large man in the neighborhood who worked out with weights and various other objects in his garage. After checking out the story, Tipton returned to tell his mother that there was a big fat man down the street who exercises, and that the man invited him to train. Upon entering Anderson's garage he saw squat racks and other equipment he had never seen before. It was obvious that Anderson had been lifting heavy poundages. Tipton also noticed that one side of the garage was bowed out, the result, Paul explained, of his having hit it once after losing his balance. Ray started warming up in the clean and press with an Olympic bar and kept increasing the weight. Paul said he would join him when he got to a level where he could start, but when Tipton got to 300 pounds, his limit, he turned around and asked, "Are you ready now?" Paul said "no, but I'll start anyway." He then pressed the bar multiple times and set it down like it was nothing. Ray asked, "Who in the hell are you. I know of practically every strong man in the country, and no one can do this. It must be a world record." But Anderson seemed unaware of how much he had just pressed or what it meant. Tipton came back and told his friends at the gym

what he had just seen but admitted that a lot of the weights were not marked and included some “odd things.” Colonna then called York, and both Terpak and Grimek were interested, knowing Tipton was a “straight shooter.” Bill said he would bring him over from Tennessee and put him up at the picnic he was planning.²⁶

By the time Paul arrived in Norfolk he was hardly an unknown, since he had already performed a 714¾ pound squat and totaled 940 pounds in the Olympic lifts.²⁷ He stayed with his mother



One could brush shoulders with many notables at the 1955 Picnic. In this photograph Paul Anderson talks with Strength & Health editor Jim Murray while Jim Park of Mr. World and Mr. Universe fame (wearing a t-shirt) and Ray Tipton smile as they watch the action on the platform.

and eight or ten other guys in Colonna’s spacious house adjacent to the lifting site. Colonna observed that “when the Andersons’ car pulled into the driveway, it leaned to Paul’s side. When Paul got out, it leaned less.” Ethel Anderson, who was very protective of her 315-pound son, immediately had two questions for Colonna. First, she wanted to know if blocks could be placed under Paul’s bed because he would otherwise likely break it. Unfortunately, whatever support was placed there was insufficient. In the middle of the night the other weightlifters were awakened by the sound of Paul crashing through his bed. Mrs. Anderson also wanted to know if there was a nearby store that sold milk. The logic of this question soon became apparent by 11:30 the next morning when others noticed that Paul had already drunk eleven quarts of milk, and his mother was headed to the store for more.²⁸ Another curiosity of this oversized athlete stemmed from his consumption of an unidentified viscous liquid from a jar. When asked about it, Anderson said that the others might not want to know what it really was. When pressed by Colonna, however, Paul revealed that it was beef blood and that he had worked out an agreement with the butcher in Elizabethton to get it as often as he could because he drank it

routinely for health purposes.²⁹

Anderson was the sensation of the picnic and fulfilled everyone’s expectations, especially with his squatting ability. After easily raising 700 pounds from a low position, all the weights available were loaded on the bar, and that too presented no difficulty. Afterwards Terpak weighed the assorted collection of iron at 762¼ pounds, a new unofficial world record. Anderson also won the best lifter award with a 975 pound total in the Olympic lifts and did an impromptu push-jerk with 420 pounds. Other odd event winners were Ronnie Ledas (Curl and Bench Press), Don Hollingsworth (broad jump), Marvin Byrum (best balancer), and Nolly Simpson (swimming). Future Mr. America Steve Klisanin from Pittsburgh won the Mr. Health physique contest, followed by Nolly Simpson, Ray Tipton, Ronnie Ledas, and Jack Reardon. It had been a beautiful sunny weekend, and everyone seemed equally sunny about the festivities and grateful to Colonna for his hospitality.³⁰ Only later did the organizers realize that four bars, including the one Anderson squatted with and three exercise bars had been bent in the process, but Colonna candidly observed, “I’ll tell you right now, this was a small price to pay just for the privilege of having met

this man.”³¹ What Jim Murray remembers most about Anderson was the shaky and slanted platform on which he had to perform, requiring him to readjust his balance to keep from falling over with his push-jerk.³² So impressed was the York contingent that Anderson was invited to Bob’s birthday show in November where he totaled 1,065 pounds and officially launched his Olympic lifting career. Also on the program were Buck Harris, Apollo AC’s heavyweight champion, performing a burlesque lifting and posing routine, as well as Earlene Colonna and Bill’s future wife, Betty Jean Woodhouse, in an act billed as the Southern Barbelles.³³ Henceforth *Strength & Health* would frequently feature news, notes, articles, and pictures of Colonna, his friends, and his picnic.

The success of Colonna’s first picnic set a high standard for subsequent gatherings, but enthusiasm was running high among Norfolk’s lifters and bodybuilders. In April 1954 Colonna’s Gym took the team trophy over ten other clubs at the All South Championships in High Point, North Carolina, and Greenfield, as Virginia AAU Chairman, brought increased attention to the area by his successful staging of the 1954 version of the Junior Nationals (Eastern section) at the Norfolk City Arena in May.³⁴ Although there would still be no entry fees and a completely open competition at the picnic two months later, Bill found he could no longer provide free food for 600 physical culture enthusiasts, some with hefty appetites.³⁵ Instead, Hoffman agreed to donate a large quantity of Hi-Proteen powder, and Colonna arranged for a nearby dairy to manufacture some hard ice cream with it in five gallon vats to serve in dishes or as shakes. “Everyone seemed to like it,” Bill recalls, “and Hoffman was very pleased.” He also introduced Bob as the man with the biggest chest in the nation, at which point Hoffman (aged 56) took off his shirt and stuck out his chest as if to show that this was no idle compliment.³⁶ Other iron game celebrities included Jim Park and Harry Johnson, 1954 Jr. Mr. America from Atlanta, both of whom gave posing exhibitions, and national lightweight champion Yaz Kuzuhara, another one of Bob’s boys. Frank “Yan” Stevens, arguably the finest weightlifter Virginia ever produced, won the best lifter award with a 715 pound total, via a 200 press, 225 snatch, and 290 clean and jerk, as a lightweight. Ronnie Ledas bench pressed 380 and curled 175 at a bodyweight of 170, and Buck Harris, weighing 217, won the squat contest with 465 pounds—a far cry from Anderson’s 762 the previous

year but quite respectable considering the innocence of the era—when body suits, wraps, and steroids were unheard of. The Mr. Health contest was won by Gene Bohaty of Chicago, who had won several major titles and, most notably, was runner-up in the 1954 Mr. America Contest. Other placements went to Don Hollingsworth, Jack King, Ray Tipton, and Dan Godfrey. Bohaty and King shared all the subdivisions. Rounding out the festivities were lots of acrobatic displays and water skiing, and an amazing handstand by Marvin Byrum atop two tables and four chairs.³⁷

The 1955 picnic, held on July 31, was climactic, attracting a crowd of 1,000, the largest of any Colonna event. Some favorable local publicity ensued earlier from Betty Woodhouse winning the Miss Norfolk Contest and crediting her victory to the weight training she did at Colonna’s Gym.³⁸ Hoffman again supplied free Hi-Proteen drinks, and Jim Murray was present with his family. Anderson too was back, and while he did not do any squatting, he posted a 1,095 pound total (via 390, 305, and 400) in the weightlifting competition, using it as a training meet for the world championships in Munich in the fall. Virtually without competition, Paul beat his next nearest opponent by 315 pounds. Still, the diminutive Chuck Vinci (the 1956 and 1960 Olympic champion) won the best lifter award with a 220 pound press and snatch and a 270 pound clean and jerk at 128 bodyweight. He also performed a strict curl with 155 pounds. Other notables included former national bantamweight champion Jack Hughes from Akron; North Carolina star Joe Grantham, who made a 730 total as a middleweight; and Jim Park (with Mr. World and Mr. Universe now added to his list of titles), who not only posed but won the middle-heavyweight class with a creditable 785 pound total. The caliber of the lifting was the highest of any Colonna picnic. Local favorite Jack King won the Mr. Health title, taking best arms, best chest, and most muscular man subdivisions in the process. Added extras included an appearance by Mooney Williamson, the human kite, propelled from the back of a motor boat, and a one leg broad jump competition won by heavyweight Gerald Tiderman. Although the whole affair cost him a total of \$670, it was probably the most satisfying picnic yet for Colonna, especially since the November 1955 issue of *Strength & Health* not only included extensive coverage of it but featured full length pictures of Colonna and Ray Tipton, the latter for winning the photo of the month contest over such nota-

bles as Roger Servin of Pennsylvania and future Mr. America Ronald Lacy.³⁹

That no picnic was held during the next two years, particularly in light of the socialization and goodwill engendered by Colonna, seems disconcerting in retrospect. It owes chiefly to a scheme contrived by Buck Cowling, who sought to exploit the increased attention being drawn to the Norfolk area as a hotbed of physical culture by staging a Mr. Universe Contest. Bob Crist recalls that Cowling was originally from West Virginia and was probably a college graduate, about 5' 6" and 160 pounds. He was a "wheeler-dealer type of promoter" who "could hustle tickets and get things done." Cowling also had "quite a temper, and if he didn't like you, he would tell you in a minute. In his life saving classes he would sit on the bottom of the pool and you would have to dive down and retrieve him." In athletics, Cowling was best known as an accomplished diver and acrobat. Although his experience in bodybuilding was limited, he had done some research and discovered that the Mr. Universe title, staged annually in London since 1948, was unprotected legally, and "he thought he could commercialize on it." To this end, he secured the cooperation and support of the Junior Chamber of Commerce of Virginia Beach, then only a small town of about 7,000 population. Crist believes Cowling chose Virginia Beach in part because it had a big outdoor stage that was erected in 1952 for a Sand Festival where such entertainers as Patti Page and Jimmy Dorsey (a Petersburg native) performed over several days to raise money to restore the beach after a nor'easter had passed through. It also included a posing display by John Grimek, who was mobbed by the audience as he tried to go on stage. In 1956 the city was celebrating its golden jubilee, and the Mr. Universe Contest would be one of many festive events from April to October. Another factor influencing the choice of venue was Cowling's enlistment of George Greenfield, whose cooperation was necessary to secure an AAU sanction. According to Crist, Greenfield had a special affinity for Virginia Beach where he had a girlfriend, led a double life, and spent most of his weekends.⁴⁰ With two dynamic promoters at the helm, civic financial support, and a seaside setting, physical culture frolics in the Norfolk area seemed destined to reach a new level of recognition.

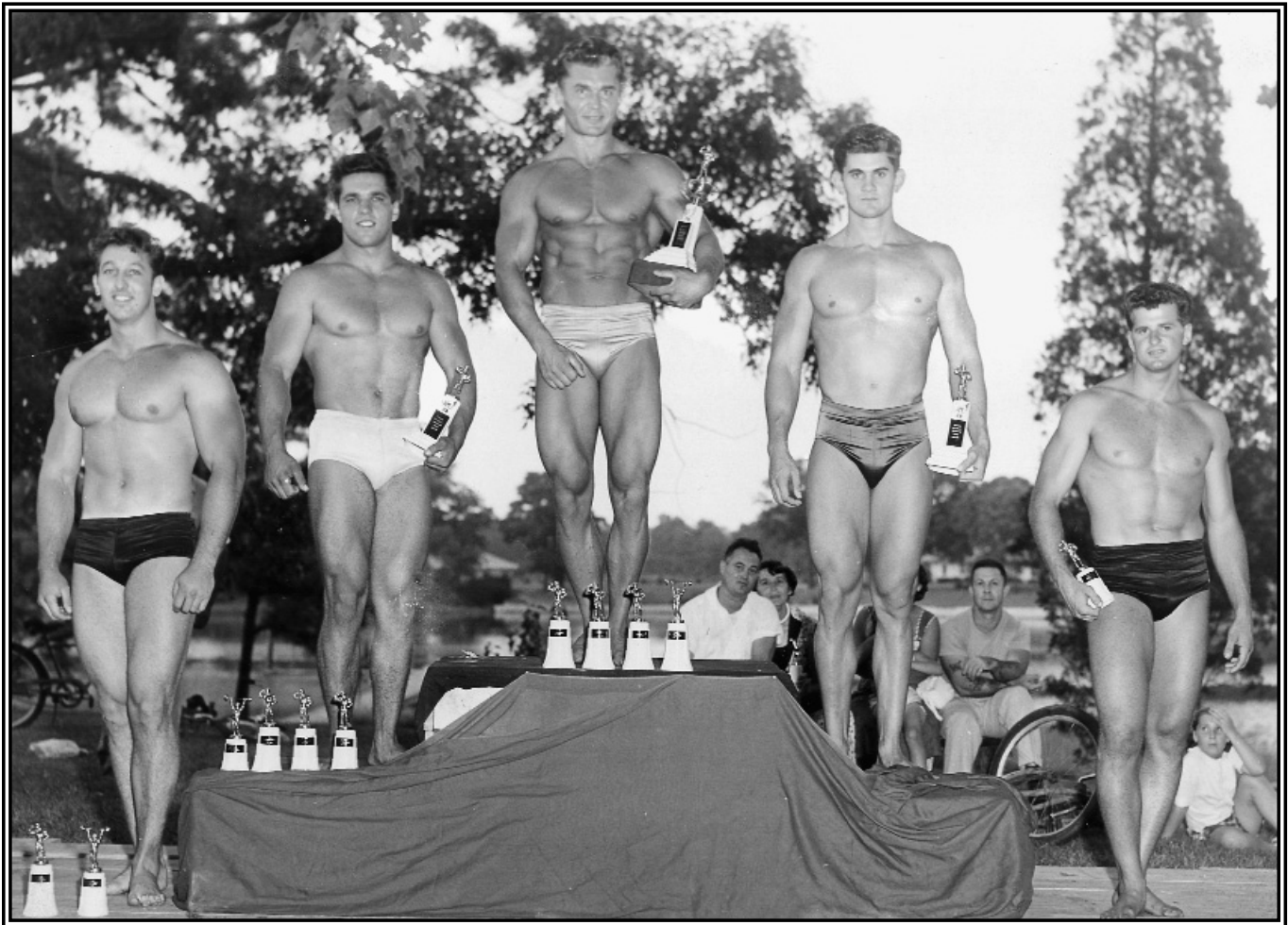
Clearly any attempt by Colonna to hold his annual picnic in 1956 would be upstaged by the planned extravaganza and appear anti-climactic. "This was

Buck's thing," Colonna recalls.⁴¹ So he judiciously stepped aside and offered his cooperation in the best interest of the sport. Although dubbed a "promotional stunt" by Peary Rader in his *Iron Man* report, even he wrote that it turned out to be a grand affair.

No one can deny that the Jr. Chamber did a marvelous job of publicity and preparation for one of the finest physique and variety shows we have ever seen. Thousands of dollars were spent in preparation and presentation. The room and board for competitors and officials was paid for a week at the Beach if they were there that long, and every effort was put forth to be sure that they enjoyed every minute of their stay there. I'm sure they all did, for I heard many comments from them that this was the way a contest should be run.

The three day event (June 8-10) included a Mr. Universe Ball that included a "nice floor show and dancing," a Mr. Universe parade featuring all of the contestants along with 32 units and branches of the armed services, and many acrobatic, balance, contortion, posing, lifting, and clown acts that were interspersed with the physique competition. "The show ran smoothly throughout, without the lags and dead spots so often encountered in physique shows. There was something entertaining taking place all the time," according to Rader. Colonna assumed a subsidiary role, offering his gym and grounds for the contestants to work out, catch crabs, and "sun bathe to their hearts content" during the preceding week. "It is the nicest place we have seen for a barbell man in a long time." Rader also took advantage of the natural setting to secure photos of some of the leading contenders for future use in his journal.⁴²

The two evenings of actual competition attracted some of the leading national lights, including the likes of Bohaty and Johnson, and newcomer Bob Hinds of Norwalk, Connecticut. But attention was focused mainly on 1955 Mr. America Steve Klisanin, a long-time favorite of Hoffman who was originally from McKeesport, Pennsylvania, and Ray Schaefer of Michigan City, Indiana, who had just won the 1956 Mr. America Contest.⁴³ As Vice President of the national AAU weightlifting committee, Hoffman took charge of the officiating. Other judges included Rader, Barton Hor-



The Mr. Health winners at Colonna's 1954 Picnic (left to right): Ray Tipton, Jack King, Gene Bohaty, Don Hollingsworth and Dan Godfrey. Bohaty was the runner-up in the 1954 Mr. America contest.

vath, Doug Biller, Dr. Howard James, Greenfield, and Colonna. At the outset, according to Rader, there was some confusion over height classifications and neither he nor Hoffman seemed to know "what we were judging. As a consequence, we just went ahead and judged for a straight Mr. Universe. . . . No one seemed to care a great deal, though, for they expected the second night's judging to be final. During the first evening Schaefer placed first with 70.5 points, followed by Hinds (68), Bohaty (68), and Klisanin (66.5).

By the second night of judging Hoffman, not liking this preliminary ranking, decided to replace Horvath (an editor for rival Weider publications) and Dr. James with Paul Anderson and Ottley Coulter, who might be more pliable, and also ruled that there would be no height divisions. Rader reported that both decisions were opposed by the contest organizers and "created a terrific disturbance back stage among both the officials

and the contestants. Many hard words were exchanged and considerable strain was placed on all relations from here on out." Colonna recalls that Cowling got up on the bleachers and scolded Hoffman for what he had done. "You big son of a bitch, you rigged my contest, and I'm going to fix your ass." Nevertheless Hoffman had his way and Klisanin became the winner with 69.5 points, while Schaefer took second with 68, and Bohaty and Johnson tied for third with 65 each.⁴⁴ Perhaps to gloss over what appeared to be a flagrant attempt to manipulate the results, Hoffman agreed to pay Schaefer's way to the far more prestigious NABBA Mr. Universe Contest in London the following weekend, reasoning that it would be pointless to send Klisanin since he was already a Mr. Universe. There Schaefer won the amateur title over a distinguished field that included such international stars as John Lees of England and Paul Winter of Antigua.

Poetic justice, however, was insufficient to appease the Weider organization, which seized on the contretemps at Virginia Beach as an opportunity to launch an assault on Hoffman and the AAU. A blast from Hoffman's old *bete noir* Dan Parker of the New York *Daily Mirror* was followed by a full expose by Barton Horvath in the October 1956 issue of Weider's *Muscle Builder*. "For far too long," claimed Horvath, Hoffman had bellowed his way into the limelight of AAU bodybuilding contests, usurping powers never officially delegated to him in a series of ludicrous attempts to establish himself as the czar of the muscle world." He pointed out that Buck Cowling refused to accept the decision of the judges and was instituting legal proceedings against Hoffman as "a liar" and "a fraud" and "an incompetent official." As further proof that Hoffman had "rigged" and "manipulated" the outcome, Horvath provided pictures comparing the physiques of Klisanin and Schaefer with other contestants and copies of actual score sheets (made available by contest promoters) showing how closely those of Coulter and Hoffman (seated side by side) coincided and how Doug Biller was allegedly pressured to rate Schaefer lower and Klisanin higher on the second night. Most damning, however, were Bob's remarks to the local *Virginian-Pilot*, that he had removed Horvath, a physical culturist for 25 years, "because I don't consider him a qualified AAU official...I only put Horvath in there the first night to try to educate him around the right line." Hoffman also expressed disdain for bodybuilding. "I'm interested in getting rid of these physique contests anyway. They are sissified things."⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, Hoffman's seemingly outrageous actions and remarks triggered a firestorm of controversy within the bodybuilding world. Soon Schaefer's pictures, articles, and testimonials were appearing regularly in Weider magazines. "During my entire training career I have used Weider methods entirely," he is quoted as saying. "My victories in the 'Mr. Junior America'—'Mr. Universe' and 'America's Most Muscular Man' contests prove how effective they are." Letters from readers of Weider magazines indicate that Schaefer's treatment at Virginia Beach was becoming a *cause celebre* and that many bodybuilders heretofore supportive of York and the AAU were being swayed by the evidence provided in Horvath's expose. "Each day," observed Joe Weider, "we receive letters, telephone calls and bits of information from many sources which point

to a Hoffman dynasty and a dictatorial rule."⁴⁶ Weider kept the pot boiling over the next year by publishing more score cards and sending letters (via Horvath) to National Weightlifting Chairman Clarence Johnson and National AAU President Carl Hansen requesting a full investigation of Hoffman's conduct. The fiasco at Virginia Beach proved to be an important step that influenced Joe and his brother Ben in 1958 to break their 1951 accord with the AAU, to revive the IFBB as a sanctioning body, and to renew their ultimately successful thrust for hegemony in the bodybuilding world.⁴⁷

In the more parochial setting of eastern Virginia, Hoffman's actions were no less damaging. Greenfield, according to Crist, "lost a lot of respect for Hoffman and stopped going to the York picnics." Characteristically, Colonna's response to Bob's untimely interventions was less overt, but like many others in the iron game community he was stunned and gained the impression that Hoffman often predetermined the winners of physique contests, especially Mr. America. "Why Bob did it I'll never know. He didn't have to do it, but it did permanent damage to his reputation," he concludes. Bill admitted to Crist that he began to lose interest in staging any more picnics because of Hoffman's behavior. He also came to the realization that they were becoming a lot of work. "I guess I got other things on my mind," he recalls, including the shipyard, bodybuilding, waterskiing, and the complicated extra-marital relationship he was cultivating with Betty Woodhouse, now married to his teammate and close friend Herman McCloud. "My father and uncle started asking, 'when are you going to get serious at the shipyard.'"⁴⁸ A no less serious setback to future physical culture frolics in the Old Dominion was the attitude at York where the Mr. Universe Contest was stigmatized by Editor Harry Paschall as a "garbled deal" and Cowling as a "goofy press agent." It was obvious that Hoffman and the York gang would no longer be available to promote any future Colonna strengthfests.⁴⁹ Thus there was no picnic for a second year. Still, teams from Colonna's Gym, as a sort of afterglow, continued to place well at various regional competitions, and Colonna won the Mr. Virginia title for 1957.⁵⁰

Then, at the urgings of his friends, Bill decided to initiate an outdoor event called Athletic Days in 1958. "They were not as big a deal as the picnics," Crist recalls. "The picnics were built more around the York model, but these other contests were structured around lifting and a bodybuilding contest." No record remains

of the lifting at the 1958 version, but Colon McMath won a most-improved weightlifter award for increasing his total from 650 pounds (195-200-255) to 760 (220-240-300) over the previous five months at a bodyweight of 193. Cable Reese of Lynchburg won the Mr. Health title and Betty Woodhouse McCloud won the Miss Health contest. However lackluster this gathering may have been compared to Bill's previous offerings, it was well-received and helped keep the iron game alive in the Norfolk area.⁵¹ In 1959 and 1960 the contests associated with Athletic Days were likewise little more than local competitions. At the former, Richie Augelli of Norfolk and Sarah Farrow of Portsmouth won the Mr. and Miss Health titles respectively, and 16-year-old John Callis won the most-improved weightlifter award by raising his total by 55

pounds to 565 (170-175-220) at a bodyweight of 196.5. In 1960 Tommy Johnson of Greensboro, North Carolina, won the Mr. Heath title and Allen Phenister of Portsmouth won the Jr. Mr. Norfolk contest. Although it was "a beautiful day," according to Colonna, "not many people" showed up, "just the ones interested in the lifting and physique."⁵² In 1961 some attempt was made to upgrade the annual event by expanding the number of competitions, holding it for two days, and moving it to Labor Day weekend. Dave Updike of Roanoke became Mr. Health, Faye King (Jack's wife) became Miss Health, and Richard Wolters of Norfolk won the Jr. Mr. Norfolk title. This gathering, reminiscent of previous picnics, also featured a burlap bag race, won by Glen Crockett of Newport News, but attendance remained small (about 250 for both days), and food, drink, and Hi-Proteen shakes were no longer available.⁵³

Although Colonna discontinued his strengthfests after 1961, his socialization initiatives long lingered in



John Grimek visited Nags Head, North Carolina with Bill Colonna and Betty Townsend Woodhouse while the Grimeks were on vacation in 1958. Good days.

their impact on events in eastern Virginia and the nation. Critical to these later developments was a mending of fences between the York gang and the Norfolk lifters. Although Greenfield might not have attended any subsequent Strength and Health picnics, he showed up at Hoffman's annual birthday show in the fall of 1957 where he narrated the performance of Buck Harris who "kept the audience howling with his antics on the posing platform as "The Great Sputnik." Some months later Greenfield was pictured in *Strength & Health* at Colonna's first Athletic Days entertaining guests on a rolly polly with his kids, Linda and George Jr., on his shoulders. In the February 1958 issue Colonna was featured with fellow water-skier Wilma Mahaffey, Miss Salisbury, North Carolina, and "a real 'Barbelle.'" The March 1959 issue featured a cheesecake-type photo of Betty Woodhouse McCloud adjacent to coverage of her appearance on the popular "I've Got A Secret" television show in New York City with Gary Moore and Keenan Wynn. The

frustration of Moore in trying to raise a 205-pound barbell that had been easily lifted by the fit and shapely trainee from Colonna's gym presented a striking image to TV viewers and a boost for women's lifting.⁵⁴

What most contributed to improved relations with York, however, was a visit to Norfolk by John Grimek on a vacation with his family in the summer of 1958. "The GRIMEKS," reported *Strength & Health*, "all seven of 'em, took the night boat to Norfolk and are tearing up the sands at Virginia Beach as this is being hacked out in sweltering York. No doubt JOHN is enjoying visits with BILL COLONNA, GEORGE GREENFIELD, BUCKY HARRIS, JACK KING and all the rest of the gang down that way. Wonder if JCG got around to trying them there water skis this time?" According to the next month's report the Grimeks, in addition to frolicking in the surf and sand at Virginia Beach, went on a fishing expedition with the Colonnas to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, which included a short "safari" to Kitty Hawk, the site of the first airplane flight. There, in front of the monument honoring the Wright brothers, Reggie Grimek took a picture that included John and Angela, their other children (Pat, Stevie, Bobby, and Bonnie), Bill Colonna, Bill's wife Earlene, Bill's future wife Betty McCloud, and Betty's soon-to-be ex-husband Herman McCloud—all as one big happy family!⁵⁵

Such amicable relations helped pave the way for an even greater outpouring of energy from across the bay in the 1960s. As Colonna's active participation as a bodybuilder and involvement as a promoter diminished, Bob Crist of Hampton, an early member of the Apollo AC who had worked closely with Colonna in staging his picnics, began to organize his Lower Peninsula Weightlifting Club, which soon became a regional power.⁵⁶ By 1968 it had won more team titles than any other Virginia club and produced two teen-age national champions. In 1962 Crist organized the first annual Chesapeake Bay Invitational Meet which quickly became one of the finest contests on the East Coast, reaching the stature perhaps of the Philadelphia Open, the Cincinnati Open, or the YMCA Nationals. The 1968 version, according to *Strength & Health*, attained a new level of excellence.

Bob does the best job of any promoter in the nation on publicizing a contest, TV, radio, and newspaper—the works. He

arranged a special rate with an extra-fine motel and the out-of-town athletes and officials had the opportunity to stay in one compound. Bob invited Morris Weissbrot, Rudy Sablo, Adam Swirz, and Al Conde down from New York to add their status to the contest. Morris and Rudy conducted a well-received clinic prior to the contest. The wives and girl friends of the lifters from the Lower Peninsula Weightlifting Club provided the finishing touch to a very nice meet as they served a buffet dinner for all the lifters (free, fellows!). Mrs. Yolanda Crist and her committee really outdid themselves this year. A terrific job by all concerned. The physical lay-out at Benjamin Syms Junior High School in Hampton was in perfect order.

The 1969 meet was perhaps even better, featuring the likes of Fernando Baez, Mike Karchut, Phil Grippaldi, and Bill March as lifters; Bill St. John as Mr. Chesapeake Bay; Mr. America Jim Haislop as guest poser; and Bob Hoffman who by his presence bestowed his blessing on the proceedings.⁵⁷ It was obvious that much of what proved so successful for Crist in staging his Chesapeake Invitational was an extension of the socialization practices at Colonna's picnics. Furthermore Crist used his prominence as a regional promoter as a base for his elevation in 1971 to the post of chairman of the national weightlifting committee, the most powerful position in the sport at that time. During his five year tenure in office and also as first president of the International Powerlifting Federation and later as director of the North American Sports Federation, he infused a new spirit of professionalism into the administration of amateur athletics.⁵⁸

Strengthfests staged as picnics, however, were hardly a thing of the past. During the 1960s those at York reached a new level of popularity as Hoffman reached the height of his powers as a promoter. In 1965 the annual picnic was linked with the first Senior National Powerlifting Championships and the Mr. United States Physique Contest during Labor Day weekend. According to the *Strength & Health* report, "many hundreds of enthusiasts" descended upon Muscletown to witness "tons of iron" being hoisted and "many impressive lumps" on display. "The 1965 Strength and Health

Picnic will go down in history as one of the greatest ever held. Old timers who have attended all the shows said that it was the biggest crowd they could remember.”⁵⁹ Not unlike its picnics of previous decades, York provided a model for similar physical culture gatherings throughout the nation.⁶⁰

Although these affairs were discontinued after 1972, the new management of York Barbell twenty-six years later, then headed by Paul Stombaugh, decided to bring back its legendary summer picnic, repackaged as The Spirit of York Strength Spectacular. Over the next four years it featured feats of strength, impromptu contests, a powerlifting championship, strongman challenges, arm wrestling contests, an Olympic lifting demonstration, hall of fame inductions, children’s games, and food. The company’s “aim in bringing back this magic event,” as stated in the 1999 program, “is to bring together all generations of the Iron Game. In this way, the rich heritage of the fraternity of fitness and strength can be experienced and shared among a broader segment of the grassroots. At the same time, we want to provide a day of fun and camaraderie.”⁶¹ Such physical culture frolics, however, could no longer be sustained after 2001, especially as York struggled to survive in the marketplace. Yet echoes of York picnics can still be heard in the three Night of Strength exhibitions staged by Roger LaPointe, a former York Barbell employee, from 2003 to 2005 at the Arnold Classic in Columbus, Ohio, and at his Atomic Athletic Great Black Swamp Olde Time Strongman Picnic held in Bowling Green, Ohio, in April 2006 and May 2007.⁶²

That such nostalgic endeavors still engage the attention of promoters may be attributed to the continued need for socialization in sport. The success of Colonna’s picnics during the 1950s, like their predecessors at York, not only presumed a degree of fellowship among athletes involved in similar (iron-related) activities but spurred them on to higher levels of achievement.

They were consciousness-raising experiences, unencumbered by any commercial or political motives, thereby fostering a spirit of brotherhood and mutual assistance. In more specific terms, they were also innovative of several major changes in the iron game that transpired over ensuing decades. More than any previous outing, the 1953 event raised (for both the public and the moguls at York) the credibility of Paul Anderson, whose size and strength would set a new standard in weightlifting. They also provided an entrée and a template for

Bob Crist, whose iron game involvement led to major changes in the organization of weightlifting, bodybuilding, and powerlifting during the 1970s. Most importantly, Colonna’s picnics set the stage for the Mr. Universe Contest in Virginia Beach which, through Hoffman’s authoritarian ways, provided a *casus belli* for a renewal of York’s feud with the Weider organization which reached a new and more intense level in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It also emboldened the Weiders to revive their International Federation of Bodybuilders, which dominated American and world bodybuilding for the rest of the century. Indeed more than frolics were at stake in these picnics. But their greatest impact was perhaps not so palpable. In a broader sense they indicated that weightlifting and bodybuilding are not isolated endeavors to be pursued just for their own sake but, as Hoffman and Colonna recognized, are intimately related to other physical culture activities, such as acrobatics, water-skiing, swimming, running, and the sporting world at large. Above all, the picnics were a social and cultural experience, incorporating elements that are most basic to human existence—food, drink, friendship, families, and fun. More than any other iron game endeavor, they were emblematic of life itself.

Notes:

1. Hoffman’s socialization ideas are also reminiscent of the exhibitions that Alan Calvert originated and Jowett continued into the 1920s at the old Milo Barbell headquarters in Philadelphia. “The A.C.W.L.A. Will Hold Lifting Contests,” *Strength* 9 (November 1924): 19; and John Bradford, “American Continental Weight Lifters’ Association Notes,” *Strength* 10 (January 1925): 10.
2. Bob Hoffman, “Reports of Lifting Shows and Events,” *Strength & Health* 3 (February 1935): 31.
3. See “Reports of Lifting,” *Strength & Health* 4 (January 1936): 29; “Reports of Lifting,” *Strength & Health* 4 (February 1936): 29; and “Lifting News, Shows and Events,” *Strength & Health* 5 (February 1937): 8-9.
4. “Reports of Lifting,” *Strength & Health* 5 (October 1937): 8, 10.
5. Wib Scharzberger, “The June 23rd Strength and Health Picnic at Brookside,” “Reports of Lifting,” *Strength & Health* 8 (August 1940): 6, 24-25.
6. Arthur F. Gay, “Strength & Health Picnic,” *Strength & Health* 13 (September 1945): 20-21.
7. Al Thomas, “Remembered Pleasures of Another World and Time: The Great Strength & Health Picnics,” *Iron Game History* 1 (March 1991): 17.
8. “Lifting News,” *Strength & Health* 5 (January 1937): 9; “Weightlifting News,” *Strength & Health* 7 (August 1939): 5; “Weightlifting News,” *Strength & Health* (November 1939): 4; and “Weightlifting News,” *Strength & Health* 8 (September 1940): 5.
9. “Shows and Lifting Events News,” *Strength & Health* 6 (April 1938): 5; and “Members of Apollo AC—since 1940, Active in Weightlifting and Physique Shows,” Bill Colonna Papers, Chesapeake, Virginia.
10. “Meet at Norfolk, VA.,” *Strength & Health* 10 (January 1942): 11; “Weightlifting News,” *Strength & Health* 10 (February, 1942): 11; and

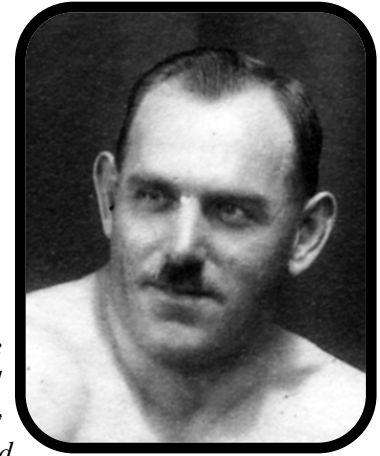
- "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* 10 (March 1942): 10.
11. Interview with Bob Crist by John Fair, August 3, 2005, Hampton, Va; and Gord Venables, "Incredible But True," *Strength & Health* 12 (March 1944): 15.
12. "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* 11 (March 1943): 11; "Weightlifting Reports," *Strength & Health* 12 (May 1944): 6; and "Letters From Our Readers," *Strength & Health* 11 (November 1943): 5.
13. "Weightlifting Announcements," *Strength & Health* 15 (January 1947): 5; and Gord Venables, "Incredible But True," *Strength & Health* 15 (May 1947): 20.
14. Walt Marcyan, "This N' That," *Iron Man* 9 (January 1949): 45; and Jim Murray, "Barbell Bits," *Strength & Health* 20 (April 1952): 14.
15. See "Iron Game News," *Iron Man* 7 (October 1946): 39; and "Readers' Round-Up," *Iron Man* 11 (December 1951): 34.
16. Interview with Bill Colonna by John Fair, August 2, 2005, Chesapeake, Va.
17. Interview with Bill Colonna by Jeffery Wells, July 24, 2006.
18. "Colonna's Gym, Moving to a New Building Ends the Era of the Dungeon," *Tidewater Physique* 1 (March 1982): 32.
19. Interview with Colonna by Fair
20. Interview with Colonna by Fair.
21. Interview with Crist.
22. Interviews with Colonna by Wells and Fair.
23. "Colonna's Picnic," July 25-26, 1953, Colonna Papers.
24. Paul Anderson, *The World's Strongest Man* (Wheaton, Ill.: by the author, 1975), 40.
25. Bill Wilson, "What's Your Best?" *Strength & Health* 22 (November 1954): 17.
26. Interview with Colonna by Fair.
27. Bill Wilson, "What's Your Best?" *Strength & Health* 21 (September 1953): 17.
28. "The Bent Bar," typescript in the Colonna Papers.
29. Interview with Colonna by Wells.
30. *Strength & Health* 21 (November 1953): 43, and "Colonna's Picnic 1953," holograph copy of results, Colonna Papers.
31. "The Bent Bar," Colonna Papers.
32. Interview with Jim Murray by Fair, October 23, 2006, Morrisville, Pa. Murray also recalls that Colonna had a replica of a coiled rattlesnake that he would "slide along the porch floor in the evening and wait for someone to notice the snake. A husky 220-pounder from New England . . . saw it and took off like a scalded cat!" Murray to Fair, November 7, 2006, letter in author's possession.
33. Bob Motter, "Anderson Sets Record Total of 1,065 at York Fall Show," *Strength & Health* 22 (February 1954): 12-13.
34. "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* 22 (October 1954): 60; and "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* 22 (June 1954): 7.
35. "Colonna's Picnic 1954," holograph copy of results, Colonna Papers.
36. Interview with Colonna by Fair.
37. "Colonna's Picnic 1954," holograph copy of results, Colonna Papers.
38. "Weight Lifting News," *Strength & Health* 23 (October 1955): 6. According to Colonna, Betty "had every opportunity to go into show business," particularly since the Miss Norfolk Contest was a feeder event for the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City which required talent. Her local voice teacher thought she had potential to be a Broadway star and even contacted her close friend in New York City, Oscar Hammerstein, who wanted to audition her. But Betty did not follow up, preferring to remain a secretary in the Navy yard. Interview with Colonna by Fair.
39. "Colonna's Picnic 1955," holograph copy of results, Colonna Papers; and "Weight Lifting News," *Strength & Health* 23 (November 1955): 6-7, 31-33.
40. Interview with Crist, August 3, 2005; and "Official Sanction of the Virginia Association, Amateur Athletic Union of the United States, June 7, 1956," Hoffman Papers, document in possession of Fair.
41. Interview with Colonna by Fair, October 16, 2006.
42. Peary Rader, "Mr. Universe of U.S.A.," *Iron Man* 16 (September 1956): 22-24; and "Readers' Round-Up," *Iron Man* 16 (September 1956): 42. See also Peary Rader, "Sensational Bob Hinds and How He Trains," *Iron Man* 17 (January 1957): 8-11; and Dr. Richard You, "Applied Nutrition for Lifters and Bodybuilders," *Iron Man* 17 (January 1957): 34.
43. Interestingly Klisanin later denied knowledge of any such favoritism on his behalf by Hoffman. Interview with Klisanin by Fair, March 18, 2005.
44. *Iron Man* 16 (September 1956): 52-53; and Interview with Colonna by Fair, October 16, 2006.
45. Quoted in *Muscle Builder* 6 (October 1956): 22-25, 46.
46. *Muscle Builder* 8 (March 1957): 53; *Muscle Builder* 8 (May 1957): 45. For Hoffman's side of the story see "Steve Klisanin . . . Mr. Universe Winner," *Strength & Health* 24 (October 1956): 28; and Bob Hoffman, "What Kind of Muscle Do You Want?" *Strength & Health* 25 (June 1957): 10.
47. See *Your Physique* 12 (January 1950): 16-17, 39.
48. Interviews with Colonna, August 2, 2005, and October 16, 2006, and Crist, August 3, 2005, by Fair.
49. Harry Paschall, "Behind the Scenes," *Strength & Health* 25 (October 1957): 58.
50. See "Weight Lifting News," *Strength & Health* 24 (November 1956): 6; *Strength & Health* 26 (December 1957): 42; *Strength & Health* (June 1958): 11; *Strength & Health* 28 (December 1959): 12; and *Strength & Health* 30 (September 1962): 60.
51. "Mr. Health 1958," holograph copy of results, Colonna Papers.
52. "Mr. Health 1959" and "Mr. Health 1960," *ibid.*
53. "Mr. Health 1961" *ibid.*
54. "Bob Hoffman's Birthday Show," *Strength & Health* 26 (March 1958): 28; "The Iron Grapevine," *Strength & Health* 27 (April 1959): 26; and *Strength & Health* 26 (February 1958): 24; and *Strength & Health* 27 (March 1959): 27.
55. *Strength & Health* 26 (November 1958): 59-60; and *Strength & Health* 27 (December 1958): 26.
56. *Strength & Health* 32 (March 1964): 14; *Strength & Health* 33 (July 1965): 10; *Strength & Health* 34 (April 1966): 79-80.
57. "Hats Off To Bob Crist," *Strength & Health* 36 (August 1968): 56; "The Iron Grapevine," *Strength & Health* 36 (August 1968): 30; and "The Eighth Annual Chesapeake Bay Invitational Meet," *Strength & Health* 37 (July 1969): 54.
58. "Bob Crist Appointed National Director for the Iron Sports & Body Building Program," *NASF Amateur Recreation* 6 (Winter 1999): 2.
59. "The Iron Grapevine," *Strength & Health* 33 (December 1965): 22-23.
60. "Mr. America Has a Picnic" *Strength & Health* 26 (December 1957): 34-35; "Greensboro S&H Picnic," *Strength & Health* 26 (December 1957): 42; "The Iron Grapevine," *Strength & Health* 34 (February 1966): 73; and *Strength & Health* 35 (January 1967): 72.
61. Program Book, *1999 Spirit of York Strength Spectacular*, June 25-27 (York, Pa.: York Barbell Co., 1999), 3.
62. Roger LaPointe to Fair, August 11, 2006, letter in the author's possession. The tradition was also carried on through outings conducted during the 1960s and 1970s by Joe Mills and his Central Falls Weightlifting Club in Rhode Island and in the competitions staged by David Lussier, past president of the New England Weightlifting Association, in Salem, Massachusetts. Here from about 1997 to 2004 about seventy lifters and guests feasted on steak and lobster at a seaside park. Interview with Denis Reno, October 30, 2006, West Newton, Mass.

WAS HERMANN GOERNER TRULY MIGHTY?

Gherardo Bonini, International Society of Health, Physical Education & Sports

Mark Kodya, Pennsylvania State University

Joe Roark, www.IronHistory.com



The following article was submitted to us as a draft last year, but between that time and this, one of the authors—Mark Kodya—passed away. Mark was a doctoral student in sport history at Penn State University and his loss has dealt a heavy blow to our field. His interest in the history of the iron game was very serious, and had his long-time ill health not taken him at such a young age he would almost certainly have finished his doctorate and gone on to make many scholarly contributions. In April of this year a symposium on the history of sports and exercise was held at Penn State in his memory and I was asked to speak. This invitation was a great honor for me, and I did my best to present a paper of which Mark would have been proud. It is also a great honor for us to publish the article Mark co-wrote with Gherardo Bonini and Joe Roark because it breaks new ground and helps us to better understand the remarkable and, at times, sad life of Hermann Goerner.

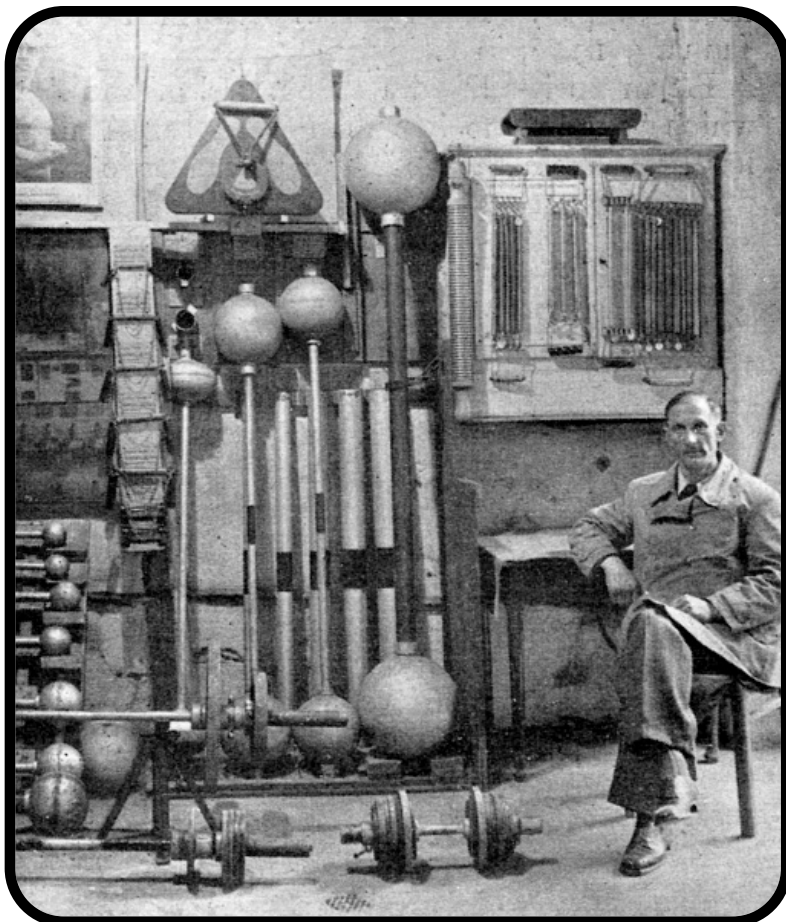
—Jan Todd

In general, when a sport figure reaches the highest international standard, he transcends his or her home country's borders and becomes an international star. Leipzig weightlifter Hermann Goerner (1891-1956) appears to be an anomaly where his own country is concerned. An examination of the three main books in English about weightlifting history, *The Super Athletes* by David Willoughby (1970); *The Iron Game* by David Webster (1976); and *Anvils, Horseshoes and Cannons* (1978) by Leo Gaudreau—plus current internet resources—clearly demonstrates that English-speaking fans and experts have viewed Goerner as a true phenomenon.¹ Conversely, according to the available German literature, Goerner played a far smaller role in the sport.² Even Leipzig, his home town, seems uninterested in keeping his memory intact.³ Although two German cyber-sites devoted to strength sports do mention Goerner, they lack the unbridled enthusiasm of their English counterparts.⁴ How was/is it possible for them—and others—to have neglected him to such a degree? Each of the English-language reference books credits Goerner with a stellar career comparable in magnitude to that of such mainstream German athletes as Erich Rademacher (swimming), Max Schmeling (boxing), or Rudolf Harbig (athletics) and, more recently, Boris Becker and Steffi Graf (tennis) and Michael Schu-

macher (auto racing). However, these German sport stars are recognized in Germany to a much greater extent than is Goerner, even when one considers that weightlifting is a relatively minor sport. Initially, one might think that Goerner's historical greatness has been buried by his homeland as a result of his membership in the Socialist-oriented Workers' organization (he was a member from 1909 to 1913 and again from 1919 to 1920) or because he turned professional in 1921. While both his some-time Socialism and professionalism may have been factors, there is more to the tale.

Goerner was born in Haenichen near Leipzig on 13 April 1891. In 1909 he joined the Socialist Worker club "Atlas" and then served in World War I where he lost an eye when he was hit by more than 200 pieces of metal shrapnel. Surgery removed most of the shrapnel from his body, but not all. During World War II, Goerner was interred in a concentration camp because of his membership in the Workers' organization. Subsequently, he was welcomed as a refugee in Klein Heidorn, now part of Wunstorf, Lower Saxony, where he died on 29 June 1956. His tombstone is engraved with the words, "*Der Stärkste Mann der Welt* (The Strongest Man in the World)."⁵

Apparently, this claim either escaped the attention of—or was not accepted by—his countrymen. As



Before World War II, Edgar Mueller lived in Leipzig, where he had a fur-trading business and also ran what John Dawe describes as “one of the best known and most fully-equipped gymnasiums in Germany,” a portion of which is pictured here. His home and fur-trading company were destroyed during the air raids of World War II, along with most of his collection of weight lifting books, magazines and other memorabilia. After the War, Mueller stayed in Leipzig, trying to keep his gym alive until 1947, when he moved to Braunschweig, West Germany to escape living under a repressive system.

previously indicated, Goerner is ranked considerably lower according to a review of German journals, reference books, encyclopedias, and current websites than he is in similar English-language references. His record in national and international contests, however, is not in dispute. He was runner-up in the 1911 European Championships in Leipzig; he was third in the 1913 National Championships in Kassel; he placed fourth in the 1913 World Championships in Breslau, and he was runner-up in the 1919 National Championships in Munich.⁶ But whereas English-language literature credits him with several world records and astounding feats, the German sources reflect only a world record in the Two Hands

Snatch with 120 kilos [264 pounds] and a not-unanimously-credited world record in the Two Hands Clean and Jerk with 157 kilos [345 pounds], both made in 1920.⁷ What could account for this discrepancy between the English and German historical memories of Hermann Goerner?

The Inquiry

As indicated above, David Willoughby, David Webster, and Leo Gaudreau each wrote an authoritative reference work providing a comprehensive historical account of the strength sports. However, they based their information about Goerner primarily on his official biography, *Goerner the Mighty* (1951), written by his close friend, the respected and authoritative trainer, Edgar Mueller (1898-1979).⁸ Although this biographical work has never been translated into German, Mueller did introduce Goerner’s athletic career in four articles in the German magazine *Athletik*, the oldest journal devoted to strength sports, having been founded in 1892. The articles appeared in 1951, the same year as the book.⁹ Perhaps the publication of a concise historical book about the strength sports by the long-time German official Ernst August Kampmann in 1950 moved Mueller to publish his strong response in *Athletik*.¹⁰ Kampmann claimed that another Leipzig native, Arthur Hennig (1878-1921), more commonly known by his stage name, Arthur Saxon, was “the strongest man of all times.”¹¹ In his *Athletik* articles, Mueller paid tribute to Saxon, but pointed out that Goerner equalled or exceeded Saxon’s best lifts and therefore deserved a reputation as the stronger man.¹²

However, even though Goerner (or Mueller on Goerner’s behalf) had claimed all—or almost all (see below)—of the most important records mentioned in *Goerner The Mighty* from the time of an introductory article that appeared in *Health and Strength* in 1926, the German literature ignored these claims.¹³ The claims were kept alive in the English-speaking countries, however, by *Health and Strength* and related English-language journals such as *Iron Man*, *Muscle Power*, and *Strength & Health* until Mueller provided a definitive account of Goerner’s career in *Iron Man* magazine

(1949) and then, two years later, in *Goerner the Mighty*.¹⁴ Approximately two years ago, two of this article's authors, Joe Roark and Mark Kodya, stimulated a debate over the reliability of Goerner's reputed performances in the e-Forum, *Iron History*.¹⁵

Goerner in *Goerner the Mighty*

Goerner The Mighty does not leave its readers room for alternative opinions: if the book is true, then Goerner was arguably the greatest strongman of the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶ But the book, in its introduction, asked its readers implicitly to accept it as truth although it is an unreferenced work. [Ed. Note: In the book's forward, written by Irving Clark, a British Amateur Weightlifter's Association (BAWLA) referee, Clark argues that the phrase, "If Edgar says it is so, it is so," should be applied to Mueller, whose book was based on a small, post-war index of records; many conversations with Goerner; and Mueller's "amazing memory."] Mueller apparently lost his archives in a fire in 1943 and had reconstructed most of the facts about Goerner using what John Dawe, editor of *Health and Strength*, called Mueller's extraordinary memory.¹⁷ However, Dawe claimed in later years to have helped Mueller and to have even written portions of *Goerner the Mighty*.¹⁸ In a foreword to the book, Irving Clark stated that Mueller showed him, several times, newspaper and magazine clippings in support of Goerner's lifts.¹⁹ In *Goerner the Mighty*, however, only a few facts (such as the ones in the last chapter of *Goerner the Mighty*) are corroborated through excerpts from other sources, some of which can no longer be found in European libraries and archives, making verification impossible.²⁰

Let us now analyze Goerner's best performances, as chronicled in *Goerner the Mighty*: 177 kilograms [391 pounds] in the Two Hands Clean and Jerk, on 11 July 1920 in Dresden, under the eyes of the famous professor Ferdinand Hüppe (1852-1938), a weight which was not officially exceeded until after World War II; 360 kilograms [793 pounds] in the Two Hands Deadlift, in Leipzig on 29 October 1920; and 330 kilograms [727 pounds] in the One Hand Deadlift on 8 October 1920.²¹

Also, according to *Goerner the Mighty*—and Willoughby, Webster, and Gaudreau—Goerner snatched 125 kilograms [275 pounds] and jerked 160 kilograms [352 pounds] in a victory against Karl Mörke in a one-on-one duel on 4 April 1920 at the Restaurant Hall of Leipzig's Zoological Garden.²² In that case, the world

amateur record in the Two Hands Snatch would have been 125 kilograms [275 pounds], not the 120 [264 pounds] Goerner is credited with in the German sources.

Karl Mörke (1889-1945) was a fierce opponent who used the continental style in shouldering a barbell or a dumbbell for the press or the jerk. The continental style, so called by Britons in reference to the German and Austrian lifters of the early twentieth century, consisted in taking the bar from the floor and bringing it up to the shoulders after having rested it one or more times on the body. This movement was rooted in gymnastic exercises and was generally executed with two classic stops, at the waist and at the shoulders, but some lifters, especially the Austrians, employed multiple rests, so that they were virtually rolling the bar up the body. The "clean" style, done in one movement from the floor up to the chest, is now the accepted international standard; it was initially advocated primarily by the French and Italians.²³ When France re-organized the international governing body for weightlifting in 1920 they imposed this "clean" style as the only one permissible internationally.

Before World War I, German and Austrian lifters stuck to the continental style, but the confrontation with France led some champions of the new generation, among them Goerner, to adopt the "clean" style. The continental style consistently allowed higher poundages, of course, especially in the jerk. For example, the world record before 1914 belonged to the Austrian lifter Karl Swoboda (1882-1933), who lifted 185.5 kilograms [408 pounds] in this manner.²⁴ In comparison, the German Hermann Gässler (1889-1970) held the world record in the jerk with 157.5 kilograms [347 pounds], although the French and (after 1922) the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) recognized only his 151 kilogram [332 pounds] performance done in France on 28 February 1912 because only the latter lift was taken to the shoulders in one movement.²⁵ In sharp contrast to the well-documented information Mueller imparts as to the records of Goerner's opponents and contemporaries, the data regarding Gässler's records are lacking. As we will see later, the records of the two lifters, Gässler and Goerner, often inter-relate.

As a professional, Goerner toured South Africa five times from 1922 to 1937. On 4 September 1926, in Kalk Bay near Cape Town, Goerner supposedly lifted 135 kilograms [297 pounds] in the Two Hands Snatch.²⁶ This was some ten years before the same official record, among amateurs, was made by the Briton Ron Walker

(1907-1948). Another relevant Goerner/Mueller claim is the 120 kilograms [264 pounds] One Hand Clean and Jerk Goerner supposedly performed in Leipzig on 9 November 1919.²⁷ The IWF ceased to recognize official records for this lift in 1950, at which time the world record was 117.5 kilograms [259 pounds], so Goerner would have remained unapproached in more than 30 years had the IWF recognized his 264 pound lift. *Goerner the Mighty* also contains numerous other accounts of claims of other astounding performances concerning “odd lifts” mainly performed in the period 1931-1934 while he was mostly in Leipzig.²⁸ For example, Goerner was accustomed to lifting the bar with unusual grips and at unusual points of the bar.

The Reliability of *Goerner the Mighty*

In the IronHistory e-Forum, Mark Kodya, one of the authors of this article, advanced doubts concerning some of Goerner’s performances, the reliability of some photographs, the absence of contemporary reports about Goerner’s duel against Möerke and, finally, the difficulties inherent in Mueller’s statement that, due to the loss by fire of his archive in 1943, he had to reconstruct Goerner’s whole career based on his memory. [Ed. Note: *The IronHistory e-forum was begun by Joe Roark in 2003, and it is dedicated to the study of the history of the “iron sports.” Anyone who shares this interest should investigate the forum as it’s a way to interact with people of like mind and to contribute to the sharing of new information such as that found in this article.*] Kodya referred also to the doubts expressed in 1952 by Kurt Hennig (1881-1952), alias Kurt Saxon, brother of Arthur and a member of the Saxon Trio, who recalled in the pages of *Health and Strength* that Goerner was unable to match several of Arthur Saxon’s feats when the two men (Goerner and Saxon) had trained together in earlier years.²⁹ It is especially interesting to reflect on Gaudreau’s account of Goerner. Among the three mentioned authoritative sources—Willoughby, Webster, and Gaudreau—Gaudreau’s work expressed the most doubt about Goerner. Even so, Gaudreau characterized Kurt Saxon’s negative opinions regarding Goerner as suspicious. According to Gaudreau, these opinions did not match the usual credulous manner of Kurt, who—Gaudreau thought—was perhaps simply defending the memory of his brother Arthur, the strongest and most famous member of the trio, who in 1952 was still considered a candidate for the title of “strongest man of all times.”³⁰

This inquiry has primarily sought to identify and verify data regarding all lifts claimed for Goerner during the periods 1911-1914 and 1919-1920, which encompasses Goerner’s entire amateur career. At the outset, the study checked possible differences between *Goerner the Mighty* and the two other biographical treatments Mueller wrote—the one from *Iron Man* in 1949 and the four articles in *Athletik* in 1951, in which Mueller, in his native language, presented Goerner to German readers. Three curious and controversial points emerged.

First, the record clean and jerk of 177 kilograms [391 pounds], which is described in *Goerner the Mighty* without mention of the status of Goerner’s amateur standing, was labelled by Mueller in *Athletik* as a “professional” lift. Mueller’s article in *Athletik* verifies that it was a “professional” feat, as he states that Goerner earned a remarkable sum for that lift—a lift that as of 1951 was still a German professional record and still in excess of the amateur world record.³¹

Secondly, *Goerner the Mighty* described another sensational performance in Leipzig on 18 August 1933 in which Goerner deadlifted a bar with a seat on either end (in which two men sat) for the incredible total weight of 376.5 kilograms (830 pounds). In *Iron Man* Mueller disclosed the identity of the sources of the live weight—none other than Edgar Mueller himself and Erich Hennig.³² In his *Athletik* article Mueller repeated the information, but provided only the surname Hennig.³³ Besides Arthur and the aforementioned Kurt, Hermann Hennig (1884-1958) was the third member of the Saxon Trio. Probably, Erich Hennig was simply a homonymous sportsman, but the imprecision remains disquieting: was “Erich” actually one of the celebrated Hennigs? Was he a relation? In any case, why did *Goerner the Mighty* not provide more details? Should Dawe have intervened here to avoid any questions?

Third, in *Athletik* Mueller explained that Goerner’s club “Atlas” belonged to the *Arbeiter Athletenbund Deutschlands* (Worker’s Athletic Union of Germany) from 6 April 1919 to 31 March 1920, which was not recognized by the *Deutsche Athletik Verband* (German Athletic Federation, similar to the American AAU).³⁴ Because of this, in order for Goerner to take part in the German Championships on 19-20 August 1919 in Munich, he was obliged to compete for the *Arbeiter Turnverein Leipzig von 1845* (Leipzig Workers’ Gymnastic team).³⁵ Moreover, Mueller affirmed that the *Deutsche Athletik Verband* did not recognize Goerner’s

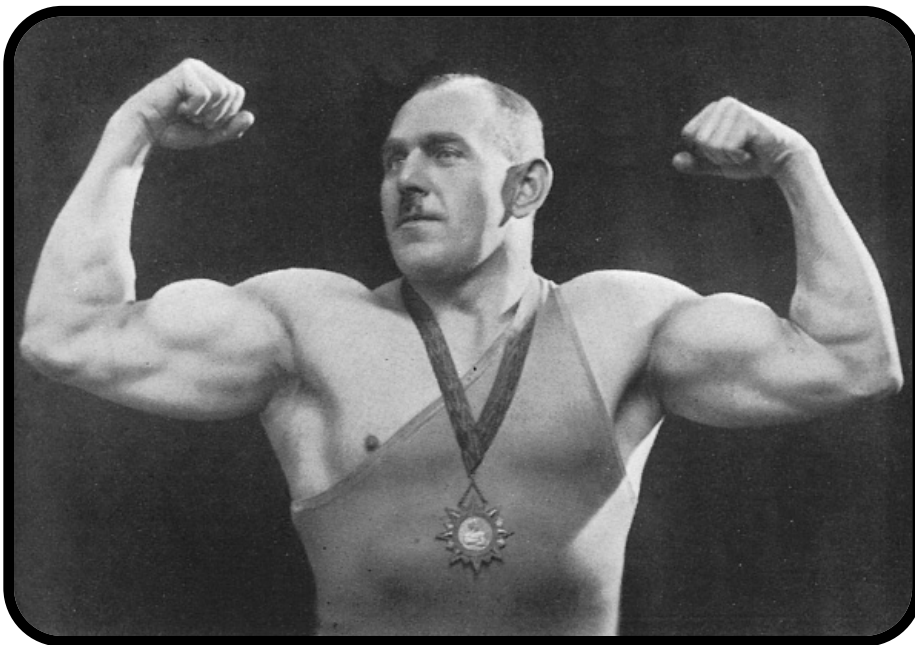
world record of 120 kilograms (264 pounds) in the One Hand Clean and Jerk, supposedly done on 9 November 1919 because, apparently, his connection with *Arbeiter Turnverein Leipzig von 1845* was not sufficient to warrant official recognition for the lift.³⁶ This lack of recognition was omitted in *Goerner the Mighty*. The archives of Atlas are unfortunately lacunose—filled with holes—but in their records Goerner's best in the One Hand Clean and Jerk was 102 kilograms [224 pounds], done at the end of 1912.³⁷ The documents concerning *Arbeiter Turnverein Leipzig von 1845* and those stored in the Sport Museum of Leipzig do not even mention Goerner.³⁸

Goerner the Mighty and Mueller's *Athletik* articles are in complete agreement on one aspect of Goerner's career which is a subject of the present inquiry: the claimed duel against Mörke and the claimed main records of 1919-1920. However, an examination of the most important books in the field of German sport history did not confirm either of these claims.³⁹ A deeper investigation of contemporary sources appeared to be warranted.

Two Facts from 1913

Before the outbreak of World War I, the apparent good relationship between *Arbeiter Athletenbund Deutschlands* and *Deutscher Athletik Verband* allowed Goerner to compete wherever he liked. According to the *Kraftsport Illustrierte Jahrbuch* (1908), the club "Atlas" belonged to *Mitteldeutscher Athletik Verband*, a federation not associated with the *Deutscher Athletik Verband*.⁴⁰

As a result of the difficulty of resuming sports in Germany after World War I and the diffusion and absence of related documentation, we have a clearer picture of Goerner's career before 1914 than in the years 1919-1920. A proper journal for *Arbeiter Athletenbund Deutschlands* re-started in late 1920, however, and another important Workers' journal, *Vorturner*, was first published in 1921. *Athletik* and the famous Viennese journal *Allgemeine Sport Zeitung*, the most reputable and widely circulated German-language sport periodical, both call into serious question two sensational feats



This double biceps shot of Hermann Goerner appeared on the cover of *Goerner the Mighty* when it was released in 1951. It was also included in a set of post-cards sold by Goerner as a professional athlete.

claimed for Goerner as a footnote to two events he lost.

On 27 July 1913, according to *Goerner the Mighty*, Goerner shouldered, in two moves (in continental style)—but without lifting the bar overhead—200 kilograms [440 pounds].⁴¹ The venue and date given coincide with that of the World Championship in Breslau, where Goerner placed fourth and cleaned and jerked in competition 135 kilograms [297 pounds]. It would seem to be a given that, barring injury, someone able to continental 200 kilograms [440 pounds] would be able to exceed 135 kilograms [297 pounds] on the same day in the clean and jerk.⁴² Equally suspicious is the feat attributed by *Goerner the Mighty* to Goerner during the German championship in Kassel on 21 September 1913. *Goerner the Mighty* claimed that Goerner was able, on that date, to clean 130 kilograms [286 pounds] with one hand and then lift the bar overhead, failing to get credit for the lift only because he was unable to "fix" it at arm's length for the required five seconds.⁴³ According to the official, published report of that competition, Goerner's best one hand clean and jerk was 92.5 kilograms [203 pounds], which both Rondi and Trappen exceeded with 97.5 kilograms [214 pounds]. The report stated that Goerner cleaned 120 kilograms [264 pounds], but apparently he did not clean 130 kilograms [286 pounds], obviously a necessary step for almost fixing the bar overhead.⁴⁴ [Editors' Note: What's more, Goerner's official

best in the Two Hands Clean and Jerk in September is only five kilos (11 pounds) more than the 130 kilo (286 pound) One Hand Clean and Jerk Mueller claims Goerner lost less than two months later only because he was unable to hold it overhead for the entire five seconds required.]

A leitmotiv of *Goerner the Mighty* is that Goerner, *Die Stärkste Mann aller Zeiten*—“the Strongest Man of AllTime”—lost the major national and international competitions in 1911-1914 and 1919-1920 only because he was inadequately prepared for these specific events. This recurring theme is seen to an extreme extent in the cases of the Breslau and Kassel contests, where he was said by Mueller to have been inadequately prepared during the actual competition. Even so, he was apparently still able to astonish Mueller on the very same day but in some sort of unofficial or impromptu demonstration.

The Duel Of 4 April 1920

Reading the pages of *Goerner the Mighty*, one gets the impression that “the duel” between Goerner and Moerke followed the victory of Karl Mörke in the 1920 World Championship in Vienna. However, this mistake was the least of the errors in *Goerner the Mighty*. For example, Vienna’s event was held in September, whereas *Goerner the Mighty* placed the duel in April.⁴⁵ In any case, even though Moerke had won each of their previous three encounters, in this April Goerner-Mörke duel, Goerner avenged these previous losses with the following results: Right Hand Snatch—90 versus 75 kilograms [198 vs. 165 pounds]; Right Hand Jerk—112.5 with clean style, against “continentaled” 100 kilograms [248 vs. 220 pounds]; Two Hands Press—110 against 120 kilograms [242 vs. 264 pounds], but the press was always Goerner’s weakest lift and Moerke’s strongest;

Two Hands Snatch—125 (apparently a world record), against 110 kilograms [275 vs. 242 pounds]; and Two Hands Jerk—with cleaning style 160 against “continentaled” 155 kilograms [352 vs. 341 pounds]. In an optional exercise, Goerner chose the Two Hands Deadlift, performing 300 kilograms [661 pounds], while Mörke opted for the Squat with 240 kilograms [529 pounds].⁴⁶

It appears from the account in *Goerner the Mighty* that Goerner had secured a crushing triumph over the recognized and official world champion, beating him in four of five events as well as in the extra event. Research, however, soon revealed that there is a significant problem with this scenario. In response to a query, Leipzig’s Zoological Garden wrote in an e-mail that in its archive there was no trace of that contest.⁴⁷ Furthermore, a book dated 1928 celebrating the Zoo’s anniversary reported some sporting events, but not the famous Goerner-Moerke duel.⁴⁸ It would seem that had the con-

test been held, and the World records achieved, some mention of the event would have been unavoidable. The journal *Der Leipziger* indicated that Professor Carl Diem lectured at the Zoological Gardens on the sport around the same time period, but makes no mention of the Goerner vs. Mörke match.⁴⁹ The official journal of the German federation, *Athletik*, whose authorization was needed for an amateur one-to-one contest (in weightlifting, an event that smacked of professionalism) also failed to report anything about the supposed contest.

But the most convincing evidence against the duel having ever occurred was supplied by Leipzig’s daily regional newspaper *Leipziger Tageblatt und Handelsblatt für Sachsen* of 6 April 1920. The newspaper reported that on the premises of the “Atlas” club Goerner had improved the World Record in the Two Hands



British weightlifting referee and *Health and Strength* author John Dawe presents the 61-year old Hermann Goerner with a copy of *Goerner the Mighty* in this 1951 photo taken outside Goerner’s home.

Snatch to 120 kilograms [264 pounds] on April 4 the same day as the “duel.”⁵⁰ The historian Dale Harder commented that sport history supplies examples of champions able to accomplish astounding feats in two parts of the same day, even in two different towns, and therefore Harder maintains that it would have been possible for Goerner to compete in the contest with Moerke either after or before making the documented record of 120 kilograms. In any case, the published sources and (it has to be stressed) the attentive local press reported only the record in the snatch. Although it seems unlikely, perhaps the Goerner-Moerke contest was not mentioned because it was not an authorized or sanctioned event. We do know that Mörke immigrated to the United States in 1921 and there is no record that he ever mentioned a lost duel, but that could be understandable.

Another factor complicating the question was that, as hinted, the world record snatch of 120 kilograms [264 pounds] on 4 April 1920 was confirmed by many actual and present sources, but not by *Goerner the Mighty*. Why Mueller would not have mentioned in a definitive biography of Goerner a unanimously recognized world record is hard to explain. [Ed. Note: *The only possible explanation could be that if the “duel” Mueller reports actually happened, which seems doubtful, Mueller might not have thought it important to mention the lighter of the two world records.*] It is also interesting to note that in an official exhibition held on 7 June 1914 in Düsseldorf, Goerner actually duelled with Mörke in a kind of one-on-one confrontation. This exhibition, although it was authorized, did not yield official results as it was a special preliminary to the upcoming Baltic Games—in which Goerner placed third. It was also a qualifying event for the national championships, which were later cancelled by the outbreak of the war. Had the normal championship’s point system been used, Goerner would have won that duel with Moerke, even though Mörke had the higher aggregated sum of weights lifted.⁵¹

The Sources and the Records of the Two Hands Clean and Jerk

The authoritative German statistician Karl Adolf Scherer’s record list credits Goerner with a world record Two Hands Clean and Jerk of 157 kilograms [355 pounds] done in 1920, which exceeded Mörke’s performance at Stuttgart’s championship of August 18-19.⁵² Goerner, then, equalled Gässler’s previously mentioned

Munich performances of 3 January 1912 and 12 April 1912 after August 19 but before December 31.⁵³ However, a puzzling complexity surrounds Goerner’s records in the Two Hands Clean and Jerk. *Goerner the Mighty* dedicated a section to this lift, setting apart the 160 kilograms [352 pounds] of the presumed duel, then mentioning a more mundane 150 kilograms [330 pounds], an odd 152 kilograms [334 pounds] (1914), and 155 kilograms [341 pounds] (1932), with no mention of any performances between 155 and 160 kilograms [341 and 352 pounds], nor between 160 and 177 kilograms [352 and 391 pounds], supposedly done in 1920.⁵⁴ It must be noted that the 160 kilograms [352 pounds] is assumed to be Goerner’s best amateur performance, as the 177 kilograms [391 pounds], if done, was done as a professional. According to *Goerner the Mighty*, the 160 kilograms [352 pounds] was done on April 4 and the 177 [391 pounds] on July 11. In three months then, Goerner’s best clean and jerk jumped a remarkable 17 kilograms [39 pounds] according to this scenario. In contrast, it took 23 years for the official world record in the same lift to progress from 160.5 kilograms [353 pounds] by Charles Rigoulot in 1925 to 177.5 kilograms [391 pounds] by John Davis in 1948.⁵⁵ Strangely, *Goerner the Mighty* does not mention Goerner’s other amateur records beyond his performance in the Moerke duel and at the Breslau event. According to *Athletik*, Goerner jerked 155 kilograms [341 pounds]⁵⁶ in 1913; and in 1914, 150 kilograms [330 pounds],⁵⁷ leading the World in the lift for these years. In the 1919 German championships, Goerner’s best clean and jerk was 140 kilograms [308 pounds], incorrectly considered a world record by Scherer.⁵⁸ Even so, it was still the best international performance of the year. The *Kleine Brockhaus* edition for 1922-1925 credited Goerner with a world record of 160 kilograms [352 pounds], done *not* in conjunction with the reputed 125 kilograms [275 pounds] Two Hands Snatch (supposedly done in the “duel”), but rather with Goerner’s 120 kilograms [264 pounds] lift of April 4.⁵⁹ Presumably, the compilers of *Kleine Brockhaus* did not take into account the results of the claimed Goerner-Moerke duel. However, a later edition, *Brockhaus—die Große*, 1928-1935—reinstated recognition of the 157.5 kilograms [347 pounds] made by Gässler in Munich on 12 April 1912 as the world record. Why was recognition of Goerner’s record with 160 kilograms [352 pounds] withdrawn?⁶⁰ Was this performance unverifiable or done as a professional? In total, the *Kleine Brockhaus* of 1922-

1925 attributed to Goerner four world records, yet three of them (surprisingly) are not mentioned in *Goerner the Mighty*.

The historians Bürger and Weidt in the book *Kraftproben* (1985) attributed to Goerner a 165 kilograms [363 pounds] Two Hands Clean and Jerk—performed in 1919 but not officially recognized because he was affiliated with *Arbeiter Athletenbund Deutschlands*.⁶¹ Once again, this performance was not mentioned in *Goerner the Mighty*. Being ignored by Scherer increased the difficulty of the search, but Goerner himself inadvertently refuted *Goerner the Mighty*. In a letter he sent to Leo Gaudreau, whose excerpts Gaudreau reported in his book, *Anvils, Cannons and Horseshoes*, Goerner said that his best in the Clean and Jerk was 168 kilograms [370 pounds].⁶²

In sum, we can document four performances that were not mentioned in *Goerner the Mighty*—even though each one was considered a world record. This fact seems particularly odd because no official documentation could be found corroborating many of the major “records” that Mueller claimed for Goerner in the biography.

The Deadlift Records

For the English-speaking world, Goerner’s records in the deadlift place him firmly within early powerlifting (the strength sport consisting of the deadlift, bench press and squat). Since 1901, the German federation has recognized records in the deadlift and, in 1913, the *Deutsche Athletik Verband* credited Goerner with a world record one-hand deadlift of 251 kilograms [552 pounds] and with 275 kilograms [606 pounds] and then 277 kilograms [610 pounds] in the two-hands version.⁶³ *Goerner the Mighty* attributed Goerner with a world record Two-Hands Deadlift with 360 kilograms [793 pounds] done in Leipzig on 29 October 1920 (not exceeded until 1969). Mueller also credited Goerner with the still-unexceeded right hand record with 330 kilograms [727 pounds], supposedly performed in Leipzig on 8 October 1920.⁶⁴

However, the historical section of the German Powerlifting Federation’s website ignores Goerner.⁶⁵ The authoritative *Encyclopedia of Sports Games and Pastimes* of 1935 reported Goerner’s records of 296.5 kilograms [653 pounds] with two hands and 273.75 kilograms [603 pounds] with one hand, both executed in the summer of 1927 in England, in the English style—namely with heels touching, and duly checked.⁶⁶ [Ed. Note: *It should be remembered that the rules under which this lift*

was made only required the lifter to raise the bar to knee height.] The journal *Health and Strength* assured the preservation of the memory of these English-style deadlifts, while “normal” encyclopedias or historical books ignored them until the 1970s or 1980s. In addition to the aforementioned two performances, and the one executed in the supposed Goerner-Moerke contest, *Goerner the Mighty* mentioned two other important deadlifts for 1919-1920—a one hand lift with 301 kilograms [663 pounds] on 29 October 1920, the same day as his two-handed 360 kilograms [793 pounds] was supposedly done. He is also said to have lifted with one hand 333 kilograms [734 pounds] in the form of a block of stone fitted with a handle—a feat of strength not properly considered a deadlift—on 20 July 1920 in Dresden.⁶⁷ These claims, again, could not be verified in authoritative German sources.

Lothar Groth’s book *Die Starcken Männer* includes a picture of Goerner in an advertisement for a Greco-Roman wrestling championships held in Dresden from the 8th to 12th of September 1920. In this reproduction, Goerner is shown lifting with one hand a stone block not of 333 kilograms [734 pounds], as Mueller indicated, but one said to be 330 kilograms [727 pounds] which equalled 660 German pfunds, the standard measure of weight at that time in Germany. This is also the same poundage claimed as Goerner’s world record for a standard, one hand deadlift with a barbell.⁶⁸ The *Dresdener Anzeiger* of 27 July 1920 also reported that Goerner elevated a stone block of 330 kilograms [727 pounds] but no height is given for the lift.⁶⁹ So, did Goerner lift in October—using a barbell—exactly what he had elevated with a stone block in July? Dale Harder argued in our online forum that this hypothesis was plausible, but it would seem to be a remarkable coincidence that the block and the barbell weighed exactly the same. In any case, the data concerning the 333 kilograms [734 pounds], claimed by Mueller, become increasingly suspicious. Or perhaps Goerner lifted one stone block weighing 333 kilograms [734 pounds] and another weighing 330 kilograms [727 pounds]? What is important is that the Leipzig and Dresden daily newspapers did not register accounts that would support the results provided by Mueller.

Because Goerner entered a major European wrestling contest in July of 1920, he “de facto” lost his amateur status. *Deutsche Athletik Verband* debated this question in its meeting of 19 August 1920 and in October the official journal of the federation duly reported the disqualification.⁷⁰ This means that Goerner was consid-



This grainy photo, taken on 8 June 1913, caught Goerner just as he is finishing a Right Hand Swing with two kettlebells. The total weight was reported as 170 German *Pfunds* or 187.39 American pounds. It was taken on the “sporting beach” at a large, open air swimming pool known as the Germania-Bath in Leipzig. On the “beach” adjoining the pool were an assortment of barbells, dumbbells, kettlebells, and block weights alongside parallel bars, chinning bars and other kinds of training apparatus. During the summer, Goerner reportedly trained on the beach at the Germania Bath twice a week.

ered a professional from 20 August 1920, not from 1 January 1921—as Mueller asserted. Therefore, it is arguable that every performance made from July to December of 1920 would have been regarded by *Deutsche Athletik Verband* as professional and not amateur marks. We are reminded of the fact that Mueller, in his series of articles in the journal *Athletik*, alluded to the large sum paid to Goerner for his 177 kilograms [391 pounds] in the Two Hands Clean and Jerk on July 11.

In conclusion, it is clear that Goerner’s two deadlift records were accomplished as a professional, which would have increased the likelihood that the performances were buried by lack of official sanction. Since no professional federation actually existed at that time, these lifts would have been unofficial. Although it listed many records for one hand lifts, the *Kleine Brockhaus* of 1922-1925 only recognized Goerner’s record with two hands. It did not mention a record with one hand, either by Goerner or by anyone else. Did the compilers of the *Kleine Brockhaus* know that Göerner elevated a stone block and not a Berg barbell? The successive edition of *Brockhaus* (1928-1935) also did not report any records of a one-hand Deadlift. However, an

article from 1950 in *Athletik*—published before Mueller’s series of articles—attributed to Goerner a 310 kilograms [683 pounds] Deadlift with two hands, but this reference also remained unconfirmed.⁷¹ In the hope that these data could be derived from a contemporary source, we turned to *Die Stärksten (The Strongest)*, an interesting, miscellaneous booklet by Josef Haupt (1928). Unfortunately, no footnotes support the booklet and the data remain vague, without a precise indication of venue, day, month, and year. For the one-hand record, Haupt referred, incredibly, to a lift of 330 kilograms [727 pounds]—making Goerner’s one-hand record better than his two-hands record! Haupt, however, indicated 1905 as the year in which the 727 lift was made, so this source proved unreliable.⁷²

Goerner: A Puzzling Figure

How did Goerner join and relate to the Workers’ federation, and what does this relationship say about his character? Careful study of the original documents reveals that Goerner may have been somewhat introverted, and perhaps somewhat isolated and lonely because of his decision to turn professional. [Goerner’s wife, Elsie,

Braunschweig, July 10, 1956
 Maschplatz 15

Dear friend Dase: Deeply sorrowful I report you the passing-away of my long-yearred, closest friend and trainingsmate Hermann Görner on June 29, 1956 (20 min. past ten o'clock on forenoon) in the hospital Neustadt/Rbz. in the age of 65 following colics of gall and liver-shrinking. His funeral was on July 2, on the church-yard of Hunstorf, Bez. Hannover. On July 8, I let take a photo of Hermann in the mortuary. I saw Hermann at last on Dec. 23, 1955 in his home at Klein-Heidorn # 70 and he want visit me in Braun-schweig in July 1956. The cause of Hermanns long-yearred illness was an operation of deep lying varicos veins in left calf, 1942 at Königshütte in Oberschlesien und, since that time his calf was heavy swollen and by bad blood-circulation his heart was weakly in last years. By the swollen leg long walks were impossible for him and following more sitting than walking, his gall and liver did suffer. - On June 30, Hermann should be discharged from the hospital, but on June 27, he get a heavy relapse. During his hospital-stay since May 27 Hermanns bodyweight shrinked from 135 kilos to 105 kilos. Hermann has no relationship and he wishes that I inherited all his sporting-files etc., and he wanted a worthy tomb-stone.

Because I live in straight circumstances (being a refugee far from my Leipzig home and friends) and was cheated by Dawn and Valentine for the selling-percentages of my book: "Goerner the Mighty", I would be very grateful, what Goerner's American friends and admirers would kindly send a small money-order on my adress: Edgar Müller, Maschplatz 15

Edgar Mueller frequently communicated with David Willoughby and sent him this postcard, dated 10 July 1956 following Goerner's death. On the back of the card, where the message concludes, Mueller explains that he is asking Willoughby and other American friends to send money so he can have a suitable tombstone set on the grave of "our unforgettable and incomparable friend Herman Görner." In a second letter to Willoughby, dated 19 January 1957, Mueller thanked Willoughby for his donation to Goerner's tombstone fund and reported that he'd received altogether about 200 German Marks. He told Willoughby that he planned to have the tombstone erected in the Spring of 1957 and noted that the stone was made possible by "serious kindful contributors" such as Willoughby, Tromp Van Diggelen and Ray Van Cleef.

—Collection of David P. Willoughby, The Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection.

who died in 1949, appeared with him in his professional acts at times and would have provided him with companionship during his years as a professional. However, by turning pro Goerner distanced himself from the lifters and officials associated with amateur weightlifting, and entered what one might describe as a sort of "sporting ghetto," which is what professional weightlifting in Europe was at that time.⁷³ In October 1913, *Athletik* noted his affiliation to *Essener Athleten Club vom 1888*, and this information is in accordance with Mueller's assertion in *Iron Man* that Goerner transferred to Essen to work for the famous steel and armament factory run by the Krupp family. We must also remember that Mueller affirmed that Goerner's membership in the *Arbeiter Athletenbund Deutschlands* blocked the probable recognition of at least one world record, but in September 1919,

at the Ulmer National Event, Goerner lifted as a member of the *Friedrichshafen Kraftsport Verein* team.⁷⁴ We cannot exclude the possibility that "Atlas" re-affiliated with DAV on 1 April 1920. In any event, Goerner's commitment to the Workers' cause appears to have been tepid. Goerner achieved the world record in the Two Hands Snatch on 4 April 1920 at the "Atlas" club. Even so, only four months after this performance, the champion became a professional.

The primary focus of this inquiry was limited to 1920. However, a preliminary examination of the archives of Goerner's friend Tromp Van Diggelen in the Cape Town Library and of past issues of *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* suggests that Goerner's record of 135 kilograms [297 pounds] in the Two Hands Snatch as a professional, reportedly made in Kalk Bay, near Cape

Town, on 4 September 1926 also left no trace in local papers.⁷⁵ Despite the attempt of *Goerner the Mighty* to do so, it is not appropriate to compare such an unofficial performance—assuming that it actually happened—with other achievements made in competitions with the support of juries and documentary evidence.

The important *Encyclopaedia Beckmann's Lexikon*, issued in 1933 in Vienna and Leipzig—two centers of Workers' sport—carried the first published reports of Workers' sport records. It would seem that all of the records Mueller claims for Goerner should have been included there, but they were not.⁷⁶ By that time, Goerner was a professional strongman in vaudeville shows, theaters, and clubs of Leipzig and beyond. Did the Workers' establishment punish him with oblivion for his earlier abandonment of the amateur ranks? Also, and strangely, the Nazi regime did not exalt Goerner as an Aryan idol. Why would they have missed the opportunity of publicizing the fact that the “Strongest Man of All Times” was a German. On the contrary, the Nazi government interned Goerner in a *lager* (prison camp) during World War II, where he shared the deprivation of several former Worker mates.

Apparently, Goerner followed an individualistic path in the post-World War Two years. He lived alone, in straightened circumstances, and did not attend the convivial meetings of Old Timers associations, which in Germany and Austria so vividly maintained the memories of past sporting glory. Did Goerner really suffer a crossed and double-crossed, bourgeois and worker, historical removal? Or, when Mueller described himself as a direct witness to Goerner's amateur achievements in 1920, did he ignore what the *Deutsche Athletik Verband* journal wrote about his friend? When Mueller repeatedly pointed out the official character of Goerner's feats, was he ignoring what the German official references reported and relying, instead, on a decidedly selective and perhaps faulty memory?

Goerner Was A Great, Not The Greatest

Thanks to his records in the Right, Left and Two Hands Deadlift—either in his amateur period or during his professional season in 1927 on English soil—and to his provable records in the Two Hands Snatch and the Two Hands Clean and Jerk, Goerner deserves serious recognition, especially since he earned first place in the World Ranking in the Two Hands Clean and Jerk for three seasons (1913, 1914 and 1919—and probably in 1920, too). Our research—and opinion—places him definitely as an iron game great but not, at the time

Goerner the Mighty was written, as *The Greatest*, or *Der Stärkste Mann der Welt*. Much mystery still surrounds his true status, and possibly he was marginalized and his real greatness disguised because of his affiliation to Workers' clubs and because of his later professionalism. In any case, perhaps this initial search will help to bridge a gap in German historical sport literature, and we invite all interested students to go over our work and to study Goerner's career as an “odd lift” specialist and professional strongman for the period 1931-1934.

[Ed Note: We applaud the authors' open-spirited invitation to other researchers to examine the primary and secondary sources in order to more clearly determine Hermann Goerner's true stature as a weightlifter/strongman. One thing is probably certain. Had World War I not thrown Goerner's life into turmoil and resulted in injuries that plagued him for the rest of his life, he would have been even more powerful than he was.]

Notes:

1. David P. Willoughby, *The Super Athletes* (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes, 1970), 92-96; David P. Webster, *The Iron Game* (Irvine: International Weightlifting Federation, 1976), 56-57; Leo Gaudreau, *Anvils, Horseshoes and Cannons*, vol. 2 (Alliance, NE: Iron Man Publishing, 1978), 108-112. For cyber sources see: <http://www.americanpowerliftrevolution.net/HermannGoernerPage.html>; <http://www.usawa.com/99goerner.html>; and http://www.geocities.com/dino_rack_training/.
2. Deutsche Athletik Verband, *1891-1931. 40 Jahre Deutscher Kraftsport. Jahrbuch des DAVS vom 1891* (Stuttgart: Verlag Athletik, 1931), 98 & 100; Ernst August Kampmann, *Aus der Geschichte des Deutschen Kraftsports* (Kassel: Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Alten Athleten Deutschlands, 1950), 88.
3. Günter Hofmann, ed. *Leipzig sportlich* (Leipzig: BlickPunkt, 2002), 215.
4. See: <http://www.strongman-kelheim.de/weboli/historisches.htm>; and <http://www.kraftsportmuseum.de/>.
5. For instance, a series of articles in the “fifth page” by *Nord Deutsche Zeitung*, 23, 24, 25, 27 and 28 January 1951.
6. *Athletik* (26 February 1931): 2.
7. *Athletik* (11 May 1920): 177. This data is confirmed by Karl Adolf Scherer who compiled a statistical annex for Walter Umminger, ed. *Die Chronik des Sports* (Munich: Chronik Verlag, 1992). Goerner's records are listed on page 924. See also: Karl Adolf Scherer, *Chronik Handbuch. Sportgeschichte in Zahlen* (Munich: Chronik Verlag, 1997), 160 & 162.
8. Edgar Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty* (Leeds, England: Vulcan Publishing, 1951).
9. Edgar Mueller, “Titanen der Kraft,” *Athletik* 7 (18 February 1951): 6; Edgar Mueller, “Titanen der Kraft,” *Athletik* 8 (25 February 1951): 7; Edgar Mueller, “Titanen der Kraft,” *Athletik* 10 (4 March 1951): 7; Edgar Mueller, “Titanen der Kraft,” *Athletik* 13 (25 March 1951): 6.
10. Kampmann, *Aus der Geschichte des Deutschen Kraftsports*, 1950.
11. *Ibid.*, 88.
12. Mueller, *Athletik* 7 (1951): 6; and Mueller, *Athletik* 13 (1951): 6.
13. George Jowett, *Health & Strength* (September 1926): 34-39, also available online at: www.sandwoplus.co.uk/Competition/Goerner/strength09.
14. Edgar Mueller, “The True Story of Gerner's (sic) Record Deadlifts,” *Iron*

Man (December 1949); also available at: <http://www.sandowplus.co.uk/Competition/Goerner/ironman12-49/true.htm>.

15. The Iron History Forum is managed by Joe Roark and Bill Piche. Some of the participants in the Forum actively took part in the debate, providing information from their collections and scanning some of their material. Registration is needed for viewing the forum. See the sub-forum "Musty Muscle" for the discussion thread entitled "Goerner's birthday" at <http://www.ironhistory.com>.

16. It's interesting to compare Webster's *The Sons of Samson*, vol. 1 (Irvine: by the author, 1993), 31, which fails to mention Goerner's greatest feats to Webster's, *The Iron Game*, 57, which does. [Ed. Note: In a conversation with David Webster, he said that he omitted several questionable lifts from *Sons of Samson* as a result of learning (from a German publication) that Arthur Saxon's famous record in the bent press (370 pounds) was not completed, i.e., Saxon lifted the weight to arm's length but never stood up with it, as the rules require.]

17. John Dawe to Joe Roark, personal communication. Irving Clark, in the introduction to *Goerner the Mighty* reports that Mueller was a "walking encyclopedia on Continental strong men and their feats...Mention a feat and he can state the date, the time and who was present..." *Goerner the Mighty*, 11.

18. John Dawe to Joe Roark, personal communication. [Ed. Note: In a conversation predating Dawe's communication with Joe Roark, Dawe told Terry Todd that he had not merely translated *Goerner the Mighty* but had actually written portions of it.]

19. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 11.

20. For instance, an important article by German master Theodor Siebert, mentioned in *Goerner the Mighty*, p. 126 is lost as well as a Siebert's manuscript covering the all-time strongest men, as mentioned by Bernd Wedemeyer, in *Der Athelntevater Theodor Siebert (1866-1961). Eine Biographie zwischen Körperkultur, Lebensreform and Esoterik* (Göttingen: Norbert Klatt Verlag, 1999), 245.

21. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 69-70, 72.

22. *Ibid.*, 32.

23. David P. Webster, *The Development of Clean and Jerk*, 3-4; see also Gherardo Bonini, "The Two-Hands Jerk: Clean or Continental? The Obizzi Formula," *MILQ: The Journal of Serious Strength Athletes* 13 (June 2005): 103-104.

24. Felix Markones, *Österreichs Schwerathletik* (Vienna: 1920), 102.

25. Gottfried Schodl, *The Lost Past. Concealed or Forgotten?* (Budapest: International Weightlifting Federation, 1992), 238.

26. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 53.

27. *Ibid.*, 29.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Health and Strength*, (March 1952): 19, 42, 44, 46.

30. Gaudreau, *Anvils*, 11.

31. Mueller, *Athletik* 8 (1951): 7.

32. Mueller, "True Story."

33. Mueller, *Athletik* 8 (1951): 7.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Athletik* (16 September 1919): 101.

36. Mueller, *Athletik* 8 (1951): 7. Neither the book, *150 Jahre Allgemeiner Turn-verein zu Leipzig 1845*, published by the Leipzig Sportsmuseum, or the archives of the same institution contain any mention of Goerner. Also, no data on Goerner was found in the material consulted at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung where the Arbeiter Athletenbund Deutschlands records are kept.

37. The Atlas Club supplied us with copies of page 54-55 of the *Atlas Jahrbuch* (yearbook) for 1912 containing a biographical sketch of Goerner and his records up to 1913.

38. See note 36.

39. We examined the most reputable books containing updated and credible German sport records: *Deutsche Sport Taschenbuch 1921*; Hyppolit von

Norman, *Deutsches Sport Lexikon* (Berlin: Schwabachersche Verlagshaus, 1928); Otto Vierath, *Moderner Sport: Eine Umschau über die Zweige des Sports und die sportlichen Wettkämpfe* (Berlin: Oestergard Verlag, 1930); and *Beckmann's Lexikon* (Vienna/Leipzig: 1933).

40. Albert Stolz, ed. *Kraftsport Illustrierte Jahrbuch* (Munich: Stolz Verlag, 1908), 93.

41. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 66.

42. In fact, the author of *Athletik* covering the World Championships did not hide the disappointment at Goerner's performance since in other exhibitions he had reportedly lifted more than 150 kilos on three occasions that year. See "Weltmeisterschaft in Breslau," *Athletik*, 22 (7 August 1913): 512.

43. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 46, 48.

44. *Athletik* (2 October 1913): 652.

45. *Athletik* (5 October 1920): 328

46. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 32.

47. E-mail from Mustafa Haikal (Secretariat Zoo Leipzig) to Gherardo Bonini, 29 November 2004.

48. Johannes Gebbing, *50 Jahre Leipziger Zoo* (Leipzig: Leipziger Zoo, 1928).

49. There is no mention of Goerner in *Der Leipziger* during 1919 and 1920, even though this weekly paper carried sport news in every issue.

50. *Leipziger Tageblatt und Handelsblatt für Sachsen*, 6 April 1920, page 4. This data contradicts Markones, *Österreichs Schwerathletik*, 101, that places the record on 10 May 1920.

51. *Athletik* (June 1914): 408-409.

52. Scherer in Walter Umminger, ed. *Die Chronik des Sports* (Munich: Chronik Verlag, 1992).

53. *Athletik* (16 January 1913): 41.

54. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 48-50, 52-53

55. See the official list of recognized records in Schodl, *Lost Past*, 236-239.

56. Performed on 11 December, see *Athletik* (18 December 1913): 821.

57. Performed during duel of 7 June 1914, see *Athletik* (18 June 1914): 408.

58. Scherer does not consider the records prior to World War I to be official records. This is a different policy than that of the IWF, which, as discussed earlier, reinstated Gässler's record.

59. Weltrekord in *Kleine Brockhaus*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1922-1925), 621.

60. *Grosse Brockhaus*, vol. 20 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1932-1935), 215. The staff of Brockhaus kindly checked in their archives but the preparatory documents of the above mentioned editions were lost.

61. Hilmar Burger & Wilhelm Weidt, *Kraftproben. Stärke Manner einst und jetzt* (Berlin: Sportverlag, 1985), 16.

62. Gaudreau, *Anvils*, 109-110.

63. *Athletik* (27 February 1913): 140; and *Athletik* (23 October 1913): 694.

64. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 69-70, 72.

65. See <http://www.bvdk.de/kdk.pdf>.

66. *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Sports, Games and Pastimes* (London: Amalgamated Press, 1935), 705.

67. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 70.

68. Lothar Groth, *Die Starken Manner. Eine Geschichte der Kraftakrobatik* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1987), 127.

69. *Dresdener Anzeiger*, 27 July 1920. We would also like to thank the Dresden Library for their assistance with our research.

70. *Athletik* (26 October 1920): 429.

71. Paul Welnowski, "Giganten der Kraft," *Athletik*, new series, 3 (1 March 1950): 6.

72. Josef Haupt, *Die Stärksten* (Munich: Munichverlag, 1928): 38, 42.

73. Elsie Goerner died in 1949. Mueller, *Goerner the Mighty*, 20.

74. *Athletik*, new series, 1 (2 December 1919) 23, page 198.

75. The search was executed by Prof. Jennie Underwood of Cape Town.

76. *Beckmann's Lexikon* (Vienna/Leipzig: 1933), 27-28 of appendix.

**Dear IGH:**

Congratulations on your new building. Your dreams and hard work are now being realized. The Stark Center will be a great triumph to all your hard work over the years. Both of you will always be remembered by future generations for bringing knowledge of the history of physical culture to the world and for being hard-working and knowledgeable people. I'm honored to be a friend of yours because I've learned so much from *Iron Game History* through the years. In my lectures to our staff I use what I've learned, with respect.

Terry Robinson
Los Angeles, CA

Kind words from Terry Robinson are much appreciated as he's been central to the game for almost three-quarters of a century and he's still going strong. The last we checked—and we always try to visit him when we're in the Los Angeles area—he was still the morning manager for the enormous, very upscale Sports Club/LA. How many men do we have in the iron game past their 90th birthday and still in the very center of things?

**Dear IGH:**

The mention of Charles Atlas, the “dynamic tension method” and Madison Avenue ad-man, Charles Roman, in the article entitled “Yearning for Muscular Power” by Terry Todd and John Hoberman in the Vol. 9 No. 3 issue reminded me of the following. It was in 1952 that I returned from overseas with a rare German car, one of 25, an SS-710 Mercedes. Because of the car I became friends with several people in Brooklyn, specifically a Fred Stevens who, interestingly, knew Charles Atlas and, in fact, reportedly had been a guest in his Long Island home more than once. Charles Atlas was Italian and had a very, very Italian name which I cannot recall. [Ed note: *Angelo Siciliano*] Atlas' home was reportedly loaded with barbell and dumbbell equipment, but Atlas himself was anything but “musclebound.”

When I was twelve, I saved up \$3.00 of hard

earned money and sent away for the “dynamic tension” course. Within a couple of weeks my \$3.00 was returned with a note clearly stating that the course, certainly not clear in the ad, was only available for \$30.00! Furthermore, \$27.00 of it was apparently to pay for vital information on “sexology!”

In response, I wrote a short letter stating that I was just 12 years old and truthfully only needed the dynamic tension part of the package. Receiving no sympathy whatsoever they again returned my \$3.00.

That weight training made you musclebound was hardly my experience. In high school, age 15 and 16, I ran the 100-yard dash in 11.3 and the 440 in 57 seconds. Overseas (Darmstadt, Germany) with just weight training and no running practice whatever I ran a 10.5 against a runner who ran ten seconds flat in high school.

Ted Nolan Thompson, M.D.
Dana Point, CA

**Dear IGH:**

I am so glad you two are continuing with your labor of love (i.e. publishing *Iron Game History*). Jan, I recently re-read your excellent essay on powerlifting and its multiplicity of organizations, etc. It has been a source of wonderment to me to observe the amazing proliferation of nuances (real and imagined) within that sport. There is obviously no shortage of people who want to be “President” or “Chairman” of something, and powerlifting really gave them the opportunity! I limit my own powerlifting activity to the AAU version of the 27 different approaches to that area of the Iron Game.

Terry, I watch the Strongman shows whenever I see them on the TV, and am happy to see you in the background occasionally. It was good to see Phil Pfister win this year—he's a fine representative of the USA.

I am enclosing \$100 “for the cause”—although you two people contribute the most precious thing we humans possess—time! Thanks for all you do for us in the Iron Game in all its varieties.

C. Jack Lano
Anaheim, CA

*We couldn't agree more, Jack, about Phil. He's a great ambassador for the sport. As evidence of the positive press he's now garnering, we thought you'd like to see the following article from the **Columbus Dispatch**.*

HUMBLE HERCULES: HUMAN POWERHOUSE KEEPS HIS STRENGTH IN PERSPECTIVE

BY TOM REED, FEBRUARY 28, 2007

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Phil Pfister can carry a 460-pound concrete stone, pull two tractor-trailers with a harness and support eight women standing on a platform. His greatest feat of strength, however, might be his grip on reality.

In late September, on a trip to China, Pfister became the first American in 24 years to win the World's Strongest Man title. Three days later, he was back at work for the Charleston Fire Department.

"Phillip is a realist," said his wife, Michelle. "He enjoys doing the strongman competitions, but he knows the Fire Department is what provides our insurance, our 401(k). If he's on the schedule to work, he wants to be there."

A giant within his sport, the 6-foot-7, 345-pound Pfister hasn't outgrown his hometown—where he remains the neighbor to call when someone needs a sofa or piano moved. He still makes public appearances for a community that supported him financially nine years ago when he started in strongman events. Although he gained national prominence in October for flipping a Pontiac Sunfire on Late Show With David Letterman, he prefers the recognition of Charleston's youth.

"Kids use me as a frame of reference when they see something big," he said. "They say, 'Is that rock too big for Phil Pfister to pick up?'"

Pfister, 35, will bring his power and perspective to Columbus this weekend as part of the Arnold Sports Festival. He hopes to earn another notch in his weightlifting belt competing in a world-class field, including four-time Arnold champion Zydrunas Savickas of Lithuania.

Strongman events, a favorite ESPN filler, feature contestants tugging, flipping, carrying and pushing large and often exotic objects. In 2002 on a New Orleans dock, Pfister harnessed himself to a 300-ton riverboat and pulled it 50 feet in the water. The unusual events sometimes have real-world applications.

Two years ago, his Fire Department unit answered a call in which a 250-pound man had fallen through his front porch. As colleagues devised a plan, Pfister reached down and pulled the man through the floor using only one arm, Capt. Kirk Lilley said.

"Part of strongman's appeal is you can relate to it," said Bill Kazmaier, the last U.S. athlete to win the World's Strongest Man contest, in 1982. "Most people can't grasp a powerlifter pulling 800 pounds on a bar, but what college kid hasn't tried to carry a beer keg or push a truck that has run out of gas?"

Pfister began watching World's Strongest Man events about 10 years ago and thought he could compete. He isn't a typical contestant: He lacks a weightlifting or powerlifting pedigree.

In fact, he passed on organized sports at South Charleston High School, instead dedicating his spare time to skateboarding and rock climbing. He quit football after peewee-league coaches forced him to play on the line.

Strength has been another constant. He chopped wood to

help pay his way through West Virginia State College. The son of two physicians, Pfister favors a rugged, bluecollar lifestyle.

Dr. Alfred Pfister recalls watching his son uproot tree stumps and clear 200-pound boulders to build a home in the early 1990s. The young man carried 30-gallon drums of water to a construction trailer, where he lived until the project was completed. "One day, Phil asked me about steroids," his father said. "I told him they shorten your life and shrink your testicles. It was the last conversation we had on the subject." Pfister said he uses no performance-enhancing drugs in a sport that does scant testing for them. He thinks his natural approach will allow him to enjoy a longer career. He has never suffered a serious injury. His biggest advantage might be his large hands, which measure 11 inches with his fingers completely spread.

"Being able to maintain a grip with these big implements is so important in Strongman, and Phil can do that," said friend and fellow Arnold participant Brian Siders, who lives near Charleston.

Pfister trains in several Charleston gyms, including one at the Fire Department, and occasionally works out with strength coach Nick Osborne at Built Solid Fitness Center in Columbus. Maintaining body weight is also difficult. Pfister has gained more than 100 pounds since high school. His wife said he eats 10 times a day, totaling more than 5,000 calories. "Before my metabolism caught up to me, I could eat 3 1/2 pounds of steak and four baked potatoes for dinner," he said.

Pfister wants to compete for at least five more years and has no plans to parlay his strongman fame into a full-time job, such as pro wrestling. "Who wouldn't want to make millions?" he said. "But 20 years from now I want to get out of bed without hurting all over."

He earned \$40,000 for his World's Strongest Man conquest and estimates he could clear \$100,000 in year-round competition if he didn't value his time at home with Michelle and their 6-year-old son, Wyatt.

His wife has plenty of chores to keep him occupied: Pfister recently carried a fully assembled treadmill into the house.

Not that her muscular hunk is the only one getting his hands dirty.

"You know," Michelle said, "I take out the trash quite a bit."



Dear IGH:

So glad to receive your Christmas Card. The illustration on the front of the card really brought back some old memories. Most people don't or can't remember working out in an old gym with that type of old equipment. When I first started out training at the local YMCA, they still had a set of the old Milo barbells. Of course, the rest of the equipment was York. I had a dumbbell set from Good at home. When I read the information inside your card, I was reminded of my days in college. We were taught about the *Turnvereins* and the

William L. Good

Bill Good died on April 19, 2007, just a month short of his 97th birthday, in Reamstown, Pennsylvania, where he was born and lived his long and vigorous life. He was the youngest, but strongest, of the three renowned Good Brothers—Walter, Harry, and Bill—weightlifters all. The last to go, Bill was still driving himself and his girlfriend to a dance every Friday night until late last fall, and his health and strength lasted until he fell in March and suffered a very serious injury to his back. Bill was the dominant heavy-weight in U.S. weightlifting during the 1930s, was a member of two Olympic teams—1932 and 1936—and, at about 190 pounds, had an outstanding physique. He continued to train with heavy weights throughout his life, and at the age of 79 he did 79 repetitions with 2150 pounds in a hip-harness lift in which he used the strength of his hips, thighs, shoulders and arms to raise a huge dumbbell a few inches from the ground. I first met Bill in 1965, and I visited him quite a few times over the past 15 years. He was in many ways a remarkable man—very modest and unassuming but also very proud of the strength and shape of his unusually able body.

—Terry Todd

gym at Hartford. I graduated from college with a double major of Physical Education and Education.

I'm glad to know that some people still remember me because I hardly remember myself. Now let me explain. Most of the lifting that I did, I don't remember it. Terpak would call me and say, "Hey Jim, Bob needs you to come to such and such place and help the team to win the TEAM TROPHY." For some reason, Bob was always hyper about winning the TEAM TROPHY. I would grab my bag, get on the train or plane, get to the meet and Terpak would say, "go out there and do this," or, "we really need this lift." Most of the time I had no idea what the weight was. In fact, in the 1960 Olympics, Terpak said, "go out there and press this and you'll be set." I didn't find out until the 1980's that it was an Olympic Record. Then Terpak said "Jim, you really need to get this snatch." I said, "no problem." I had no

idea how much the bar weighed. The only thing I remember saying to Terpak is, "boy, that was easy." I think the bar weighed 330 ½ or 332 ½. I do remember that lift because the weight just seemed to float up in the air and I had to stop it from going back too far. I didn't know what was going on but Terpak was grinning at Schemansky and Schemansky was mad as hell. I found out years later that my snatch had caused Schemansky to make a try for a 440 or 450-pound Clean and Jerk. I was rooting for him but his knee kept banging down on the platform. He was trying like hell but even Skee couldn't get down low enough. Now I know you don't believe me so I won't even bother to tell you I don't remember winning the Sr. Nationals. Oh Well!

But one thing I want you to help me with—one day I walked into the York Gym (that's what I'm calling it, did you ever see the place?) There was this big dumbbell laying on the floor and everybody said, "Hey Jim, do you think you could lift this?" I bent down; picked it up with my left hand, and pressed it. It was easy because it had a thick bar on it and that's when I realized that I had a large hand and that's why I had so much trouble cleaning weights. Of course, everyone knew that I couldn't split worth a damn.

But anyway, do you have any idea what that dumbbell was called or how much it may have weighed? And, do you have any idea what happened to the equipment that was in Sig Klein's gym? Well, enough for now.

Jim Bradford Washington, D.C.

There were several old dumbbells that appeared in the York gym over the years, but the most famous one was once owned by Louis Cyr. Unloaded, it weighed a few pounds over 200, and it had a handle that was thicker than that of a standard Olympic bar. To our knowledge—although some have claimed otherwise—no one has ever cleaned and pressed the Cyr bell with one hand because it was so difficult to clean; it had large spheres which made it awkward, a thick handle, and it weighed at least 200 pounds. As far as Sig's famous equipment is concerned, it was dispersed in the mid-1970s, when he closed the gym. Earlier, Bob Hoffman had declined Sig's offer to sell all of the equipment as a package.

