

Nautilus Bulletin #2

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A Natural Mistake

The movie magazines are devoted primarily to the doings of the "stars" –the average actor is seldom mentioned; but for each star, there are hundreds of actors of average ability – and who can say how many actors with very great, but unrecognized (or unpublished) ability?

And having become recognized as a star – frequently through no fault of their own – many actors become "instant experts" on practically everything, acting, directing, writing, even political science. In the field of weight-training – and this is particularly apparent in body building –many of the stars are literally freaks, hereditary freaks; and having received a lot of publicity, and credit for something that was thrust upon them by heredity, they frequently become instant experts.

It is a mistake – although a natural mistake – to listen to such people, who seldom if ever really understand the actual cause-effect relationships responsible for their development; and who would probably be the last to admit it if they did. It is probable that something on the order of ninety per cent of the total number of words published on the subject of weight-training during the last twenty years were devoted to the actions and opinions of less than a thousand individuals; in effect, less than one per cent of the weight-training public has received about ninety per cent of the publicity.

Which is unfortunate, doubly unfortunate – because almost none of the published "information" is even true, and because very little of it has any significance for the average trainee even when it is true; very few of the published training routines of well-known bodybuilders are in any way related to their actual training routines – and when they are, it certainly doesn't follow that it was an actually good routine, regardless of the degree of results that its advocate may have produced, eventually.

Most well-known bodybuilders have followed so many different routines by the time they finally do attain a point of recognition that they really have no slightest idea regarding "which routine produced which result" – but they almost invariably think they do; which is, I suppose, another natural mistake – but a mistake, nevertheless.

Paraphrasing one of Mark Twain's famous remarks, ". . . it might appear that God made idiots for practice – and then made bodybuilders." And if we are supposed to look upon the published remarks of many leading bodybuilders as sincere statements of their actual beliefs, then I think that would be giving them the benefit of an unjustified doubt. Hundreds of articles have been published on the subject of "muscle shaping" exercises and-or training routines – but the fact of the matter is, of course, that the shape of a muscle is entirely determined by heredity and by its existing degree of development, in relation to the overall fatty-tissue to muscle-tissue ratio.

"Train this way for bulk" – "train that way for definition" – "train like this for strength" – "train like that for size", and so on; hogwash, pure hogwash – the people who write such trash have no slightest idea of the real facts – and any results they may have produced were produced almost literally in spite of their efforts.

If a muscle gets bigger, it must change its shape – because little or nothing in the way of an increase in the length of a muscle is even possible, for obvious reasons; so in growing, a muscle changes its aspect ratio, the relationship of length to width (and-or thickness), and thus its shape – and since any significant increase in actual muscular bulk presupposes an increase in strength, and vice versa, it obviously follows that increasing the existing level of strength will change the shape of a muscle.

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But it does not follow that the change in shape will be apparent; because, if the muscular tissue is covered with a thick layer of fatty tissue then an actually significant change in muscular size and shape may not result in a noticeable degree of change in external appearances.

I could quote literally hundreds of equally foolish beliefs that are held to be established fact by almost all bodybuilders – and in other chapters I have listed at least a dozen such false beliefs – but my real point is that "believing doesn't make it so."

But the recent upsurge of the "NOW culture" – which encourages people to demand, and even expect, instant results – has led to a widespread refusal to even consider the facts; and being quick to recognize the trend, the commercial interests in the field of body building have been equally quick to take advantage of it – to their own enormous profit.

So bodybuilders – and publishers in the body building field – say anything that just might attract attention; having run out of anything of any real value to say at least twenty years ago, and feeling that they must publish "something", they end up publishing almost literally "anything" –most of it pure hogwash, to put it very mildly. And don't make the mistake of holding your breath until the situation improves – it probably never will, and certainly not soon.

But there is an answer, a very simple one – just ignore anything you read in almost all body building publications; better yet, read them very selectively – if at all. In my obviously biased opinion, the only one worth reading is Iron Man – and don't believe everything you read there; Peary Rader (the publisher of Iron Man) is an honest man, to my personal knowledge – but like all of us, he makes mistakes. In my opinion, most of his mistakes have come about as an unavoidable result of leaning over backwards in his attempts to be fair; frequently in relationships with people who obviously feel that anything to their own advantage is "fair".

A former friend of mine on the west coast (at a time when I was still foolish enough to listen to his advice – if perhaps not stupid enough to follow it) told me, upon reading a prior-to-publication draft of one of my articles, ". . . my God, Arthur, you've insulted everybody but Jesus Christ and Ghandi."

So I told him, "Don't worry about it; I'll get around to them in the next article."

From almost all directions I have been getting similar advice, "Don't rock the boat," or "play along, don't mess up a good thing."

A "good thing" for who? Certainly not for the poor kids that read – and sometimes apparently even believe – all the garbage that has been published during the last few years; there was a time, not too many years ago, when most bodybuilders read the magazines strictly for laughs – they knew it wasn't true, and it gave them a source of amusement. But now, quite a few bodybuilders obviously take everything they read in the muscle magazines at face value – primarily, I think, because they want to; because the publishers of such magazines have learned just what their readers want to hear and are very careful not to give them anything else.

One publisher of such a magazine told me to my face that, ". . . my readers are too dumb to understand anything of real value; your articles would be clear over their heads – and they don't want the facts anyway."

Mabel Rader (Peary Rader's wife) told me in good faith, ". . . Arthur, I don't approve of you calling our readers fools in your articles."

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So I said, "Mabel, I didn't call ALL of your readers fools – just some of them; but in any case, I didn't make ANY of your readers fools, God did that – I just pointed it out. But should I lie to them? Should I encourage them in outright foolishness? Or tell them the truth?"

"Well," she said, "you're still calling them fools."

And I said, "Mabel, some of your readers are fools, and calling them fools won't change them, or help them, it will only serve to infuriate them; but a lot of your readers aren't fools, they're intelligent people – but you can't have it both ways, you have to take a stand, support the truth and let the chips fall where they may. If that outrages a few fools – and it will, I promise you – then sobeit; but in the end you will get across to intelligent people – and nobody can ever get across to a fool, so why bother trying?"

And of course, a lot of the people who have been misled aren't fools – and in the almost total lack of a place to go for reliable information, it isn't surprising that a lot of them have been misled; simply another natural mistake – but still a mistake.

During the last year or so I have been almost shocked by the ignorance of a very high percentage of the bodybuilders I have met – and don't be disturbed by the term "ignorance," it simply implies a lack of knowledge, and we are all ignorant on at least some subjects, and most of us on nearly all subjects; things that I always assumed "everybody knew," seem, in fact, to be totally new to most current bodybuilders – things that almost all bodybuilders did know, and understand, at one time, basic things, simple things, obvious things.

So, in following chapters, I will do my best to at least bring these things back into the light – point by point, simply and clearly; a few readers will unavoidably feel that such attention to basic points is unjustified, a waste of their reading time, but I would remind them of the classic example of a clear explanation, "how to make a rabbit stew; first, you catch a rabbit. . ."