My First Half-Century in the Iron Game

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Having been mentioned in earlier articles in this series, a man named Fred Hatfield visited me in Florida about seven years ago; he was then an editor and writer for some of Joe Weider's magazines, and had been a power lifter for about twenty years.

I first met Hatfield, together with Joe Weider (who I had met previously) in California. I had gone to California in order to take my wife there for the purpose of her attempting to set a world record coast-to-coast flight; and she did set such a speed record, from Los Angeles nonstop to Jacksonville, Florida.

Having already been a pilot for more than forty years, I started teaching the girl that I later married to fly when she was 17 years old. By the time of that record flight she already had an Airline Transport Pilot's license, the highest possible level of pilot's license.

In school we have four levels: grammar school, high school, college, and post graduate education. In flying there are also four levels: student permit (which permits you to take flying lessons), private pilot's license (which permits you to fly small airplanes and carry passengers, but does not permit you to work as a pilot), commercial pilot's license (which does permit you to work as a pilot, but not as an airline captain), and airline transport pilot's license (which does permit you to serve as captain for a scheduled airline).

In addition to those levels of licenses, there are so-called "type rating," and these are: single-engine land, multi-engine land, both single and multi-engine sea, and a special "type rating" for any large aircraft.

In addition to the other requirements, there are age restrictions on pilot's licenses; you cannot obtain an airline transport license until you are at least 23 years old. But long before she was old enough, she already had all of the experience required for such a license, had passed all of the required tests (both written and practical tests), and apart from being too young was qualified for an airline transport pilot's license. So the Federal Aviation Agency issued her a letter which stated … "When you are old enough, bring this letter back to us and we will issue your license."

She was the youngest person in history to obtain a captain's license for a Boeing 747 "Jumbo" jet, together with ratings for several other large jets. At that time I owned three Boeing 707-323C "heavy" jets. Any airplane that weighs more than 250,000 pounds must use the term "heavy" as part of its identification on the radio; this being a warning to other pilots to stay well clear since heavy airplanes create enormous disturbances to the air mass behind them, and if another airplane flies into this disturbance they may be destroyed. My big jets weighed 336,000 pounds, and carried 160,000 pounds (25,000 gallons) of fuel, so they were "heavy,"

The magazine Professional Pilot did a cover story on our flight operations called "Heavy Iron."

Using one of these big jets, in 1984 we carried 63 African elephants nonstop from an island off the coast of Africa to my farm in Florida; both U.S. Customs and Immigration officials declared my airport an "International airport" for only one day, in order to permit us to land there on a direct flight from Africa.

So, a couple of years later, in 1986, I wrote an article called "Exercise 1986, the Present State of the Art, Now a Science." Which article was the first published mention of several important factors that we had discovered during our ongoing research in the field of muscular physiology.

And, being in California for the purpose of the attempted record-breaking flight, I called Joe Weider from my hotel in Beverly Hills; told him a bit about the then recent discoveries and offered to discuss them with him at my hotel. So, a couple of hours later he showed up with Fred Hatfield.

I offered Joe the opportunity to publish this information under certain conditions: one requirement being that he publish it in full, word for word as written, with no editing. He agreed to the terms spelled out by me and we drew up a contract to that effect; a contract signed by Joe, by Fred Hatfield, and by me, and witnessed by several employees of the hotel.

Then I flew back to Florida in one of my jets, and Fred Hatfield came with me for the stated purpose of attending two or three of the daily medical seminars that we were then conducting. I wanted him to see exactly what we were doing, and he did.

During that visit we conducted several strength tests with Fred, with somewhat surprising results that were covered in an earlier article in this series (it turned out that he was weak in his quadriceps muscles, weak as a result of his muscular fiber type which proved to be largely or entirely slow twitch).

During his visit, Fred repeatedly brought up things which he believed to be "new," things that he did not believe we had previously considered; but, in fact, every single one of the points raised by Fred had been covered by me more than fifteen years earlier in two books that I wrote in 1970 and 1971. So, every time Fred raised what he believed to be a "new" point I would whip out a copy of one of these books, turn to the appropriate chapter and show him that in fact we had considered these points. He was, literally, stunned by this.

So, after about three days, in a state of near shock, Fred returned to California; having been forced to admit that we did in fact know what we were doing, and that we were far ahead of anybody else in the field.

Then, of course, Joe Weider did not live up to his agreement; in spite of the contract he never published my article. In fact, I heard nothing more about it until seven years later; then, in January of 1993, a man wrote me asking for advice about exercise, and he enclosed a copy of an article written by Fred Hatfield that did mention his trip to visit me. But it was not possible for me to determine just when this article was published.

As is typical of Weider magazine articles, Fred got a lot of his facts wrong, stated a few outright lies, and of course wrote the entire article with a smart-ass tone. I did not, as he stated, have 80 elephants, in fact I had 97; did not have "dozens" of rhinos, only three; did not have "dozens" of big rattlesnakes, had hundreds; did not have 2,500 crocodilians, had nearly 4,000 including the largest crocodile in modern history, a world record animal. Which perhaps, is nit picking; perhaps Fred cannot count very well, or may have a poor memory.

What really bothered me was that Fred stated that … "I admitted that my earlier theories were wrong; that an exercise program of one set to failure three times a week did not work." Which statement was not made.

But, insofar as admitting earlier mistakes, this has never bothered me; I have made thousands of mistakes (which is usually the way you learn), but I have also been very quick to rush into print in order to admit these earlier mistakes if and when they came to my attention. Have not, however, ever heard of Joe Weider admitting a mistake. Have you?

But, then, if you never do anything you will not make any mistakes, or so it might appear; while, in fact, doing nothing is a mistake in itself.

Nearly eighteen yeas ago, in 1975, I conducted research at the United States Military Academy, West Point, using a large part of their football team as subjects during this research, and the results were outstanding. All of these subjects were already far above an average level in size and strength at the start of this research; but, nevertheless, in spite of their high level of starting strength, they then increased their strength by an average of 60 percent within a period of only six weeks. While reducing their average time for a two-mile run by an average of 88 seconds, and while producing increases in aerobic capacity and flexibility that appeared to be impossible.

How much did they train?

One set of each exercise, three times each week for six weeks. Kenneth Cooper, from Dallas, the "father" of aerobic exercise, sent some of his "experts" to West Point at the start of this research and later at the end of this research; they went there for the purpose of conducting tests to determine just how much improvement was produced in the subject's aerobic capacity. And were stunned by their own test results; these subjects improved their aerobic capacity more in six weeks than Cooper was able to do in six years.

So just how did Cooper react?

How would you expect him to react? He refused to believe it, of course; could not produce such results himself so refused to believe that anybody else could. Which is his problem.

Having been telling people for years that "more is better" in the case of exercise, that running 100 miles a week was better than 50 miles a week, Cooper later began to realize that more is not always better; eventually he said that … "Anybody who performs more than one hour of exercise a week is not doing so for physiological purposes." So, even he was able to learn at least something, eventually.

Having knocked any form of strength-building exercise for years, Cooper also eventually began to realize that it was of actually great value.

It took me twenty years to convince them, but eventually the "experts" in the American College of Sports Medicine adopted as their policy the practice of only one set of each exercise during three weekly workouts; and, now, I realize that better results will usually be produced by only two weekly workouts. And, yes, some people do appear to produce better results from more exercise than that, but not many people; some do better with even less.

Now not having another twenty years to convince them in regard to this latest discovery, it is probable that most people will still be training three or more times each week for the next few hundred years. So be it; I cannot solve all of the world's problems.

And please do not blame me, I did not make any of these people stupid; I merely pointed out the fact that a lot of them are stupid.

One very serious problem that still causes mistakes in the area of scientific research is the result of basing an evaluation of the results of an exercise program upon "average" results produced by a group of subjects. If one guy gains 50 pounds while another guy loses 50 pounds then the "average" gain will be zero.

If you land an airplane a mile to the right of the runway, among the buildings, while I land another airplane a mile to the left of the runway, among the trees, then both of us, on the "average" landed on the centerline of the runway. Sure. Then why did everybody get killed?

People are different, have different needs in the way of exercise, have different tolerances for exercise, so what works for me may not work for you. The primary purpose of this series of articles is an attempt on my part to make the readers aware of these differences; so that they can then evaluate their exercise program on a basis of the known facts rather than upon a lot of hogwash published by Weider and a lot other people.

Proper exercise is good for almost anybody and can be dangerous; but just what is, or is not, proper exercise must be determined on an individual basis, can only be determined by trial and error. If you are not steadily and rather rapidly increasing both your strength and muscular size, then there are only two possibilities: either you are already as big and as strong as you can get (which is seldom the case but is a least possible) or something is "wrong" with your exercise program. The most common mistake probably being that you are performing too much exercise, and the second most common mistake being that you are not working hard enough.

You can exercise a lot, or you can exercise hard, but you cannot do both; doing so will produce losses in size and strength rather than gains. And no amount of relatively "easy" exercise will ever produce much in the way of gains in size or strength.

But just what is "hard" exercise?

Properly performed, with the right level of resistance, every exercise should be continued for as many repetitions as possible, as many as possible in "good form." Which means lifting and lowering the weight rather than throwing it and dropping it. Which requires moving fairly slowly. Then, when you are momentarily incapable (because of fatigue) or performing one more full-range movement, stop; at that point you have done everything that is required, and everything that is safe.

When you are able to perform more than your "guide number" of repetitions in good form, then increase the level of resistance by about 5 percent. This being the so-called "double progressive" form of exercise; you are constantly trying to increase the level of resistance or the number of repetitions, or both.

It should also be noted, in regard to the West Point research mentioned above, that the gains in strength by these subjects was far better than "average." Most of the research programs that have been conducted during the last twenty-five years, and there have been thousands of such studies, were continued for ten or twelve weeks, involved three sets of each exercise during each of three weekly workouts (nine sets each week or each exercise), and usually produce a strength gain of less than 25 percent. And these studies usually involved previously untrained subjects who should have had the potential for large increases in strength.

But, in West Point, the subjects were already far above average strength at the start, had less potential for additional strength increases, and gained 60 percent in strength from only one set of each exercise within a period of only six weeks. So the total time was only half the average total time, while the total amount of exercise during each workout was only one third of the usual amount of exercise; and yet the results were more than twice as good as average.

So believe what you like, do what you want to, but don't later say that you were never warned.

But, in all honesty, I must give Fred Hatfield the credit for at least one intelligent comment in the article mentioned above; the last thing he stated was … "Who knows? Jones has been right before, too!"

And, one final point: as stated in earlier articles in this series, a large part of the current ignorance in the scientific community is a direct result of "overspecialization." Such people usually cannot see the forest for the trees. Have "tunnel vision," see nothing to the right or left of what they read, are usually unaware of even basic laws of physics, yet consider themselves "experts."

The things that I have learned during the last fifty-odd years regarding exercise would not have been possible for me to even notice had it not been for my experience in flying and in a number of other activities; in particular, my years of work with animals made me aware of many things of importance in the field of exercise, things that were overlooked by the scientists because they lacked such experience.

As a fictitious character supposedly stated … "A man should be able to build a house, butcher a hog, tan the hide, preserve the meat, deliver a baby, nurture the sick and reassure the dying, fight a war … specialization is for insects." I have done almost all of those things, and a long list of other things.